

## Editorial

Zechariah is not an easy book, nor are its difficulties confined to an obscure passage. Instead they raise an entire class of issues having to do with God's promises to Israel.

Promises in the Old Testament are a special case of prophecy. They assert not only that something will happen but that God will make it happen. The problem is that a promise involves two parties. Even though God does not change, if large amounts of time are involved there is a question whether one group might ultimately receive the blessing that was intended for another. If this happens, even though the blessing is given, has the promise been kept? Or, if the later recipient is the church, is that really another group? How do we define our terms?

To answer the above question we must know something of God's intent when making a given promise, and this cannot be known until it is revealed. So rather than craft my own solution to the thorny problems found in Zechariah, I suggest tapping a class of solutions that are already firmly in place: Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Let the New Testament interpret Zechariah.

For Paul the church is spiritual Israel (Gal 3:28-29; Rom 10:12; Col 3:11). The question is not whether he held this view, but what basis he had for holding it. And the answer is that he used functional definitions. Israel is as Israel does. Thus, even in the Old Testament, Israel was never just the physical progeny of Jacob. From the start it was always also a community of faith. When faith dies, the significance it once gave also dies (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6-8). And if faith is called into existence where it had not been before, the significance of having it is fully present (Rom 11:19-21; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11-12). Thus, the church as a community of faith is the true inheritor of Israel's promises. By accepting Israel's Messiah the church occupies Israel's intended role. Promises made to Israel but fulfilled to the church have been truly kept.

The references to Jerusalem in Zechariah's prophecies of the distant future should be approached in a similar manner. In the New Testament, the real Jerusalem was one that would come "down out of heaven from God" (Rev 21:2). It was a center of spiritual interest, the focus of true worship. On earth the corresponding focus of true worship is the church wherever found.

The above model can be extended to other Old Testament prophecies besides Zechariah. In the final verses of Dan 11, for example, there is an attack of apocalyptic proportions, but not on physical Jerusalem. It is an attack on the church in its capacity as guardian of the true worship of God. Zechariah's distant references to Israel and Jerusalem are not an isolated problem, but a solution for a very challenging part of Daniel.

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