

PREFACE

I was first motivated to study and teach Zechariah because of the strong connection between Israel's postexilic setting and the situation of Christian believers in a postmodern world. Both of us look back on a legacy that is both glorious and tragically disappointing. We have ample reasons to see the faithfulness and power of God, along with concerns regarding the worldliness and weakness of God's people. Many of us experience this individually. How do we think about our victories and failures? How do we approach God and face the future with confidence, trusting him while being realistic about ourselves? To the believers of Zechariah's day and ours, God calls out in grace: "Return to me, and I will return to you" (Zech. 1:3).

The people to whom God commissioned Zechariah as a prophet are not often considered heroes of the Bible. This book does not present the mightiness of a man like Moses, or the fidelity of a Joshua, or even the heart of a king like David. Zechariah recounts no famous battles in which God's people cast down their enemies and claimed his Promised Land. Instead, Zechariah presents a people whose record has been disgraced by sin and whose covenant with God lay broken—a reality amply illustrated by the ruins of Jerusalem to which they returned, with its broken-down temple. This is why Zechariah's message is so important to our time. Do people who have failed God—people surrounded not with the scenes of spiritual advance but rather besieged by spiritual collapse—have a book in the Bible for them? The whole Bible is for everyone, of course. But people who long to start over with God, and a generation that wonders if the flame of bygone years can be relit, find a message particularly suited to their needs in the book of Zechariah.

In truth, although this book claims few epic heroes, the believers of Zechariah's time were very much like earlier Bible champions. They resembled

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Moses as he knelt before the burning bush, doubting his ability to serve as Israel's redeemer. Like Joshua as he stepped into Moses' shoes, they needed the encouragement of a divine commissioning. Like King David, it was their love for God that led them into their hardships. Their battles of faith were every bit as important as the conquests of earlier heroes. The shattered city they labored to rebuild was as beloved to God as Jerusalem had ever been. And the temple they rebuilt, though not outwardly as glorious as the original of Solomon's day, would serve just as truly to bring the people into God's presence for worship. The reality is that God always uses failures to do his work: it is his gracious delight to call, atone, restore, and equip weak and sinful people to bring glory to himself. This is true because the hero of Zechariah is none other than Jesus Christ, whose portraits fill this prophecy with a depth and vibrancy unsurpassed anywhere else in the Old Testament.

This is a message we all need to hear: by God's grace in Christ, the role he has assigned to us is no less significant than the greatest deeds ever performed by God's choicest saints. Like Zechariah's generation, God would lift up our heads with a fresh vision of his message of old: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD" (Zech. 4:6). May God bless all who read these studies with refreshment to hope in God's grace and with strength for the work he has given each of us to do.

These messages were first preached in the evening services of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from November 2000 to July 2001, and again as an evening series at First Presbyterian Church of Coral Springs/Margate, Florida, in 2005 and 2006. I thank these wonderful congregations, and am especially grateful to their sessions for the time they permit me for careful study and preparation. I am also appreciative of Philip Ryken and Iain Duguid, whose editorial labors have measurably improved the quality of this book. This commentary is dedicated to the staff and faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, with gratitude for my priceless years of study there and for the lifelong influence this great institution has exercised on my ministry.

Additionally, I give praise to God for the devoted ministry of my dear wife Sharon, not merely for her unflagging support, but also for the delight she brings into my life, and for the godly joys of our children: Hannah, Matthew, Jonathan, Ellie, and Lydia. Lastly, I give thanks to the Lord of hosts, whose grace in Christ is truly new every morning and new in every generation. To him be glory forever.