
OUTLINE

2

THE SECOND AND THIRD VISION Protection and growth of the church, 1:18-2:13

2.1 The redemption of Zion: 1:18-21

There is a close connection between the second and the third night vision of Zechariah. Actually, these visions give an explanation and specification of the first vision concerning God's jealousy and wrath.

The second vision is known as the vision of the horns and the smiths. Bear in mind the different ways of expression. In verse 18 we read: "And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four horns!" Zechariah saw these horns right away. His attention was kept on them from the very beginning. But in verse 20 we read: "Then the LORD showed me four smiths." These smiths are shown to Zechariah by the LORD God Himself. God requests Zechariah to give them special attention.

In the Bible the horn symbolizes brute and bold power. This can be seen in the Book of Psalms where the horn is mentioned as a symbol of power (cf. Ps. 22:22; 69:32; 75:5,6,11; 89:18,25; 92:11; 112:9; 132:17; 148:14).

Daniel 7 can also be mentioned for the same reason (cf. the verses 7-9 and 19-27, i.e., the fourth beast with ten horns and also the little horn with a mouth speaking great words).

One may have the idea that this vision also has a cultic meaning. This is also possible because the Psalms sometimes connect the horns with the altar (see Ps. 118:27, cf. also Amos 3:14). But here the primary meaning is one of destruction. It means: the church is attacked by powers which stand over against God and His people. Now it is possible to understand the explanation of the interpreting angel about the horns which is as follows: "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem." They have scattered God's people. For "to scatter" the same word is used as in the prophecies of Ezekiel where it is repeatedly said that the LORD Himself will scatter His people among strange nations if His people do not want to listen to Him (cf. Ezekiel

12:14,15; 20:23; 36:19). This happened in Babylon when His people had to sigh in captivity. Then Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem were scattered indeed. The holy land, the holy nation, and the holy city were defiled and laid in ruins.

So these horns very clearly show to Zechariah how the church of his days was beaten. See also Ezekiel 34:21 and 22 where it is said, "Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will save My flock, they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep?"

The number four is remarkable. There were four allied powers which attacked Judah from the north, south, east and west. This earthly totality, as a great power of the world, appears from the four corners of the earth. This is a hostile, anti-Christian power from all sides and one of all times. This terrible work goes on in an endless variety but always with the same goal throughout the ages.

The people of Judah had just experienced Babylon's great power. Now they were back in Canaan, but — at present they had to endure the violence of Persia. So we may say: the Persian Empire of Zechariah's days stood upon the shoulders of the Empire of Babylon. It was principally united with that empire. Also Persia had made the people of the LORD submit.

According to Daniel 7 that empire also had an anti-Christian character. Similarly the horns beat the walls of the church.

Actually it is a miracle that the LORD will protect His church against the attacks from the outside.

That is also said in this vision. After seeing the horns, four smiths appear. The LORD makes Zechariah concentrate on the four smiths. The name of the God of His covenant is mentioned here especially. That means: He is the faithful God who fulfils His promises. Jerusalem is not destroyed forever. There is still a Messianic future! For it says, "The LORD." This name evokes the whole activity of God in His covenant.

What are the smiths actually doing? The interpreting angel tells Zechariah: the people are in a situation in which they do not know what to do. The horns scattered Jerusalem in such a way that no man could raise his head. But then the smiths are going to beat the horns with their sledgehammers. God places a smith opposite each horn. The four smiths now have the task to redeem the present need of God's people. The word that is used for smith actually means craftsman. This word is also used for a carpenter, stonemason and a sculptor. The word does not point to brute and bold power but to a work of discretion. Again the number four is mentioned. This means that also these powers are of this earth. But in this case they symbolize a new power, more calculating than the first one. The smiths are going to destroy the horns. It means: the world constructs its own downfall using other powers of the world.

Great powers of the world which also fought against God's people

are presently defeated by other earthly powers. But in the meantime this downfall is a relief for God's people so that they can raise their heads again. Compare Isaiah's prophecies concerning the defeat of Assur (ch. 23). In a short while the same will happen to Babylon, the Philistines and Egypt.

Again and again God orders another big power which destroys the former one. See also Revelation 12. When Christ is caught up to God and His throne, the woman (that is the church) flees into the wilderness (vv. 5,6). But the earth comes to the help of the woman (v. 16). That means: God orders other powers, also from this earth, in order to destroy the first ones. See also Rev. 20 where it is described that the nations which are at the four corners of the earth will march up over the broad earth and surround the camp of the saints (vv. 7-9). But then these historical powers will be consumed. In this way God preserves His church.

2.2 The destruction of Babylon: 2:6-9

In chapter 2:6-9 we read about the application of the vision of the horns and the smiths. The second and third visions are closely connected and in the verses 6-13 we read the conclusion of both night visions. So, first vv. 6-9.

Zechariah exclaims to the exiles who are still in Babylon, "Ho! ho! Flee from the land of the north." (The north was the name of Babylon at that time.) The RSV says, "for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, says the LORD," (v. 6). But here we have a difficulty, for the people had especially been spread to one of the corners of the earth, namely, Babylon, thus the north. It is better to translate here: "For I will spread you as the four winds of the heavens, says the LORD." So not a judgment of the LORD in the *past* is mentioned here, but a promise of the LORD for the *future*. In this way we can also see the connection with v. 7: "Ho! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon?"

How is it possible that there are still people living in Babylon while there is the possibility to return to Zion? The reason is that they are used to living there. They feel at home in Babylon. They are at ease, they are settled there. There they have found their homeland. But the tragic thing is that they do not see the threat of God's punishment. They are laughing that away in Babylon.

But then the LORD of hosts speaks, after His glory sent the prophet to the nations. That is a wonderful expression: God's glory sent him, not a whimsical act. Then the LORD says, "He who touches you touches the apple of My eye." That means that the LORD reacts immediately and He shakes His hand. The LORD uses a very human expression here. For, to touch the apple of your eye is actually impossible. Then you would touch something that is the most beloved of men.

So the LORD says, they have to keep their hands off My people because they are My own dear possession. It is the apple of My eye! So he who touches God's people touches the LORD Himself!

See Revelation 18 where the same summons is used to leave Babylon and to go back to Zion, "Come out of her, My people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues;" (v. 4).

The church must dare to say the same just as the Psalms are singing, "Let us with one accord go to the temple of the LORD" and, "Blest be the LORD who made us not their prey" (Ps. 122 and 124).

We also read in the Psalms that God's people are called the apple of God's eye (Ps. 17:8). The LORD preserves His church by the redemption of Zion and the destruction of Babylon. Therefore we should be found on His church path.

2.3 An open territory: 2:1-5

The third vision is closely connected with the second one. First God called the anti-Christian powers in the world to punish His sinful people, so much even that no man was able to raise his head. But because they furthered the disaster, the LORD soon called other powers again to punish the first ones and to destroy them. God Himself comes from heaven to conquer His adversaries and to glorify Jerusalem, the city of Zion, the church of the LORD.

In connection with this, there will be a very great increase in the church, a church growth all over the world, to the end of the earth.

That is the theme of Zechariah's third vision. Here we have the other side of the coin. In the second night vision the theme was that God would put to shame the kingdom of darkness. Now, in this third vision of the man with the measuring line, the main idea is that God will comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem. Zechariah saw a young man with a measuring line in his hand. He wants to measure the length and breadth of Jerusalem.

At the time that Zechariah received these night visions, Jerusalem had not yet been rebuilt. This man wants to mark out the city and establish where the wall of Jerusalem is to be built. He wants to outline how extensive the future Jerusalem will become. For the best translation of verse 2 we should read, "Then I said, 'Where are you going?' And he said to me, 'To measure Jerusalem, to see what its breadth and what its length *must* be'."

In other words, it is still all for the future. This young man is busy for Jerusalem. He is enthusiastically busy for the church of the LORD. He has a strong desire to see how Jerusalem is growing and how extensive the city of the LORD will be.

But, suddenly at that moment, two heavenly figures appear. They do not come to extinguish the youthful enthusiasm but to correct it. In the first place, the interpreter-angel appears. He had talked to Zechariah

but the prophet had not seen him before face-to-face. But also another angel came forward to meet him and said to him, "Run. Say to that young man, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle in it."

The last angel is actually an errand boy. That is not strange because angels are ministering spirits sent forth to serve (cf. Heb. 1:14).

Here we have the heavenly correction which was necessary for this young man. The meaning is clear enough. The young man would measure Jerusalem but the angel says: That is quite impossible because the population of Jerusalem will become so numerous that she cannot live inside a city which is surrounded by walls. The extension will be so enormous that you are not able to confine the inhabitants within a small space. Every wall that you will build means a limit to the city. Jerusalem, however, shall be inhabited as villages without walls. The city is not to be limited to a territory around which you easily can place some walls.

Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled in the New Testament. In a little while the apostle Paul will write to the Ephesians, "Jesus Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, Israel and the Gentiles, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14). Now the nations may come and worship the LORD. The end will be the great multitude which no man can number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (cf. Rev. 5 and 7).

That is the fulfilment of this prophecy. This will not happen in the city of Jerusalem, in Canaan, which Zerubbabel was going to build up again, but in the city of Jerusalem of which the letter to the Hebrews says, "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," (Heb. 12:22). That is said of the New Testament church. It had already started on the day of Pentecost when about three thousand souls were added (cf. Acts 2:41).

That goes on! For then Jerusalem has become an open territory in which there is no more distinction between Jew and Greek, race and nation. Actually, Jerusalem is not a city without a wall, for in verse 5 it is said, "I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the LORD." Fire can be a sign of safety. Remember the pillar of fire which led the people of Israel at night in the desert and which did not depart from before the people (Ex. 40:36-38). God is a wall of fire round about, an impenetrable cordon round His people. For God gathers His church. He preserves it. He increases His church also. That will be fulfilled in the new Jerusalem of which Rev. 21 and 22 are speaking. God's glory is the light of that city and its lamp is the Lamb (21:23). Night shall be no more; they need no light of a lamp or the sun, for the LORD God will be their light (22:5).

But God's glory already overwhelms His church today: the believers and their children.

2.4 God's own property: 2:10-13

Chapter 2:10-13 gives us the application of the third vision.

Zechariah's good tidings had impressed the prophet so much that he exclaims, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the Lord." Everything is becoming just as glorious as before and then it will continue to be even more glorious.

For the background of this exclamation we have to see the situation of the land and the people of those times. There were many adversaries. Many people were defeatists. They said, "It will never be as before, as in the glorious days of Solomon."

But Zechariah says: No, it will become even more glorious than in Solomon's days. In former days there was a sanctuary in which the LORD dwelt. Now there is a prophecy, "I will dwell in the midst of you, says the LORD." That is actually a prophecy about *Christmas*. John writes in the gospel, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. We have beheld His glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14).

God dwelling in the midst of His people is also a prophecy about *Pentecost*.

The apostle Paul calls Christ's church a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph. 2:22)

It is also a prophecy of Christ's *return*. For the end will be, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people and God Himself will be with them," (Rev. 21:3).

The farthest horizons are opened before the eyes of the prophet Zechariah. "You shall *know*," says the prophet. That means in this case: you will experience it from the facts, "that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. The LORD will inherit Judah as His portion of the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem." So the LORD will say: That is My own property!

We must see this night vision and its conclusion within the framework and background of Zechariah's time.

In the eyes of the nations, Jerusalem has no significance at all. Babylon, Persia, Assur — those were the great powers at that time.

However, then comes that mighty word, "Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD." All these great powers have to be silent. The reason is: "For He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling." In Hebrew an expression is used which actually means: the LORD dresses Himself and goes to work. The starting point is: His holy dwelling, i.e., Jerusalem, His own city. God says: That place will be My residence, My own property. So be silent, all flesh, all the powers of the world, I am going to glorify Myself in My people. I will increase it to a multitude that nobody can count.

2.5 Some questions

1. *There are many “horns” which trampled on God’s people. Can you mention some of them?*
2. *Are there more examples (also from the history of the church) how “smiths” stood overagainst the “horns”?*
3. *Elaborate on the summons “to go out from Babylon” in the present situation of the church (Zech. 2:6,7 and Rev. 18:4).*
4. *Read Zech. 2:4. Can something be derived from this text with respect to the church growth today?*
5. *The third vision of Zechariah has sometimes been applied to the breaking down of “church walls.” Is that a correct application?*
6. *Are mission and evangelism matters of people who are especially interested in them, a kind of ecclesiastical hobby?*

2.6 Literature

See Outline 1.