

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adult Bible Equipping Class
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OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

The overall message of Zechariah, though occasionally obscure, is largely clear and plain. The prophet is concerned to comfort his discouraged and pessimistic compatriots, who are in the process of rebuilding their Temple and restructuring their community but who view their efforts as making little difference in the present and offering no hope for the future. With his eye on both the temporal task at hand the eschatological day to come, he challenges members of the restored remnant to go to work with the full understanding that what they do, feeble as it appears, will be crowned with success when YHWH, true to His covenant word, will bring to pass the fulfillment of His ancient promises to the fathers.

Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 87

Zechariah

I. Introduction

The book of Zechariah comprises the second of three prophetic books written during the period of time following the return of Judah from Babylonian exile. Like Haggai and Malachi, the prophet Zechariah addressed the specific circumstances and attitudes of the remnant who found themselves in a precarious situation back in their home land. Haggai focused his attention specifically on the rebuilding of the temple and its immediate impact on Judah's worship and covenant relationship with Yahweh. Some years later, Malachi would write to the people rebuking their religious leaders for corrupting their priestly obligations, yet not completely withholding hope for a future where covenant promises would be finally realized. In between these two, Zechariah would write his book, a message which lifts the gaze of his readers beyond the present to a hopeful future. While the present is not absent from his book, it serves only as a foil for what God will do for Israel in the eschaton.

A. *Date & Authorship*

The book's name is derived from the name of its author, a Hebrew name which translates to "Yahweh remembers," a fitting name for a man whose writings focus on how God will ultimately bring about all that he has promised to Israel. The prophet is distinguished by his ancestral lineage, "son of Berechiah, son of Iddo" (1:1), and when this compared with Ezra 5:1 and Nehemiah 12:16 which indentify him simply as the son of Iddo, it may suggest that Zechariah's father died early on in the prophet's life leaving the majority of his upbringing to his grandfather, though this is purely speculative. Regardless, the prophet

should not be confused with "Zechariah son of Jeberechiah," who lived during the time of Isaiah the prophet (Isa 8:2).¹

The timeframe of the book is clearly distinguished by the prophet's careful attention to chronological markers, and the ancient dating scheme is easily converted to our modern calendar:

1:1	8th month/2nd year	Late Oct. to late Nov., 520 B.C.
1:7	24th day/11th month	February 15, 519 B.C.
7:1	14th day/9th month/4th year	December 5, 518 B.C.

"Like Haggai, Zechariah is concerned to pinpoint the major turning points of his ministry by attaching them to a sequential, chronological framework." When one compares the dates with those given by Haggai, it becomes clear that the two prophets were contemporaries with overlapping ministries. As Merrill explains,

It is difficult to determine what role Zechariah may have played in connection with the public ministry of Haggai, a ministry that commenced only two months before his own (Hag. 1:1). When they are mentioned together (Ezra 5:1; 6:14), Haggai's name is always first, suggesting either his leadership or his prophetic and canonical priority. In any case, the two men of God together encouraged the resumption of Temple construction after it had lain dormant for 18 years (from 536 to 520 B.C.; cf. Ezra 3:8-10; 5:1-2). With Haggai, Zechariah provided the leadership to enable their compatriots to bring the building task successfully to completion by about March 13, 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:14-15).²

It must be remembered that the provided dates represent the time when Zechariah *received* and delivered his messages, not necessarily when he composed the book. Most conservative scholars allow for a period of time between the time of reception and the time of transmission, but there must be caution in how late these dates may go before questions of Zechariah's authorship arise.

Despite a complete lack of reasonable and objective evidence, liberal scholars have tended to favor pseudo-authorship for the latter 6 chapters of the book. Like the authorship of Isaiah, they suggest that chapters 1-8 can perhaps be attributed to the actual prophet chapters 9-14 originate from a different hand writing sometime around 150 B.C. To support their contention they cite 4 critical historical references specific to the Alexandrian time period: (1) the mention of Greece in 9:13; (2) the mention of key provinces conquered by Alexander the Great in 9:1-2; (3) discussion of the reunification of Israel and Judah in 11:14; (4) the mention of the "evil shepherd" (11:17) and "three shepherds" (11:8) as allusions to certain Maccabean religious leaders.³

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, "The Book of Zechariah," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 483n1.

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 62.

³ Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 474-6.

Each of these apparent "evidences," however, are highly suspect and extremely subjective. Any points of contact that do exist in (2-4) between the text and the suggested historical references are incidental and lack any kind of objective criteria. As for (1), Greece had already existed as a major power since before the 6th century B.C., and its victories over Xerxes in Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale in 480-478 B.C. provide more than sufficient reason for Zechariah to draw his reader's attention to them.

Thus, in summation, the two-source theory of the book fails to persuade, and its anti-supernatural assumptions become glaringly obvious. There is no reason to doubt the unity of the work, and numerous OT scholars have provided good work demonstrated its overall unity.

B. *Historical Background*

Much of the historical circumstances surrounding Zechariah's vision are shared by his contemporary Haggai. Both are oriented around the 2nd year of the reign of Darius Hystaspes of Persia, who ruled from 522-486 B.C. After 70 years in captivity, Judah had been released under edict from Cyrus (538 B.C.) and allowed to return to their land and reestablish their Jewish state. The task, however, proved more difficult than expected. Opposition arose during the reconstruction of the temple, which led to a 18-year hiatus that, according to Haggai, produced a sense of disillusionment and covenant apathy among the leaders and the people.

It appears that the antagonism and opposition that plagued the early years of the rebuilding project ended when Darius ascended the throne (Ezra 4:4-5), and from 520 B.C., temple construction went unimpeded until 518 B.C., when Tattenai the governor of the satrapy *eber-nari* questioned the legitimacy of the project (Ezra 5:13-17). However, after Darius clarified the project's legality (Ezra 6:1-12), the work continued unhindered until its completion (Ezra 6:13-14). Only after the beginning of Xerxes' reign did serious opposition resume (Ezra 4:6). Nevertheless, the temple construction itself was completed on the "third day of the month Adar" in the "sixth year of the reign of King Darius," that is, March 13, 515 B.C.

Yet even after the temple rebuilding project recommenced in 520 B.C., Haggai evidences a persistent pessimism among the people. His address to them on Oct. 17, 520 B.C. aimed at encouraging the disheartened people who were more than a little underwhelmed at the scale and meagerness of the new temple (Hag 2:1-9). Within weeks after this message was delivered, Zechariah spoke to the people as well, reminding them of God's displeasure with Israel's previous generations and calling on the people to return to Yahweh in repentance (Zech 1:1-6). The overall thrust of his book attempts to shift the people's eyes from the present to the future. "The dismal conditions of the struggling state would be redressed and the people of so little apparent promise would some day see the fulfillment of all the glorious promises of God."⁴

⁴ Merrill, "The Book of Zechariah," 487.

II. Major Themes

Amidst the apocalyptic visions and promises, three themes form the backbone of the book:

A. *Israel*

1. Disobedience & Judgment

Zechariah reminds his readers consistently of the past failings of the nation Israel. His opening message, spoken perhaps only weeks following Haggai's address to the people (Hag 2:1-9), begins by recounting God's anger with their ancestors (1:2), who continued in disobedience despite the message of the prophets (1:4). This, of course, had led them into exile (1:5), and the prophet uses their history to implore the current generation to "return" to Yahweh, that covenant restoration may follow (1:3).

Two years later, Zechariah addresses the people again when a delegation of Jews from Bethel arrive seeking divine/prophetic approval to continue their festival observances (7:1-3). In response, the prophet reminded the people that their actions were no different than the superficial piety of their ancestors during the exile (7:4-7). This type of religiosity is void of efficacy. The previous generations had attempted vain cultic ritualism, but had neglected the heart of the covenant stipulations, and because of that, they underwent exile (7:8-14).

In chapters 10-11, the prophet focuses on the failure of Judah's wicked leadership. While hope remains in the coming of a future King, the past and current situation left much to be desired. The nation's religious and political leaders had led the people into covenant violation resulting in the division of the kingdom and covenant curse (10:1-3a; 11:1-17).

2. Restoration

Despite the prophet's reminders of Israel's past and even current failures, Zechariah remains intent to cast a glorious vision for the future of the nation.

Historical Israel had failed to achieve God's covenant purposes for her, and even the state of the prophet's time was in jeopardy because of its lack of total commitment to His kingdom program. However, the promises of the Lord are sure, and what He has begun in world redemption He will bring to ultimate and magnificent conclusion.⁵

The prophet's push for corporate repentance and covenant recommitment in 1:2-6 emphasizes his overarching contention that the nation can expect future blessings only as long as they maintain present covenant obedience (5:3-4; 7:8-10; 8:16-19).

Yahweh's purpose of the nation is not condemnation. He fully intends to realize every good promise he has made to the nation. To do this, the Lord will establish a universal peace (1:8-11) that will allow Israel to grow and succeed, rebuild the temple (1:16), and multiply its cities and prosperity (1:17). All of God's enemies must be brought into subjection (1:18-21), and Jerusalem will once again become a thriving

⁵ Ibid., 489.

and prosperous city (2:1-5), so that even Gentiles will join themselves to the nation and become part of God's people (2:11-12).

After Israel's sin is itself judged by God (5:1-4), the Lord will remove it far away from them (5:5-11), and he will ensure that his peace remains in the earth (6:1-10). Though he condemns his contemporaries for their empty ritualism (7:1-7), he promises that the Lord will return to his people and give them unparalleled blessings (8:1-8).

He will bring them back from their exile among the nations (10:8-10a) and bring them back into the land, and their numbers will be so great that the land will not contain them (10:10b). Jerusalem will become an indestructible imposition to all its enemies (12:1-9). Spiritual renewal will flow over the nation, and the house of David and the people of Judah will realize its failings and mourn over its sin and embrace Yahweh finally and completely (12:10-14). Fountains of grace will cover their past transgressions (13:1), and the hearts of the people will pursue covenant loyalty (13:2-6) and unification (13:7-9). The land will produce untold abundance (8:9-12), and God will once again do good to Jerusalem and Judah (8:14-15). Israel will stand as the center of the world, and the nations will stream to the Jews because they recognize that God is with them (8:20-23).

B. *The Nations*

1. Judgment

The nations comprise the second major theme of the book, and their judgment at the hands of Yahweh and Israel is central to the book's overall message. Judah's present pessimism arose as they faced continued opposition during the early years of reconstruction. Small and seemingly insignificant, still under the authority of a foreign power (Persia), they had become disillusioned for the present and hopeless for the future. God's message offered rays of hope that their current status as a byword among the nations would not last forever. God would subject all their enemies to his authority (1:15-21) and force upon the world a kind of peace they had never seen (1:7-11; 6:1-8). He will bring judgment on the nations (9:1-8) through his conquering King (9:9-10) and through Israel herself (9:11-17). Though the nations attempt to besiege the city, their efforts will prove futile (12:1-9). Even while they appear to enjoy a taste of victory in the capture of Jerusalem in a final and decisive battle, Yahweh himself will return, save the remnant of his people (14:1-7) and strike the nations who fought against the city (14:12-15).

2. Salvation

Despite their judgment, there is definitive place for the nations in the eschatological vision of Zechariah. He sees their judgment as a necessary means for restoring Israel to their covenanted potential, and their prominence and faithfulness will result in the salvation of many peoples. As God dwells among them once again, people will become proselytes and join themselves to Israel, themselves being counted among God's people (2:11). And when they observe the richness of the covenant blessings enjoyed by Israel, the nations will be stirred to approach Israel in order to worship God (8:20-23). When the kingdom is established and God rules over the earth, he will

ensure that the nations maintain their allegiance to him, withholding blessing from any nation which revolts (14:16-19).

C. *Messiah*

Zechariah's messianic theology turns out to be the agency by which God accomplishes all of his covenant purposes for Israel. Interspersed throughout his oracles to Israel concerning their past failings, need for repentance, and bright future, and scattered among his prophecies describing future judgment and salvation on Gentile nations, Zechariah has strategically introduced a messianic figure who will be the divine means for accomplishing these.

After describing a future when God's enemies are subjected to him, Jerusalem and the people are prosperous, and the nations attach themselves to Israel for salvation (1:8-2:11), the prophet depicts a vision of a priestly tribunal, where Joshua is accused by Satan of being unfit for his role as high priest on account of his ritual impurity. Yahweh's response, however, is to highlight his sovereign and gracious election of Jerusalem. After Joshua's symbolic cleansing and charge to covenant obedience, he is promised to take up both a political and spiritual rule over Israel (3:6-7), a role that serves to foreshadow a future "Branch" who will exercise a similar but more effective dominion, one that will result in removing the iniquity of the land in a single day (3:9) and the ushering in of revolutionary peace (3:10).

Similarly, Zechariah's messianic "branch" language reappears in chapter 6. After describing a universal peace thrust upon the world by the sovereign Lord (6:1-8), the prophet then depicts a ceremonial crowning of Joshua and a "Branch" (Zerubbabel) as two individuals who will together rule over the nation in a complementary manner (3:11-15).

What is ultimately at stake here is not just the crowning of two persons in 519 B.C., no matter how important these two might be in terms of their own circumstances or even in terms of what they symbolize. Joshua and Zerubbabel are signs (Zech. 3:8), anointed ones (4:14) whose messianic significance is unmistakable (Hag 2:23; Zech 3:2-5; 6:11-13). That is, they point toward something far more remarkable and transcendent than even they themselves could have anticipated. The historical here is merely a portent of the eschatological to follow.

As already intimated the dual roles of priest and king are central themes of OT history and theology. Man was created to have dominion over all things (Gen 1:26-28) and, like a priest, to stand between God and His creation (Ps. 8:5-8). When Israel was elected by YHWH and redeemed from Egyptian bondage, she entered into covenant with Him as "a hold nation, a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:4-6). Orders of priests and lines of kings emerged in the course of redemptive history, always independent of each other yet complementing one another.

Beginning with David, however, there was the undeniable fact that royal and priestly rule would someday merge in one individual, the scion of David. This anointed one of YHWH would be His son who would reign from Zion and be heir of all the nations (Ps 2:2, 6-8). Moreover, he, as universal ruler, would also be a priest after the line of Melchizedek (Ps 110:2, 4). Christian theology identifies this offspring of David as Jesus Christ, a point elaborated in great detail by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 5:1-10; 7:1-25).

Apart from Psalm 110 there is no OT passage that comes as close as this one in Zechariah to uniting the royal and priestly offices. . . . Joshua and Zerubbabel are messianic forerunners whose persons and functions prototypically portray that One to come who died as servant, intercedes as priest, and will return as king, even Christ Jesus.⁶

In chapter 9, the pronouncement of judgment against the nations (9:1-8) climaxes with a triumphant proclamation that Zion's king has come bringing victory, salvation, and universal dominion (9:9-10). He will come as a shepherd to lead them in triumph over their enemies (10:1-7). Unlike Judah's wicked kings, he will lead them in covenant fidelity (11:1-17). In the last days, he will deliver the people into the hands of their oppressors by allowing his "shepherd" to be struck, thus scattering the sheep (13:7-9), the price of their centuries of wickedness under wicked kings. But when Jerusalem is surrounded by her enemies and finally taken, most of her inhabitants killed, houses plundered, and women raped, Zechariah describes in clearly anthropomorphic language Yahweh's personal arrival to fight for his people, with his "feet" standing on the Mount of Olives, splitting it in two, and allowing a passage of escape for the city's remnant. Following a supernatural darkening of the heavens, light reappears with Yahweh reigning personally over his earthly kingdom—language that clearly draws on all the messianic theology of the previous chapters.

III. Purpose

Yahweh remembers the nation of Israel and will yet bring Messianic blessing upon it.

IV. Literary Structure

Zechariah's message comprises two main genres: vision reports and oracles. Eight visions appear in the first six chapters:

1. The four horsemen (1:7-17)
2. The four horns (1:18-21)
3. The surveyor (ch. 2)
4. The priest (ch. 3)
5. The menorah (ch. 4)
6. The flying scroll (5:1-4)
7. The ephah (5:5-11)
8. The chariots (6:1-8)

Oracles appear interspersed throughout chapters 1-6 (1:116-17; 2:6-13; 3:8-10; 4:6b-10a; 6:9-15), are more concentrated in chapters 7-8 (7:4-14; 8:1-23), and appear in two fully formed and elaborated oracles in chapters 9-14 (chs. 9-11; chs. 12-14).

⁶ Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 200-1.

ZECHARIAH

A Call to Repentance	Eight Night Visions	The Issue of Fasting	Two Burdens	
<p style="text-align: center;">Oct/Nov 520 B.C.</p> <p>1:1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Jan/Feb 519 B.C.</p> <p>1:7</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Nov/Dec 518 B.C.</p> <p>7:1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Messiah's Rejection</p> <p>9:1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Messiah's Acceptance</p> <p>12:1</p>