

# Zechariah

## Zechariah 1-4

Zechariah and Haggai were contemporaries, and both prophets urged the leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, to lead the people in building a new temple. Haggai's first recorded prophecy was given in August of 520 BC (Haggai 1:1) and Zechariah's first message is dated October/November of the same year (Zechariah 1:1).

Considering that Iddo was Zechariah's grandfather, Zechariah was probably a priest (as were Jeremiah and Ezekiel). Iddo is mentioned as a leader among the priests who returned from Babylon in Zechariah 12:4 and Zechariah is mentioned as a leader of his priestly family in Nehemiah 12:10-16.

Although nothing is said of Zechariah's death in the book, Jesus mentioned Zechariah son of Barachiah as last in a long string of prophets killed by those who refused to listen in Matthew 23:35. It may be that Jesus was citing a known historical tradition of this prophet's death when he spoke that day to/of the Pharisees and scribes.

Zechariah's initial message to the exiles who'd already been back in Jerusalem 16 years was "return to me, says the LORD of hosts" (1:3), and a reminder that the words of the former prophets (such as Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) had proven true. God had dealt with them just as he said (1:5-6), his word was proven true.

Overall, Zechariah's theme is encouragement, to persuade his people that following God's word is what's best for them, in this world and in anticipation of the future kingdom of God.

Zech. 1:7-6:8 is a series of visions received in a night, similar to portions of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. Chapters 9-14 highlight God's work of redemption in language that is often symbolic.

The last date mentioned in Haggai was in mid-December of 520 BC (Haggai 2:10, 20). The 2<sup>nd</sup> date mentioned in Zechariah is 2 months later in mid-February of 519 BC (Zech. 1:7).

The vision in Zech. 1:7-20 including horsemen and horns was about Jerusalem in relation to the world. The first character Zechariah saw in v8, a man riding a red horse, is identified as the angel of the LORD in v11-12, which is a description, not a title, nor a proper name. Gabriel in Luke 1:11, 18-19 is described in the same way. The horsemen on horses of various colors are described as agents of God sent to patrol the earth, highlighting as in Daniel the role of angels among the nations of the world. When the report given has the earth "at rest" the question is raised about Jerusalem and other Jewish cities languishing in those circumstances. Jerusalem was not sharing in the general well-being of the world around them. We are reminded of the 70 years Jeremiah prophesied for Babylon, which ended with a decree for the willing exiles to return to Jerusalem. Although that had been fulfilled 19 years prior to Zechariah's prophecy, there were still unresolved issues.

Notice that when the angel requested God's benevolence for Jerusalem in 1:12 the LORD's reply

was “gracious and comforting words.” Those words are then echoed in a message Zechariah was to proclaim in v14ff, that the time had come for complacency among the nations to end, and for the Jews to stir themselves to build the house of God in Jerusalem. Building the temple is linked to restored prosperity for Jerusalem and Judah.

The four horns in 1:18-21 may refer to the major powers of the recent past and of the day that had participated in the reduction and ruin of Judah and Jerusalem, Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and Persia. The four craftsmen might refer to the nations of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome that successively destroyed their predecessors, and played a leading role in preparing for the coming of the Messiah’s kingdom.

Zechariah’s message in the 2<sup>nd</sup> vision seems to anticipate the coming kingdom of the Messiah, with Jerusalem as an open and growing city, protected by a wall of fire from God (see Revelation 20:9). The “glory in her midst” was only fulfilled when Jesus’ came in the flesh (John 1:14) and anticipates the glory of God’s Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22.

The ingathering of God’s people from the nations in 2:6ff was a message for Zechariah’s generation, but really languished until the apostles took the gospel to all the world. When the Lord came to his own he was not received (2:10, John 1:11), but he does and will nevertheless dwell among his people (1 Corinthians 3:16, Revelation 21:3). The promises of 2:10-11 are only fulfilled in the Lord’s church, his people as a whole, in this world and in the new heavens and new earth.

Zech 3 is a vision about the high priest. His name is Joshua (Jeshua in Haggai), which is essentially the same name as Jesus in the New Testament. The angel of the LORD here must have had a rank or authority similar to that of Michael, or perhaps it was Michael, as the interaction with Satan is very similar to that described between Michael and the devil in Jude 1:9. Zechariah saw the high priest in filthy garments, because he was in fact an imperfect sinner. He was like a stick plucked from the fire. The LORD intended to clean him up, just as on other occasions he had cleansed Isaiah or David or others. The newly cleansed and clothed priest was then spoken to in covenant terms in 3:7-10 where God described the future servant, the branch, Jesus, who would truly do God’s will and serve him without stain. The stone with 7 eyes (facets) in 3:9 speaks to us of Jesus, the stone the builders rejected, and the 7 eyes reminds us that he was anointed by God’s Spirit and had the Spirit without measure. With the work of that future Joshua/Jesus (Jesus means savior), God would remove iniquity in one day (the day Jesus died) and then the good news would be shared neighbor to neighbor (3:10).

The lampstand of the vision in Zech 4 focuses on a golden lampstand with 7 branches, so we have Tabernacle/Temple imagery, though the temple had not yet been built by Zechariah’s people. While this lampstand reminds us of the one made in Moses’s day, it is seen in relation to 2 olive trees that perpetually supply oil to a bowl atop the lampstand. We can connect the lampstand to the idea of God’s word as the light of the world, including he who is the Word in the flesh, and the empowering of that word/Word by the Spirit of God (the sacred oil with which Jesus was anointed, Acts 10:38, and by which the prophets spoke, 2 Peter 1:19-21). The Spirit of God is similarly seen in connection with 7 lamps in Revelation 4:5 and Zech 4:10 is echoed Rev 5:6.

The two olive trees are explained as the LORD's anointed ones (Zech 4:14) which would be the royal heir and the high priest, which came together in Jesus Christ (Christ means anointed). Zerubbabel and Joshua were very important in their leadership as temple builders, and they were living symbols of God's future temple builder, the Christ.

## Zechariah 5-9

Zechariah chapter 5 continues the series of night visions begun in 1:7. Zechariah saw an enormous scroll flying through the air. Its message was curse on thieves on one side, and a curse on false witnesses on the other side. Both are sins against neighbors, and both bring corruption into every aspect of life, consuming the whole. The Law condemns lawbreakers and thoroughly expunges them from the city of God.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> vision in chapter 5 (v5-10, 7<sup>th</sup> in the series) also focuses on sin, this time personified as a woman called Wickedness. The iniquity of Judah was transported to Shinar, that is, the land of Babel/Babylon. The bearers of the basket, feminine with great white wings like a stork, became the sort of classic image of angels in western art. This scene is somewhat reminiscent of the binding of Satan in Revelation 20. Perhaps in considering the imagery here it would be helpful to think of the "house" in Shinar in v11 as the opposite of the "house" Zechariah was advocating for in Jerusalem. In 1:16, 3:7, and 4:9 God's house was to be built in Jerusalem. In 5:11 Wickedness's house was to be built in Shinar, which is the land of Babylon. This same contrast between two cities, two temples, two women, occurs over and over again in the Bible, and is a pervasive theme in Revelation. Wickedness is removed from the city of God, where his house is built, but has a residence/temple in Babylon (see Revelation 17-18).

Zechariah 6:1-8 relates the 8<sup>th</sup> vision in the series. Four chariots with horses of various colors, reminiscent of the horses of various colors and patterns in the 1<sup>st</sup> vision (1:7ff). We also should be reminded of this vision when we read Revelation 6:1-8. God's agents patrol the earth, and intervene as necessary to secure his purposes among the nations. My notion is that the 2 mountains of bronze, like the 2 olive trees in chapter 4, stand for the 2 anointed ones who stand before the Lord of the whole earth, the King and High Priest who in Revelation 5 has the authority to open the seals and administer God's purpose over the nations. While the chariots in this vision go out to patrol the earth, the area of particular concern for Zechariah and his people is the north. Assyria came to Israel from the north. So did Babylon, and that was the direction to go to get to Persia as well. God's Spirit at rest in the north country resolves the issues of 1:11-16, clearing the path for Jerusalem to focus on building God's house/temple.

The LORD's message in 6:9-15 once again used the high priest Joshua as a figure foreshadowing the coming priest-king, the Branch, who would be the builder of God's enduring temple and reign on the royal throne, Jesus of Nazareth. Again, as highlighted many times in the prophets, that temple built by the Branch would incorporate those who were far off, the Gentile peoples.

Zechariah 7 moves forward chronologically almost 2 years from the night vision series. The date given by the prophet would be December 7, 518 BC on our calendar. Some messengers traveled from Bethel to Jerusalem, several miles, to inquire about ritual fasting that had been inspired by

the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. In the 5<sup>th</sup> month the temple had been burned (2 Kings 25:8). The inquiry was addressed to priests of the temple (which was still under construction) and prophets. We know that Haggai and Zechariah were both prophets in Jerusalem at that time.

The LORD's answer regarding the fasting was similar to that of Isaiah 58. God wants people to pursue justice, kindness and mercy rather than being selfish and then performing rituals to justify themselves before the Lord. The messages of the prophets before the exile are referred to as "the former prophets" in 7:7, 12, and their message attributed to the Spirit of God. God wants hearts aligned with his will, and loving our neighbor as ourselves, rather than religious rituals.

Zechariah 8 promises blessings, 10 times. God's jealousy in v2 is a positive thing, the sort of jealousy that prompts a man to stand up for his wife, to protect her and lay down his life for her because she is beloved to him. The promises of renewal and rest and restoration in the blessings of chapter 8 were partially realized for physical Jerusalem, but are only truly fulfilled in the New Jerusalem under the administration of Christ Jesus. We have the ingathering from the nations, the abundance of divine supply, the kingdom of peace, the reign of righteousness and justice, the removal of sorrow and fullness of joy in its place. In the midst of these blessings is the blessing of godly people conducting themselves with integrity in v16-17, 19.

Zechariah 9 is the counterpoint to chapter 8. While God's people are blessed, including those who come to His Jerusalem from the nations, those who continue in rebellion face humiliation and destruction. When we read of the downfall of all these cities and nations that were hostile to God and his people, we shouldn't overlook v7 where the despoiled Philistines become "a remnant for our God" and "like a clan in Judah." When we read of Philip preaching in Azotus (Acts 8:40), that's Ashdod, and he preached all along the coast where the Philistines had ruled. When we read of the flourishing church in Tyre (Acts 21:3ff) we should be reminded that God's plan for the nations included an opportunity to come into his kingdom. That kingdom was initiated by the one who rode the donkey into Jerusalem (9:9, Matthew 21:5), and founded a kingdom of peace. The Messiah came as foretold, not leading an army but establishing a kingdom of peace. Not just for Jews, but for all nations. The blood of the covenant (v11) was Jesus' own blood (Luke 22:20). The foretelling of Zechariah 9 spans the whole of the kingdom of God, from Jesus as a man to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming when the LORD will appear "over them" "like lightning" and the trumpet of God will sound (9:14, Matthew 24:27, 30-31). God's people need not fear the violence of the nations, being God's flock and his jewels, he will protect those he treasures.

#### Zechariah 10-14

Zechariah 10:1-2 indicate the returned Jews still had some problems mixing pagan beliefs into their faith in God. The sheep without a shepherd problem for Israel was first stated by Moses when his own death was imminent (Numbers 27:16-17), but then Joshua was ready to take the lead. 1400 years later it was the plight of Israel when Jesus came (Matthew 9:36), and he came to be that shepherd and also to prepare his apostles to carry on as shepherds of his flock (Matthew 9:37-10:42). As the existing shepherds of the people were corrupt in Zechariah's time (10:3) so also in Jesus' generation (Matthew 23). But the Shepherd God would send would be from the

tribe of Judah, and would be the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20) and the tent peg (Isaiah 22:22-23), and the battle bow (Revelation 12:10-11). Victory in Jesus over the forces of evil. Salvation for the two blessed houses of Israel, Judah and Joseph (10:6), and their regathering, would ultimately depend on the work of the Christ, because they were always struggling with issues like that in 10:2. Followers of Jesus are called to be strong in the Lord and to walk in his name (10:12; Ephesians 6:10, Ephesians 4:1-7).

Zechariah 11 opens with a sharp contrast to the promises of salvation and ingathering that end chapter 10. Not everyone will humble themselves under God's might hand or accept the good shepherd. Three kinds of proud trees of the region are enumerated in 11:1-3, and trees are often symbolic of rulers or kingdoms in the imagery of the prophets. Those who glory in themselves are doomed to humiliation and destruction. There is a flock that chooses folly rather than guidance and discipline, a flock destined for slaughter. They cannot receive God's favor (grace) because they will not yield to him. Wages that amount to the price of a slave are meted out and thrown to the potter (Zechariah 11:12-13). The wages and the potter are of course cited in the gospels when Judas betrayed Jesus and then had regret (Matthew 26:15, 27:3-10). So Zechariah is dramatizing matters pertaining to Jesus when a covenant relationship came to an end, and the Lord gave up on some people doomed to destruction (though Jesus warned them constantly of the looming disaster if they did not follow him). There were other shepherds, priests and rulers of the people, who persisted in rebellion and misleading the people until the nation was destroyed by the Romans.

Reading Zechariah 12 one might think of the Romans destroying Jerusalem in 70 AD, but that isn't really the fulfillment of this message. This is another prophetic glimpse of the impending judgment of all nations, as seen in Isaiah 24 and Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 19:17-21 & 20:7-10. When the nations in common purpose join together to attack and destroy God's city, God's holy people, then God's judgement falls upon them. In opposition to the condemnation of the rebellious nations we have the story of redemption in 12:7-8. Of course redemption began in Jerusalem with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and then the proclamation of the gospel. Divine strength is imparted to those who are inhabitants of the Jerusalem of God. This prophecy is dependent on "him whom they have pierced," Jesus who was crucified (12:10, John 19:37), and how people respond to him. It's interesting that the "house of Nathan" is mentioned here in v12, and Jesus in Luke 3:31 is recorded as being a descendant of Nathan, the son of David. Perhaps the mention of various families and specifically wives in 12:12-14 had other implications, but one implication is that each person answers/responds for themselves to the one who was pierced, either accepting or rejecting, and no one can answer for anyone else.

Zechariah 13:1 continues the oracle of chapter 12, with the promise of a fountain of cleansing, which again refers us to the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Paul included himself and Titus, a Greek disciple, in this washing of renewal (Titus 3:4-7).

Zechariah 13 continues with a message against presumptive prophets, a sort of hired clergy that prophesy for an income. That message flows into rejection of the Messiah himself in v6, the shepherd who was struck (13:7; Matthew 26:31), and only a remnant, here described as 1/3, would be saved, though refined through fire (13:8-9; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

Ezekiel 14 resumes the warning of conflict for the people of God as in 12:1-5. Jesus warned his disciples of tribulation and persecution (Matthew 24:9) in their Christian walk. The language of 14:1-5 suggests the doom of Jerusalem when the Romans came, and the Christians being forewarned by Jesus fled the city eastward, apparently, to Pella. However, the mention of the Mt of Olives brings to mind David leaving Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 15:30, and the departure of God's glory from the temple in Ezekiel 11:23. The Mt of Olives of course was where the Triumphal entry of Jesus riding the donkey began, and where Jesus was arrested, and where the disciples saw Jesus ascend on a cloud into heaven. That's where the angels told the disciples that as they'd seen Jesus ascend on a cloud, so they would see him come again. The conclusion of the first coming, and then the promised 2<sup>nd</sup> coming may well be the two mountains separated by a valley of escape. Escape from death itself (recall Psalm 23:4). What began with Jesus' ascension concludes with his return, when death itself is destroyed and every enemy cast into the lake of fire. The unique day of 14:6-7 sounds much like the unending day of the New Jerusalem in the New Creation of Revelation 21, and the living water of 14:8 dovetails with Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22, along with the eternal reign of the LORD in v9. The loftiness of Jerusalem (v10) again is like that seen in Ezekiel 40:2 and Revelation 21:10. The world's attempt to defeat the people of God once again is shown to end by God's power in disaster, and the wealth of the nations (v14) flows into the Lord's Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24-27).

Zechariah 14:16 recalls the feast of booths (a Jewish festival being celebrated at the moment this is being written, September 22, 2021), which was a celebration of Israel's time in the wilderness, before they had permanent homes in the promised land. Christians live in this world in a temporary dwelling, anticipating a permanent home in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1-2). Christians are living the feast of tabernacles, nourished in the wilderness until the heavenly home is fully realized (Revelation 12:6, 14). Those who refuse to adopt that heavenly perspective and worship the King are under God's wrath, facing only a fearful expectation of punishment.