

NAME YOUR CHILD ZECHERIAH!

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, saying: The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. Therefore say to them...Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you...Zech 1:1-3

This week in the Armenian Church sacred calendar, Tuesday specifically, we remember the prophet Zechariah. So happy name day to all the Zecheriahs in our church community☺. No there are not too many people naming their kids after Zecheriah these days, and we don't talk about him much. He is even classified as a 'minor' prophet. But that's precisely why I love our Armenian Church calendar, it reminds us that sometimes minor players have major spiritual impact! Indeed, Zechariah was a prophet with major impact. His book is a prophecy, a mystical, spirit-filled text which takes the events that are happening in the world around the readers, and points to how God's will can be discerned in those events. What is interesting and relevant for us about Zechariah's book of prophecy, is that the socio-political situation the Hebrew people found themselves in at the time is pretty similar to the socio-political situation Armenian people have found themselves in, even unto this day. And since the problems surrounding the readers of Zechariah and our people are so similar, so also might the vision of God's plan to solve these problems be similar and relevant to us today.

What was life like for the hearers of Zechariah's prophecy? Well Zechariah ministered to the Jewish people after the Babylonian takeover and destruction of their homeland. Some of the Jews remained in Babylon as diaspora and struggled to come to terms with their new identity. Many returned from Babylon to rebuild the homeland around Jerusalem. But this remnant had little collective nation building experience and were still subject to the whims of larger nations around them. There were lots of social problems, corruption, poverty and hard living, so it was a discouraging time, and a spirit of dark pessimism gripped these people. It is an easy substitution, perhaps one you've already made in your head, to insert the Armenian experience in place of the Hebrew one. The Turks and Soviets took over and destroyed our homelands. Some Armenians remained in the Diaspora and struggle to come to terms with their new identity. Some are rebuilding the Armenian homeland, but collectively we have little nation-building experience and are a small player in global politics. Bad governance has led to deep pessimism in the homeland, and in the Diaspora, Armenian identity itself is disintegrating.

Well along comes Zechariah with a message of hope about seeing God's presence through all this hardship and anxiety; an equally powerful message for ancient Hebrews or modern Armenians. Though easy to miss, we can discern God's abiding presence and blessing for his people in the very first verse of Zechariah, which I started with; "In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet." This seems boring and insignificant. It's just a list of names, and crazy names, at that. There are few kids named Zecheriah out there these days, but there are none named Berechiah or Iddo. But remember that Biblical names almost always mean something, and these three names reveal God's presence to the faithful then and now.

Zechariah in Hebrew means "God remembers." Berechiah, his father's name, means "God blesses." His grandfather's name, Iddo, means "At the appointed time." God remembers and God blesses at the appointed time. That's the prophetic vision in a nutshell that gives hope to Jews, to Armenians and to all of us who find ourselves from time to time in exile and trial. The next gets more direct about finding God in the trials of history and our own lives: "The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. Therefore say to them...Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you."

It's very simple, Jews and Armenians in the diaspora and homeland, this has always been God's way. If we find ourselves straying away from God's presence and as a result, our lives grow cold, our faith grows dim, we grow discouraged, defeated and prone to temptation, what must we do? "Return to me," says the Lord, "and I will return to you." If you want God back in your life, with all the glory of his presence, then come back to him. That is always the formula and it works for individuals as well as communities, for Armenians, Americans and Jews.

Because woven into the identity of all God's people, revealed in our ancestry and our very names is our primary identity as sons and daughters of God. This is the center of our being and our deepest self. Unfortunately, we stray constantly

from this self. The good news is through Zechariah, that “God remembers us”, even when we forget him. Through Berechiah and Iddo, that God blesses us at the appointed time, if we wish to return to Him. The ‘minor’ prophet Zechariah, whose feast day we remember today, has major impact on the life of the believer. So please consider the name Zechariah for your children or grandchildren. It will remind you of what we have said so many times, and in so many ways. That if we put God first, there is no problem-not homeland corruption, not diaspora assimilation, not personal tribulation-which could cause God to forget his people, or prevent Him from blessing us abundantly at the appointed time; now and always, amen.