

The Prophecy of Zechariah

The Prophecy of Zechariah: Its Setting

- The year is 520BC. Work on the temple in Jerusalem stopped short at the foundations and has lain dormant for *sixteen* years. It was a time of despondency, disillusionment and disappointment. Where was God? Where was the fulfilment of His promise of a glorious restoration after the exile? *Isaiah 51.11: The redeemed of the LORD shall return, And come with singing unto Zion; And everlasting joy shall be upon their head: They shall obtain gladness and joy; And sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*
- Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to call God's people to repentance and to put their hands to the work once again (Ezra 5.1). Zechariah particularly called them to hope by lifting their eyes (x6) to a glorious future.
- **Why was there a call to repentance?** In 538BC, Cyrus (the Persian) decreed the return of God's people from exile in Babylon (Ezra 1.1-4). In 536BC (exactly 70 years after Nebuchadnezzar first attacked Jerusalem), 49,897 exiles returned with Zerubbabel, the civil leader, and Joshua, the religious leader and High Priest. The altar was rebuilt immediately (Ezra 3) and work began on the foundations of the temple (Ezra 5.16). But, the work was soon hindered by enemies seeking to discourage and dishearten (Ezra 4.1-4), as well as physical and material hardships in the land (Haggai 1.6).
- When things got tough, God's people turned their attention from spiritual things to themselves. If this was God's mind and purpose, why wasn't it easier? Perhaps this was just a day of 'small things' (4.10). They made the choice to pursue the best life possible for themselves, turning from God's house to their own homes, and were characterised by spiritual indifference and lethargy. *Haggai 1.4-5: Is it right for you to live in richly panelled houses while my temple is in ruins? Here then is what the LORD who rules over all says: 'Think carefully about what you are doing.'* NET. *Consider your ways! Haggai 1.8: Go up to the mountain, bring wood and build! Haggai 2.4: Be strong! For I am with you. Zechariah 1.3: Turn unto me, and I will turn unto you!*
- Through the ministry of these prophets, work resumed on the temple which was finished four years later (516BC).



The Prophecy of Zechariah: Its Significance

- Zechariah is the longest of the minor prophets, totalling *fourteen* chapters and 211 verses. It is one of the most frequently quoted books of the NT, with 71 allusions to the prophecy, 27 in the gospels and 31 in Revelation, cf. Matthew 21.5; 26.31; 27.9-10; Mark 14.27; John 19.37.
- Part of the book's significance is its huge emphasis on Christ and His coming. Perhaps only Isaiah has more to say about the coming Messiah. God was seeking to encourage His people by causing them to view their *present* discouragement in the glorious light of the *future*. God is true to His promises.
- The temple would be rebuilt and the glory of God would return. The city of Jerusalem was raised to the ground, but it would be exalted again. *Zechariah 1.16: Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: My house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, And a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.*
- Joshua and Zerubbabel were but foreshadows of a greater Priest-King who would sit on David's throne (9.9; 14.9).
- **Why is there so much emphasis on the future?** Not only to encourage the faithful remnant and inspire hope, but God tells us of **tomorrow**, so we can live rightly **today**. So often we live wrongly today because we think too little about tomorrow (2 Peter 3.11). Why live for the temporal and transient when eternity is our destiny?
- *MacArthur: For 400 years there will be prophetic silence [following the prophecy of Malachi]. As it closes it pleased God to have a mighty outburst of prophecy to indicate that prophecy was not dying a slow death. It was going out in a blaze of glory. "The eternal glories gleam afar to nerve our faint endeavour. So now to watch! to work! to war! And then, to rest for ever!"*

The Prophecy of Zechariah: The Seer

- Zechariah was both a *prophet* (Ezra 5.1) and a *priest*. He was the son of *Berechiah* and grandson of *Iddo*, and thus part of a prominent priestly family who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Nehemiah 12.4, 16).
- He was a 'young man' when he began prophesying (2.4). The word signifies a *boy* or *youth*, and is used of both David (1 Samuel 17.33) and Jeremiah (1.6). Zechariah is occasionally spoken of as 'son' (*ben*) of Iddo (Ezra 5.1; 6.14), thus his father, Berechiah, may have died at an early age. *Ben* often means grandson or descendant.

- According to the Lord Jesus, Zechariah was murdered between the temple and altar (Matthew 23.35). *JN Darby: The Jewish Targum states that Zechariah the son of Iddo, a prophet and priest was slain in the sanctuary. As the rabbis could have no possible reason for seeking to confirm the words of the Lord Jesus, it would seem as though their testimony was conclusive.* The Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24.20-21 was therefore a different man.
- Zechariah means 'Jehovah remembers'. Every time he was seen or spoke, he therefore reminded the nation that God would never forget His covenant promises. There was a glorious future for the temple and nation.
- Zechariah and Haggai were *contemporary* and *complementary* prophets. Haggai emphasised the *temple*; Zechariah, the *city* of Jerusalem, *throne* and *land*.

The Prophecy of Zechariah: Its Structure

The prophecy divides neatly into *three* parts. There are two great *prophetic* panels at the beginning (Zechariah 1-6) and end (Zechariah 9-14), and one *practical* panel in the centre (Zechariah 7-8). See chart.

- Zechariah 1-6 concerns the universal re-display of God's glory. Sin has obscured the revelation of God's glory, but it will yet shine forth in a pre-eminent Priest-King, clothed in the splendour of deity (6.12-13). The eight *visions* of 1.7-6.8 show how God will accomplish His purpose, closing with the crowning of Joshua the High Priest (6.9-15).
- Zechariah 7-8 contains a restatement of God's grace towards Israel in the past, present and future. The call is to live appropriately in the light of such grace – they must love *truth* and *peace* (8.16-19).
- The main message of Zechariah 9-14 is the universal re-establishment of God's government. The rebellion of man has challenged God's authority, but the day is coming when the Lord shall be King over all the earth (14.9). The two *oracles* of 9.1-14.21 show how God will destroy every foe and establish worldwide dominion.

The Prophecy of Zechariah: Its Subjects

The primary themes of the book are intimately related to its structure (above). To fulfil God's purposes requires:

- **Person.** *CI Scofield: No OT prophet has more prophecy concerning Christ in so short a book. Zechariah predicts the second coming, the reign of Christ, His priesthood, His kingship, His humanity, His deity, His building of the temple of the Lord, His coming in lowliness, His bringing of permanent peace, His rejection and betrayal, His return to Israel as the crucified one, and His being smitten by the sword of the Lord.* Zechariah speaks of the two advents of Christ in grace (9.9) and glory (14.14). He alone tells us Christ will be a Priest-King in the millennium (6.13).
- **Place.** Jerusalem (x41). The unfolding of God's purpose requires Christ returning to the place of His rejection. The holy land (2.12) and its capital, Jerusalem, shall yet be manifested as the place of God's choosing (1.17; 2.12). The city will become the focus of war and much bloodshed (12.2-4; 14.2), but the Lord shall deliver His people (12.9; 14.3). The Lord shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem (8.3, 8) which will become the centre of the nations (8.22). It shall be characterised by truth, holiness and righteousness (8.3, 8). *Webb: For Zechariah, Jerusalem's chief glory was the presence of God, powerfully symbolised by the temple. It was God's presence that made both the temple and the city glorious. With the LORD present in his temple, Jerusalem was the city of God – the centre of His earthly kingdom.*
- **Purity.** The people were unfit for the presence of God and thus unqualified for worship or service. This is symbolised by Joshua, the high priest, standing before the Lord in *filthy* garments (3.1-3). But cleansing is provided through the agency of the Angel of the Lord (3.4-5), typical of a yet future and final cleansing when God will remove the sin of the land in a single day (3.9, cf. 13.1-2). In that day, the city and the people will be marked by holiness (14.20-21).
- **People.** Zechariah speaks of a nation that is central to God's purpose – *Judah* and *Israel* (1.19). God has a future for His earthly people. Judah (x22) is highlighted, being the *royal* tribe. David's greater son shall reign on his throne.
- **Power.** How will God implement His mighty plan? The most frequent word in the entire prophecy is *Jehovah* (x133), the covenant keeping God, and in particular *Jehovah of Hosts* (x53). This is a great title of omnipotence and deity. The hosts of heaven are under His control which thus guarantees the purposes of God will be fulfilled.

The Prophecy of Zechariah: Its Summary

- The primary message of the book is an exhortation to *repentance*. Unbounded blessing flows to those in right relationship with the Lord (not the Law). *1.3: Turn ye unto me... And I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.*
- A second prominent thought is beautifully summarised in the meaning of the names found in the first verse of the prophecy. Zechariah = Jehovah **remembers**. Berechiah = Jehovah **blesses**. Iddo = the appointed **time**.
- *JJ Stubbs: Zechariah 12 shows how God will once again open His eyes upon the people. He will not forget them or His promise to them in His word. Zechariah 13 shows how He will bless them when the fountain for sin and uncleanness will be opened for them. He will bless them on the ground of the work of Calvary. In Zechariah 14, He will come to deliver His people in the Person of the Messiah. How timely His arrival will be for Israel!*