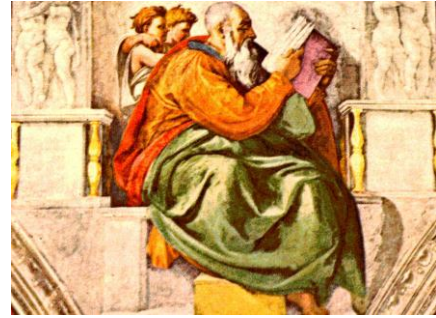


Zechariah

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Zechariah is the eleventh of the twelve Minor Prophets. His prophecy is *The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo.* (1:1) Zechariah is the longest book in the Minor Prophets and the most difficult to understand. It contains a number of visions, which are sometimes obscure in meaning, and which are only sometimes interpreted (by angels). Zechariah is often quoted in the New Testament and probably influenced the book of Revelation more than any other Old Testament book.

Author The prophet Zechariah. The name Zechariah means “the Lord remembers” and is a common name in the Bible. Zechariah was the *son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo*. Jesus seemed to refer to him in Matthew 23:35, describing him as a martyr.

Date Zechariah received the first 8 chapters of his prophecy *from the Lord* during the first few years of the reign of Darius. (1:1, 1:7, 7:1). Darius was king of Persia between 521–486 BC, so the prophecy was given between 520 and 518 BC, before the rebuilding of the temple. There are no dates given for chapters 9–14, but they must have been written sometime after the rebuilding of the temple.

Background The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in 586 BC, and most of the people were taken captive to Babylon. See 2 Kings chapters 24,25. Jeremiah predicted that the captivity in Babylon would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10; Daniel 9:2) and Zechariah’s first prophecies were given as the 70 year period was coming to an end (Zechariah 1:12; 7:5). The Babylonian Empire had fallen to the Persians in 538 BC, and Cyrus the first king of Persia signed a decree permitting all captives to return to their homes (2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:1-4). The first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem about 536 BC. Their main objective was to start rebuilding of the temple. (Ezra 1:3) but there was much opposition and indifference. See Nehemiah (whole book). Haggai and Zechariah spoke powerfully into this situation, and the rebuilding of the temple began in 520 BC and was finished in 516 BC (Ezra 5:1, 14-15; Haggai 1–2; Zechariah 1–8).

Message Zechariah was written to reassure and encourage the exiles who had returned from Babylon. They needed to know that the temple would be rebuilt, and later that Messiah would come and the kingdom of God would come in its fullness. The people needed to repent of their sins, focus on building God’s house and look forward to the time when God’s glory would return to Jerusalem.

Outline

Zechariah is divided into two distinct sections: chapters 1-8 and 9-14. The first part is *the word of the Lord* that came to Zechariah and is a number of visions and oracles to reassure the returned exiles concerning the rebuilding of the temple. In the second part the temple has been rebuilt and the people can look forward to the time when Messiah comes, Israel is restored and God brings in His eternal kingdom.

Return to the Lord. 1:1-7.

The Lord was *very angry* with the peoples’ forefathers and promised through His prophets: *Return to Me, and I will return to you.* They didn’t listen to God and *turn from their evil ways.* When they finally repented they said *The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve.*

Zechariah exhorted the people to not be like their forefathers and shared eight visions with them. (1:7-6:8). There is no overall pattern to the visions other than to exhort the people to be obedient to the Lord and rebuild the temple. Some of the visions contain oracles beginning with *Thus says the Lord.*

Vision of the man among the myrtle trees. 1:7-17.

Zechariah saw a *man riding a red horse standing among myrtle trees* surrounded by *red, brown and white horses.* An angel said they were *the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth.* They *found the whole world at rest and in peace.* The angel then asked how long the Lord would *withhold mercy* from Judah and

Jerusalem. God replied that He *was jealous for Jerusalem and Zion* but angry with nations that *feel secure*. He was going to return to Jerusalem *with mercy* and His house would be rebuilt. God's towns would again *overflow with prosperity* and the Lord would *comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem*. This must have been extremely encouraging for the exiles, as they had been in captivity in Babylon for nearly 70 years.

Vision of the four horns and four craftsmen. 1:18-21.

The next vision was of *four horns* representing the nations that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. Craftsmen came *to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah, to scatter its people*.

Vision of a man with a measuring line. 2:1-13.

In this vision a man measured the walls of Jerusalem because God was going to be *a wall of fire around it*, and be its *glory within*. The people of Jerusalem had been plundered and scattered but they were the *apple of God's eye*. He will punish the nations for what they have done to Jerusalem but His people could rejoice. *Shout and be glad, Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become My people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. The Lord will inherit Judah as His portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling."*

Vision of Joshua standing before the Lord. 3:1-10.

In this vision Zechariah saw Joshua the High Priest standing before the Lord being accused by Satan. Satan was rebuked and Joshua was told to take off his filthy clothes because the Lord had taken away his sin. He was to walk in God's ways and keep God's requirements in his role as High Priest. He was to be *symbolic of things to come*, as God was going to *bring my servant, the Branch* (Jesus) who would *remove the sin of this land in a single day*.

The name "Joshua" in Hebrew is exactly the same name as "Jesus" in Greek. It means "Yahweh saves". Zechariah 3:8,9 is a very specific prophecy regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus would *remove sin* (Matthew 1:21, John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21), and also be our great *High Priest* (Hebrews 4:14-8:13).

Vision of the gold lampstand and two olive trees. 4:1-14.

The next vision is of a gold lampstand with seven channels to its lights, with two olive trees beside it. The vision is for Zerubbabel, the governor. It is *not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty*. From small beginnings he would complete the building of the temple *to shouts of God bless it!* The seven lights are the *eyes of the Lord which range throughout the earth*, and the two olive trees are two who are *anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth*. These images are picked up again in Revelation 1:19 and 11:1-14. They seem to indicate that when the temple is rebuilt God will use it to spread His light throughout the world.

Vision of a flying scroll. 5:1-4.

Zechariah saw a flying scroll which was the curse that was *going out over the whole land* for thieves and for those who *swear falsely*.

Vision of a woman in a basket. 5:5-11.

Next was a vision of woman carrying a measuring basket which was *the iniquity of the people throughout the land*. Two women took it to Babylon where it was to be *set in its place*. Evil was being sent back where it belonged!

Vision of four chariots. 6:1-8.

This vision was of four chariots which are *the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world*. The one going towards the north gave *my Spirit rest in the land of the north*, presumably bring rest to the land of God's people.

A crown for Joshua. 6:9-15.

Zechariah was told to go to the house of Josiah and make a crown for Joshua the priest, *the Branch*, the one who would *build the temple*. He would be *clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne* as priest. After the ceremony the crown is to be hung in the temple as a memorial of those who gave the silver and the gold for the crown. Exiles from *far away* will come and *help build the temple of the Lord*, as long as God's people *diligently obey Him*.

Justice and mercy. 7:1-14.

In the fourth year of King Darius (518 BC.) the work on the temple had been going on for two years. A group from Bethel asked the priests and prophets if they should *mourn and fast* as they had done *for so many years*. The Lord told Zechariah to ask why they were fasting, and whether they were just feasting for themselves.

God said that He wanted them to *administer true justice; show mercy and compassion; not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In their hearts they were not to think evil of each other.*

In the past they refused to pay attention to God so *the Lord Almighty was very angry.* He wouldn't listen to them and *scattered them among the nations* so that the *pleasant land* they came from *became desolate.*

This is similar to an equivalent passage in Micah where God told them *He has showed you, O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* Micah 6:8.

Blessing for Jerusalem. 8:1-23.

The last part of the first section of Zechariah contains ten promises from the Lord. They are not about judgment but promise, hope, forgiveness, and restoration.

God says that:

- He is jealous for Zion; (Zion is the mountain on which Jerusalem is built. The term "Zion" is often used to stand for Jerusalem).
- He will return to Zion and it will be called a Holy Mountain once again;
- The streets of Jerusalem will again be filled with happy people;
- It will be marvellous;
- He will bring His people back to live in Jerusalem *and they will be My people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God;*
- The people are to be strong. God will not deal with them as He has done in the past. They had become an *object of cursing among the nations* but now God will save them and bless them so they *will be a blessing;*
- He had determined to bring disaster on them but now He had determined to *do good again to Judah and Jerusalem.* This is dependent on their being truthful and not plotting evil, which are things God hates;
- The fasts will again become joyous occasions;
- Many peoples are yet to return to seek the Lord in Jerusalem;
- People will recognise that God is with them.

It must have been very encouraging for the people to receive these messages. After 70 years in captivity and so much struggle and oppression now they knew that the Lord would be with them in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. But the prophet Zechariah made sure they also knew that this blessing was dependent on their following the Lord and living according to His ways.

Oracles from the Lord. Chapters 9-14.

The last part of Zechariah (chapters 9–14) consists of two oracles, or messages from the Lord. These oracles are focused on the future for God's people and include aspects fulfilled in the initial coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and aspects that will be fulfilled at His second coming. The oracles were given some time after the temple had been rebuilt.

Oracle 1: Restoration of God's people, Israel. 9:1-11:17.

The first oracle is concerned with the restoration of the tribes back to the land of Judah. To accomplish this God will judge the nations round about, and will defend His house. *Never again will an oppressor overrun My people, for now I am keeping watch.* God's people can *rejoice greatly* because their King is coming *righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* This was fulfilled when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on His way to the Cross. Matthew 21:5, John 12:15. Jesus will *proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

The Lord will appear to His people and will save them. *How beautiful and attractive they will be!* He will bless them richly and restore them because He has *compassion on them.* They will be as though God *had not rejected them,* for He is the Lord *and will answer them.* They may go through times of *great trouble,* but God will strengthen them and *they will return. "I will strengthen them in the Lord and in His name they will walk"* declares the Lord.

Up to this time God had symbolically taken two staves to shepherd His people, one called "Favour" and the other called "Union". When His people rejected Him God had broken these staves and they had lost favour with Him and broken the bonds of union that they had with Him. They tried to buy their way back with thirty pieces of silver and God had raised up *worthless shepherds* over the land who did not care for them at all.

This carried on right up till the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd *who gives His life for the sheep.* See John 10:7-18.

Oracle 2: The coming of the Lord. 12:1-14:21.

The final oracle is even more eschatological (end-time) focused than the first. It gives one of the Old Testament's most complete views of what will happen in the last days when Jesus returns and when God brings in His eternal kingdom. It gives many details about what will happen in Israel as the "new Jerusalem" is established.

Nations will gather against Israel but Jerusalem will be *an immovable rock*. God will protect the people of Jerusalem and will pour out on them *a spirit of grace and supplication*. *They will look on Me, the One they have pierced and they will mourn for Him as one mourns an only child*. This shows that many of the people of Israel will ultimately recognise that Jesus is the Messiah and turn to Him as Saviour. Then *a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity*, they will be ashamed of their past sins. After Jesus, the Good Shepherd is struck down (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27) they will be scattered and ultimately about a third of the people will call on the Lord and take Him as their God.

In the end times God will gather the nations to fight against Jerusalem and half of the city will go into exile. The Lord will fight against these nations and when Jesus returns *His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives*, and it will be split into two. *Then the Lord will come, and all the holy ones with Him*. From then on there will be no day or night and *living water will flow out from Jerusalem*. *The Lord will be King over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His name the only name*. Jerusalem will never again be destroyed. God will destroy all of the nations who have fought against Jerusalem and those who survive will worship the Lord year by year by keeping the Feast of Tabernacles.

The last part of Zechariah shows what the world will be like in the New Jerusalem when the world has been cleansed from sin. *Holy to the Lord* will be inscribed on everything and there will be peace and security. There will be no merchants in the house of the Lord because there will be no difference between Jews and Gentiles. All will worship the Lord of Hosts as King.

The last days.

The events described here relate to what is often called the *day of the Lord*. This is the time when Jesus returns and God completes the final part of His plan for mankind. Zechariah's account of end-time events reinforces those given in many other parts of the Bible. To get a complete picture of what will happen in the last days see all of the other Old and New Testament references to this wonderful event. These include the following chapters: *Isaiah 65, 66; Daniel 9, 12; Joel 2:28-3:21; Micah 4, 7; Zephaniah 1-3; Zechariah 12-14; Matthew 24, 25; Mark 13; Luke 21; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4,5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2; Revelation 6-22.*

Discussion questions

Zechariah prophesied at a time when God's people were returning from captivity in Babylon and were re-establishing themselves as a nation. What were the key messages from the Lord that Zechariah shared with His people? Why were these messages needed? How do you think they would have felt when they received these messages? What did they do in response?

Zechariah prophesied about the future of the Jews, of Jerusalem, and of what would later become the nation of Israel. Which of these prophecies have been fulfilled; which are currently being fulfilled, and which are yet to be fulfilled?

What can we learn from Zechariah about the way that God judges nations? How is that relevant for our nation? What can we do to ensure we enjoy God's blessing and don't face His wrath?

How does Zechariah predict about the coming of Jesus? How was this fulfilled? What was the significance of this for the Jewish people, and for all of mankind?

What does Zechariah predict about what will happen in the last days? How does this fit in with what is taught in other parts of the Bible? How much has been fulfilled already? What is yet to be fulfilled?

What have you learned from your study of Zechariah? How will you apply this in your life?