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Messianism and Eschatology in Zechariah 9-14

- PhD Research -

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KEY WORDS

"Prophecy", "On that day", "A day for God", "Jerusalem", "Israel", "Judah" , "All nations", "People",
"Huge destruction", "To hit"

SUMMARY

In special literature, The Book of the prophet Zechariah was divided into two parts (Proto-Zechariah, chapters 1-8 and Deutero-Zechariah, chapters 9-14). The specialists show that the first eight chapters of the book are different from the other chapters grace to style. The first part is preoccupied on history aspects, and the second part predict an eschatological time, highlighted by the phrase "on that day" (Zech 9,16; 12,3.6.9)- a day or a period of terror and "destruction" (Zech 14;12), a day of bitter war against Jerusalem (Zech 12,2); and a day in which God gets involved in the human world with the purpose to save Zion and Judah's descendants (Zech 12,3-5). But also with the purpose to establish His universal Kingdom (Zech 14,16). This part includes some remarkable messianic predictions (Zech 9,9; 10,4; 11,12-13; 12;10; 13,7), whose value is confirmed in New Testament, when the words expressed by Zechariah are cited by the four evangelists.

In this research we were interested in Zechariah 9-14, especially on messianic and eschatological aspects found in this section. The basic motivation for choosing this theme is the presentation – from the Orthodox perspective- of these two concepts (messianic and eschatological), with concrete application in Zechariah 9-14. We started from the premise (1) that the predictions of Old Testament describe both historical events and some other events waiting to be fulfilled in the future or even at the end of age. Also (2) predictions with messianic character "include both details about the first coming of the Saviour into the body and of the second coming into glory."¹

"The eschatological term comes from the Greek *eschatos* and it symbolises *the last one*"². Eschatology is a component of prophetic literature and has its fulfilment in the Second Coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ when He will establish the Eternal Kingdom. 23,02. The Christian concept about death is considered to be a transition door to a new life, having a natural character, representing the communion with God."

Using only the method of literalism in biblical exegesis the prophetic message is unnatural; are omitted important theological aspects. For this reason, Zechariah's message must be approached through an eschatological perspective. Beside some historical aspects, Zechariah predicts a future period of salvation history, which will be instated by the second coming of Jesus Christ (Zech 9,9-10).

Chapters 9-14 from The Book of Zechariah foretell a future time (announced by the phrase "on that day"), a period characterised by judgement and punishment made by God against Israel and his leaders (see Zech 11,4.6), but also against surrounding peoples (Zech 9,4.6; 14,12). Alongside the punitive character of speech, it is highlighted God's decision to keep some "pieces" to be faithful and He will raise them after His will and commandments (Zech 9,7- for people; 14,2- for Israel). Through judgement and punishment, God removes the sin, and by keeping "the pieces" He maintains alive a nation to bring it to Himself. God's Kingdom foretold to Zechariah will include the wide world. This Kingdom will be characterised by faith, obedience and peace.

In this prophetic speech the promises and punishments alternate and can be identified different messages with messianic character. Zechariah foretold some events from The Saviour's life as an eye

witness. He foretold the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem (Zech 9,9), His sale for 30 silver coins (Zech 11,12-13) or the fact that He will be pierced (Zech 12,10). The Saviour Himself cites from Zechariah 10,4 referring to Him when He says: "*Jesus says to them, Did you never see in the Writings, The stone which the builders put on one side, the same has been made the chief stone of the building: this was the Lord's doing, and it is a wonder in our eyes?*"(Matthew 21:42). Around the passions of Christ, when He prepared His disciples for what was about to come, reminding them about the text from Zechariah 13,7: "*for it is said in the Writings, I will put to death the keeper of the sheep, and the sheep of the flock will be put to flight.*"(Matthew 26,31).

The highlighted aspects are just some of the observations that we found after our researches. After all, the entire thesis is focused on these aspects and their clarification. We analysed the seven chapter of Zechariah from historical-critical and terminological perspective, but also from theological, spiritual anagogical perspective. We observed that many of interpreters have searched for historical moments to demonstrate that Zechariah's prophecy has happened. Largely, the tentative of creating a parallelism between Holy Judgement and historical events which happened in the period after the writing of Zechariah's work has no foundation. The text from Zechariah should not be seen in this way. It is suitable to take into account the theological aspects and the eschatological character of the prophetic speech and to be seen in the perspective of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Indeed, a big part of them have been fulfilled in history (especially these about earthly activity of Jesus); the others will be fulfilled in "the last days", near The Second Coming.

This thesis is structured into three parts: Isagogics notions to the book of Zechariah; Exegetical Approach; Theological dimension. In the part of Isagogics are presented the general information about the author of the book, date and place of writing, structure and themes. Also within this part are detailed aspects about authenticity of the book, pro and against opinions about this subject. Thus, in the first part we highlighted some isagogics landmarks about Zechariah's personality and book. The big questions are about the division of the book into two parts (Zech 1-8; 9-14). A part of exegetes start from the premise that these two parts reveal different points of view from historical perspective. So, chapters 1-8 describe the history from a prophetic perspective, while chapters 9-14 reflect apocalyptic problems which include the end of this world and inauguration of a new one, under the mastery of God. Another point of view is highlighted through the idea that the first eight chapters focus on Persian period, while chapters 9-14 focus on the period of History of Judah, which cannot be dated. However, some try to date chapters 9-14, saying that these chapters reflect pre-exilic period, or describe 4th century b.Ch. Another important reason for spreading the book is the differences of vocabulary and other linguistic characteristics which appear when it's compared Zechariah 1-8 and Zechariah 9-14. In the same context, another important reason should be the different literary aspects of these sections. However, even if there are two different styles of writing, there can be observed a unity of content.

The chapter dedicated to exegesis is the most expansive. In this, each verse from Zechariah 9-14 is analysed, being highlighted the historical and eschatological dimension of the text. Also, are distinguished

the holy decisions about Israel and its people, but also surrounding nations. The accent is on holy judgement, applied as a result to the sins. In the second chapter we realised an exegetical analysis of each chapter (9-14). In the first part (verses 1-8), chapter 9 tells us that God will judge and have sovereignty over surrounding nations. He punished the sins, with the desire to expulse it from his Kingdom. Verses 9-10 have a messianic character and we discussed more about them in the section dedicated to messianic texts (we did in the same way also for the next chapters). The last verses (11-17) continue the theme of God's Kingdom, describing the process through which God create the kingdom of peace, conquering the enemies and saving the chosen people. There are verses marked by the promise of God to offer charity.

Chapter 10 begins with the request to pray to God for receiving His blessing. In the next verses, because the leaders and people's sins, is announced that God will have a rough judgement, because one more time God will promise to take care of his sheep (Zech 10,3) and will fortify the house of Judah (Zech 10,6). The chapter ends by announcing that the name of God will be the strength of His people. Verses 1-2 present the blessings as a result of prayers addressed to God, in contrast with idols. "The rain at the right time" is a term with eschatological meaning. St. Basil emphasizes the fact that both blessing and punishment to redemption come from God. (Fc 19,24). Through the first rain, He shows His kindness, through the other one His severity. *"Or is it nothing to you that God had pity on you, waiting and putting up with you for so long, not seeing that in his pity God's desire is to give you a change of heart? But by your hard and unchanged heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of the revelation of God's judging in righteousness;"*³ Verses 5-7 describe the idea that the Jewish rulers will be some warriors that will step over the mud of the earth, highlighting the strengthening of the house of Judah and the deliverance of the house of Joseph. In the next two verses is bold the universal character of God's Kingdom thanks to people's redemption who believed in God. The chosen people have always found release in God. (10,12).

The next chapter shows the attitude of bad shepherd. The fact that Zechariah called himself a shepherd as God instructs him and the folk refuses to listen to him, in fact they refuses God Himself (Zech 11,1-17). The first three verses created numerous controversies regarding the interpretation, divided into two directions: a literary interpretation and a metaphoric one. The specific of literary interpretation reduces the message to the idea of static nature. In a metaphoric sense, some exegetes looking to next verses, highlight that trees and animals are actually the same with shepherds. Another approach suggests that the different type of trees represent big and small nations. Verses 4-5 show God 's commandment to the prophet in which He asked him to lead His sheep, Judah's seed. The identification of the sheep represent one of the big questions which already exist. The sheep must be Israel or Judah's seed and trying to assign another nation to this sheep is irrelevant in this context. Although the verse 4 does not clarify the purpose according to which this sheep is intended for slaughter, however the reason is suggested. The judgement of God against Israel or Judah's seed is manifested because of their sins against Him. The next verses present the two rods named "Mercy" and "Convenant". "Mercy" means "benevolence", "grace", and reflects one of the principal attributes of God. "Convenant" refers to the covenant that God made with the chosen people and the harmony that overwhelm the people if they are faithful to God. The symbol of "Covenant" rod or

"Commitment" is explained in the verse 14, where the riping of the second rod shows the separation between Israel and Judah, which had a brotherly relation. The loss of harmony and peace; the riping of "Mercy" rod represents the breaking point of the symbolic action presented by Zechariah. The rooting of rod is the symbol of blessing abolition which was dedicated to people of God.

Chapter 12 describes the way in which God will defend Jerusalem and its inhabitants (Zech 12,1-7) and how much power they will have (Zech 12,8). The set of epithet which describes Yahweh in verse 1 has a cosmic and creative nature. He is the one that "stretch" the skies, on which he "lays" the earth and "create" the spirit of human. Zechariah introduces God as a Creator of sky and earth. By referring to the creative mission of God, Zechariah wants to show God as Creator of all things, highlighting His incomparable power. If God has the power to create the universe, then He can accomplish the promises made to Judah, no matter what difficult it may seem to people. On another hand, the prophet of Old Testament connects the theme of creation with salvation, presenting God as a Savior of Israel, the One who will save from the sins and their enemies. The next verses present the siege of Jerusalem and Judah by opponent powers. Jerusalem was identified with a crown which send in decline with a "cup of stagger" and with the image "stones of burden", hurting all the people. The divine intervention has as a consequence the curse for disobedience, as a result of Divine Judgement. Verse 8 affirms that "on that day" God will extend His protection over the inhabitants of Jerusalem in such a powerful way that the weakest will be as David. Verses 10-12 present the theme of suffering. Zechariah compares suffering with "the complaint from HadadRimmon, in the Meghion plain". The concret localization of HadadRimmon has arouse intense debates. Some have interpreted this verse as an allusion to rituals of complaint in connection with death before the time of king Iosia in "in the Meghion plain". Others said that "HadadRimmon" is an unknown city or a textual mistake for "the son of Amon". Another approach consists on the syntagme HadadRimmon as a name of a person. In this case, the translation should mention lament "for" or "toward" HadadRimmon, as in the case of the Revised Standard Version: "the complaint from Jerusalem will be as strong as the wailing for HadadRimmon. The most plausible version is the one according to which HadadRimmon would be the name of a place. In the vision of Holy Fathers, this text is in relation with the verse 10. St. Cyril of Jerusalem says that in the moment in which Jewish will see The One they bored, they will cry and repent. St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher continues with the interpretation, offering to the text a eschatological perspective, highlighting the fact that the people will cry at The Second Coming because of their sins.

Chapter 13 speaks about a fountain which purify the sins of people; "on that day" when the fountain will flow, God will bring the people to their initial standing, removing all the sins (Zech 13,1). Forward, the subject of the chapter focuses on the false prophets, on the punishment that God will bring over the chosen people and on the fact that those who will remain will be spiritually purify and received in the community of God (Zech 13,2-9). Verses 2-6 focus on the expulsion of idols and false prophets. On this point, the prophet returns at the subject about idolatry and false prophecy, declaring that "on that day", The Lord will remove for ever the all the remnants of such great deception. The idolatry resisted against the great efforts of faithful people from Old Testament which tried to destroy it. Moreover, The Future Kingdom of God, over which

Messiah will rule with justice, will not have place for false teachings about God. The discussion from the third verse is better understood as an hypothetical scenario which emphasizes certainty, absolute finality and the disappearance of any theological fallacy. The public opinion from Israel has rarely condemned the idolatry. Usually it was considered satisfactorily that someone worship God, even if that person worship also to idols. Syncretism has become a norm for a big part from history of Israel, even if God has always forbidden such venerations. Judah had a doubtful attitude against the false prophecy launched by Zechariah. But in God's Kingdom, idolatry will not be tolerated. Zechariah says that even the parents of false prophet will testify against their own children and will kill them for idolatry. Verses 8-9 shape the divine judgement. The expression "God says" prevail in prophetic writings to point out the divine authority and the authority of the message which is transmitted by the prophet. In this verse is presented the result of Divine Judgement: two-thirds "will perish and will die" and the other third "will be left there". Among those left behind, God will continue His work of redemption on earth. The statement "They will summon my name and I will listen to them" characterises the relation between God and his people. The verb "to summon" symbolises to call God in prayers.

Chapter 14 of the book of Zechariah begins with the announcement of the big coalition against Jerusalem (Zech 14,1-2) and the fact that God will support Zion (Zech 13,3). The chapter describes the calamities "of that day" (Zech 14, 6-7). But in this terrifying landscape, God imposes his sovereignty (Zech 14, 9) and lifts Jerusalem (Zech 14, 10). It will become a burg in which all the people will come every year to bring oblations, at the same time with the celebration of the tabernacles (Zech14, 11-16). Zechariah 14 ends with the description of God's Kingdom, characterised by holiness and justice.

Through a biblical exegesis, we realised the third chapter called "Theological dimension". Here we discussed two important concepts: messianism and eschatology which are important through all seven analysed chapters.

In order to offer a singular perspective over the prophetic speech about messianism, we extracted texts with such characteristics from exegetical chapter and we analysed only in this section. We compared different opinions of other researchers in the following texts: The Entrance in Jerusalem (Zech 9, 9), The Corner Stone (Zech 10, 4), the thirty silver coins (Zech 10, 12-13), Messiah will be bored (Zech 12, 10) and Beating the Shepherd and the scattering of sheep (Zech 13, 7). The following subchapter focuses on the eschatological dimension of Zechariah text 9-14. As regards messianism, we analysed five texts which had a reverberation in Old Testament. The first text refers to the entrance of The Saviour in Jerusalem (Zech 9, 9-10). Referring to this prophecy we showed the fact that it announces a double event: A Palm Sunday, but also an eschatological procession. This double meaning is identifiable in the tone or accent difference between Zech 9, 9 and Zech 9, 10. In verse 9, the one who comes, named king, is describes as "humble" or "pious", inappropriate attributes for an Emperor. Only in verse 10 He is presented as lord or general sovereign. The piety from verse will not benefit by victory effects only in verse 10 and once with The Second Coming of The Lord. The following texts with messianic character refers to the corner stone (Zech

10, 4), to the thirty silver coins (Zech 11,12-13), Messiah's piercing (Zech 12, 10) and Beating the Shepherd and scattering of sheep (Zech 13, 7).

The corner stone is connected with Messiah. The keystone metaphor refers to the role that Jesus Christ will have in The Haven Kingdom. The Selling of Jesus for 30 silver coins is describes in chapter 11. The price of 30 silver coins is the price attributed to slaves. Giving 30 silver coins foreshadows the price of Jesus selling established by Judah. Jesus is The Dead and Raised from the Dead Messiah as Old Testament predicts. St. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote the next opinion on the ridge of Zechariah's text 11, 12: "Oh, Prophetic Precision! Great and lasting wisdom of Holy Spirit! Because he didn't say ten or twenty, but thirty, the right amount."⁴

The fourth text refers to Messiah as the one who will be bored. Critics opinion regarding to the identity of the bored one is different from case to case. Some support the idea that God Himself would be bored, but others think that is someone who represents Him. This last approach concludes the fact that the bored one is Messiah Himself- idea which is supported by the Christology of New Testament. Another point of view of exegetes is that the text has a non-messianic character, trying to demonstrate this fact through unconvincing explanations.

The last messianic prophecy 13, 7 had been supported by the using of possessive pronoun, which suggests an appropriate relation between shepherd and Yahwe. Many suggests that the shepherd is the equal of God; in the New Testament, The Saviour says that "Me and Father are like one" (John 10, 30), which supports the idea that "My Shepherd" actually is "My Son". This fact became obviously in the moment in which these words are summoned by The Saviour Himself, near His Passions (see Matthew 26, 31).

Regarding Zechariah prophecy, we discussed firstly some terms or phrases which have these characteristics. For a better understanding of this perspective we analysed the key terms: "Prophecy", "On that day", "A day for God", "Jerusalem", "Israel", "Judah", "All nations", "People", "Huge destruction", "To hit". In the same way, we highlighted the Almighty God-Creator and His sovereignty (as it's shown in Zech 12, 1), as the relation history-eschatology/time-eternity as it is highlighted in the example of Jerusalem (Jerusalem from earth and Jerusalem from heavens analysed in different specialized texts). After this process, we consider that the message of the prophet is better understood by the reader and in the text there are highlighted eschatological elements. The phrase "on that day" is pointed out 19 times in this chapter. Especially, this phrase confirms the fact that the described events are eschatological because we can find absolutely nothing in the history in connection with the presentation of prophet. In the last part, we analysed Zechariah's text 12, 1, highlighting the fact that God created all things and put them in the right place. Finally, using the example of Jerusalem, we presented the relation between history-eschatology/time-eternity. In general, the prophets realised a distinction between an earthly, historical Jerusalem, having space and time, and a heaven, eschatological and the same eternal Jerusalem. Human purpose in this life is to pass (especially through worship) from earthly Jerusalem to the heaven Jerusalem, through love to achieve an eternal communion with God.

These are the results we achieved during our research. The text from Zechariah 9-14 is very rich and can be discussed from many other perspectives. We remind here "the shepherd theme", of "false prophets" or "the universal character of Zechariah's discourse". Zechariah's text 12,10-14 (from a messianic and eschatological perspective) can continue a research subject.

The most important aim of our research was to approach Zechariah 9-14 and the concepts of messianism and eschatology from an eastern perspective point of view. We took into consideration the Western comments and we inserted a patristic opinion which offers an anagogical-spiritual perspective on the text (*theoria*⁵)- in this way we highlighted some similarities and differences between patristic exegesis and the modern one. To this principal aim, we added: finding some isagogic landmarks in The Book of Zechariah, in general but also in 9-14; realising a detailed exegesis to clarify the biblical text from Zechariah 9-14; thoroughness of messianic prophecies and the terms with eschatological characteristics, but also their position in relation with other biblical books, with the purpose to highlight the divine nature of prophecy.