

The Vengeance of Zechariah

When Christ was dying on the cross He asked His Father to forgive those who crucified Him:

Luke 23:34: “Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them;** for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.”

Stephen did the same thing. When the Pharisees stoned him for testifying about Christ, he asked God to forgive his murderers:

Acts 7:59: “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, **Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.** And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Based on these two examples it would be easy to think that this was the universal response to being martyred, but that's not the case. There is a rather odd exception to this rule, and it is found in the book of II Chronicles. When King Joash forsook the Lord and served idols, Zechariah (the priest, not the prophet) rebuked him:

II Chronicles 24:20: “And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? **because ye have forsaken the Lord,**

he hath also forsaken you.”

The king did not want to hear this, so he had Zechariah killed:

II Chronicles 24:21: “And they conspired against him, and **stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king** in the court of the house of the Lord.”

When the king commanded that he be stoned to death, you would naturally expect Zechariah to forgive him. After all, that’s what Stephen did when he was stoned. However, that’s not what happened. Instead Zechariah asked God *to avenge him*:

II Chronicles 24:22: “Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, **The Lord look upon it, and require it.**”

It would be easy to think “Well, Zechariah was just upset about being killed and he set a bad example. We should ignore him and copy the example of Stephen.” The problem with this theory is that *the Lord listened to Zechariah*:

II Chronicles 24:23: “And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. 24 For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the Lord delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. So

they executed judgment against Joash.
25 And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) **his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest,** and slew him on his bed, **and he died:** and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings.”

Zechariah asked God for vengeance *and he got it:* King Joash was defeated in battle and then murdered.

So what are we to make of this? I think the answer is actually simple: there is a key difference between the case of Zechariah and the other two examples. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was crucified out of ignorance:

1 Corinthians 2:7: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: **for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”**

When Stephen was stoned to death, Saul (who later became the apostle Paul) approved of it. Paul later explained that the reason God forgave him for persecuting the church was because he did it out of ignorance:

I Timothy 1:12: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;
13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but **I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly** in unbelief.”

Christ forgave the people who crucified Him out of ignorance, and Stephen forgave Paul who also sinned out of ignorance. Zechariah, though, was *not* murdered out of ignorance.

You see, Zechariah's father was a priest named Jehoiada, who was a good friend to King Joash. As long as Jehoiada was alive the king faithfully served the Lord:

II Chronicles 24:2: "And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord **all the days of Jehoiada** the priest."

After Jehoiada died, however, the king forsook the Lord and served false gods:

II Chronicles 24:17: "Now **after the death of Jehoiada** came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them.

18 And **they left the house of the Lord God** of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass."

When King Joash forsook the Lord, Jehoiada's son Zechariah rebuked the king (just as Jehoiada would have done if he had still been alive). That is when the king had him stoned to death.

Paul said that he received mercy because he sinned out of ignorance. King Joash, though, didn't sin out of ignorance. He actually stopped following God and turned to idols, and he had the son of his lifelong friend Jehoiada *murdered* for rebuking him. Joash did not sin out of ignorance; he sinned willfully and deliberately. Joash knew better but he chose to sin anyway, and so when Zechariah was dying he cried out for God's judgment – and God sent it.

It is one thing to sin in ignorance and unbelief; it is another

er thing entirely to abandon God and start murdering those who serve Him. It is true that sinning in ignorance does not somehow make the sin “ok”; the wages for all sin is death, and God does not turn a blind eye to sin just because the person who is doing it doesn’t know any better. A sin that is committed in ignorance is still a sin.

What I am saying is that Stephen understood that he was being killed out of ignorance and unbelief, and so he asked God to pardon their sin. Zechariah, however, was *not* killed out of ignorance and unbelief; he was killed by someone who knew better and had deliberately forsaken God. King Joash had already rejected God’s mercy, so Zechariah cried out for vengeance.

This is how the apostle Peter put it:

2 Peter 2:20: “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, **they are again entangled therein**, and overcome, **the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.**

21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”

Peter actually says it is better to *not know God at all* than to know Him and turn from Him. We would do well to heed his words.

