

# **Zechariah**

## **Chapter 1**

### **I. Overview and Synopsis**

Zechariah's name means "The Lord Remembers". It is a most descriptive name since the central theme of the book is that God remembers his people and his promises.

Zechariah has more references to Christ than all of the other minor prophets combined.

The name for God, "Lord of Hosts" occurs some eighty plus times in the post-exilic prophets.

Zechariah is one of the three post-exilic prophets, the other two being Malachi and Haggai.

Zechariah and Haggai were contemporaries. In Haggai 1:1 we find that Haggai prophesied in the sixth month of the second year of Darius. This corresponds to the year 520 B.C. In Zechariah 1:1 we find Zechariah's ministry starting two months later, namely the eighth month of the second year of Darius. In fact, the last three books of the Old Testament are in chronological order.

It is of further note that the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi all record events in the same general time-frame.

Zechariah is a common name in the Old Testament. We are aware of at least 27 other men with this same name.

There is a seeming contradiction regarding Zechariah in Matthew 23:25. In Christ's denunciation of the Pharisees, he mentions "Zechariah the son of Berechiah whom ye slew between the temple and the altar". There is a Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22 who was murdered in the temple courtyard by stoning but who was named as "Zechariah the son of Jehoida". This seeming contradiction is best answered by assuming that Christ knew what he was talking about and that Zechariah the prophet met the same fate as this other Zechariah but at a different time.

Zechariah is mentioned as the "son of Berechiah the son of Iddo" in Zechariah 1:1 and "Zechariah the son of Iddo" in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. This "contradiction" is most easily answered by 1) understanding the fact the "son of" can refer not only to an immediate son, but also a grandson or great-grandson, and 2) that Zechariah's father probably died while Zechariah was young and as a result he was known to his contemporaries as "Zechariah the son of Iddo".

There are some who would have us believe that the book of Zechariah was actually written by two men, chapters 1-8 being written by Zechariah the prophet, and chapters 9-14 being written by another person much later. The reasons for this are 1) chapters 9-14 contain some very specific prophecies regarding Alexander the Great and as a result many deny their authenticity on the grounds of their predilection against prophecy (the old post-date the prophecies school), and 2) the subject matter of the last six chapters are quite different than the first eight. The answers to these two points are as follows:

- 1). Those who have problems with prophecy also post-date every other significant prophetic work in the Bible. For example, they assert that Isaiah was written by three different authors (Isaiah I, chapters 1-39, Isaiah II, chapters 40-59, and Isaiah III, Isaiah 60-66), and that Daniel was written by a pious Jew in the times of the Maccabees (around 150 B.C. or 300+ years after it's supposed writing). To do this, however, one must approach the scriptures with the viewpoint that 1) God is not able to predict the future, 2) that it is absurd to believe that anyone can predict the future with the accuracy found in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, and 3) that the scriptures do not contain the word of God after all but are merely products of human intellect and wisdom. Anyone who holds to this view find's themselves in trouble at the start.
- 2). So what if the subject matter of the first part of Zechariah is different than the subject matter of the last part. Since both sections are written at different times and dealing with different subjects it is a most natural conclusion to reach that there would be significant differences.

The real bottom line in denying the unity and authorship of the Book of Zechariah is based on one's view of the inerrancy of the scripture.

A. The Purpose of the Prophecy

The purpose of the Book of Zechariah is to comfort Israel in the difficult post-exilic times. When this book was being written, the Jews were in the process of rebuilding the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. The Prophet Haggai spoke to Israel regarding the issue of rebuilding the temple and restoring worship in his small prophecy. From that prophecy we find that the Jews had indeed heard his plea and restarted the work on the temple.

Now that the work on the temple was proceeding, God sends eight visions to Zechariah to comfort Israel. We find these in Zechariah 1-6.

Basically, Zechariah is a prophecy of comfort and promise. Comfort in the sense that God is taking care of his chosen people. Promise in the sense that God pulls back the curtains of time and gives the Jews in that day, and ours, a glimpse of the glory and prominence of Israel in the Kingdom.

B. The Basic Structure of the Prophecy

Zechariah naturally divides itself up into three major sections. The first section comprises chapters one through six and concerns itself with a series of eight visions which depict the future glory of Israel and Jerusalem. The second section is found in chapters seven and eight and concerns itself with true worship as opposed to external ritual and routine. The last section, and most unique to scripture, is the section on the Second Coming of Christ to establish the Millennial Kingdom. This is found in chapters nine through fourteen.

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| Chapters 1-6  | Visions regarding future restoration and glory. |
| Chapters 7-8  | A comparison of true and false worship.         |
| Chapters 9-14 | The Second Coming and Millennial Glory.         |

II. A Call to Repentance - Zechariah 1:1-6

**1:1 In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, 1:2 The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers. 1:3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. 1:4 Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and [from] your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD. 1:5 Your fathers, where [are] they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? 1:6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.**

The prophecy of Zechariah starts with a call to repentance. This call was first given by Haggai two months earlier. From the repetition of this call, we can surmise that the repentance of Israel was not complete. Although work had begun again on the reconstruction of the temple, it seems that there was still only a half-hearted return to God.

The call to repentance centers around three major points.

1. Those who turn to God with their whole heart will find that God will turn to them.
2. Unrepentant sin is always judged.
3. God's promises will always come to pass.

A. Point number 1: True vs. Partial Repentance

It is a central point of scripture that God will reveal himself to those who seek him. Jeremiah echoed this concept most clearly in Jeremiah 29:13 where he said "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart".

It is also a central point of scripture that God will not reveal himself, and in some cases, will actually hide himself from those who do not seek him or have any inclination of seeking him. See Romans 1:18 following.

It is most noteworthy that this prophecy starts out with a call for true heart repentance. God can only forgive and bless when repentance is sought for by the whole heart. A half-hearted request for forgiveness is not heeded by God.

B. Point number 2: Unrepentant sin is always judged.

It is a common misconception by men that they can get away with sin since immediate retribution seems to be lacking. Unfortunately, someone has once said that "God's judgment may grind slow but it grinds fine". Man cannot sin and get away with it.

God, through Zechariah, reminds the people of Israel that all of the judgments he promised to their fathers came to pass exactly as he said they would. If we look

back at the Old Testament record, we find God warning Israel time and time again of impending judgment, but all to no avail.

In fact, Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was called into the ministry with the statement by God that no one would listen to his message. This was literally fulfilled as Jeremiah was witness to the destruction of the Judean monarchy by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B. C..

C. Point number 3: God's promises will always come to pass.

Throughout the prophetic ministry of many of the prophets, most notably Isaiah and Jeremiah, we find God promising judgment for the sin of Israel. In Zechariah 1:6, we find God reminding Israel that everything he said would happen, did.

We can take some comfort in the fact that God will always keep his promises. Unlike us, he can fulfill his promises regardless of the human instruments. In fact, it was exactly this point that caused the prophet Habakkuk so much trouble when he found out that God was going to use the ungodly Chaldeans to judge Israel.

Another interesting point to make at this time is "if God was true in regards to the promises of judgment, then he can be trusted in regards to the promises of blessing". In fact, it is probably this point that God wants to make in verse 6 of chapter 1. Since the theme of Zechariah is comfort, God wants Israel to know that just as his judgments came to pass as predicted, so his blessings will come to pass as well.

III. Vision 1: The Horses Among the Myrtle Trees - Zechariah 1:7-17

**1:7 Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which [is] the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, 1:8 I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that [were] in the bottom; and behind him [were there] red horses, speckled, and white. 1:9 Then said I, O my lord, what [are] these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these [be]. 1:10 And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These [are they] whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. 1:11 And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest. 1:12 Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? 1:13 And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me [with] good words [and] comfortable words. 1:14 So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. 1:15 And I am very sore displeased with the heathen [that are] at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. 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. 1:17 Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.**

This is the first vision of eight that Zechariah had on the same night.

We are given the time of these visions in Zechariah 1:7 as being the eleventh month of the second year of Darius. This would place their occurrence at three months after the call to repentance found in verses one through six.

Before we attempt to understand any of these visions, we need to observe the following two essential points:

1. Throughout the visions, Zechariah is speaking with an angel who interprets each of the visions to him. This angel is to be contrasted with any other angels mentioned in the verses. This reminds us somewhat of the visions of Daniel in which an angel was sent to help him understand the visions and to answer any questions he might have had.
2. The central theme of each of these visions is comfort. God wants Zechariah and all Israel to know that the captivity is over and he is once again dealing with the Jews.

In our treatment of each of these visions, we will look at each verse and explain the symbology. Once we have done that, we will look at the interpretation of the vision which should, if we have done our work correctly, be somewhat obvious.

#### **Zechariah 1:8**

Throughout the Bible horses speak of war. See Zechariah 9:10, Deuteronomy 32:13, and Revelation 19 for examples.

Red horses symbolized judgment and vengeance. This comes from the fact that judgment is often accompanied by bloodshed. See Isaiah 63:1 as an example.

Myrtle trees were an indigenous tree to Israel and was used to speak of Israel in Isaiah 41:19. It is a very beautiful tree with starlike flowers.

The "bottom" or "hollow", since it uses the definite article, must refer to a well-known place. Many scholars interpret this as referring to the Kidron valley in Jerusalem.

A white horse was a symbol of victory. Compare Revelation 19 in which Christ is pictured riding a white horse.

The riders on the horses refer to God's messengers, angels.

#### **Zechariah 1:10**

We are given the identity of the angels on the horses as being those whom God has sent to "walk to and fro" in the earth. The term "walk" is used in a military sense and carries the idea of reconnoitering.

#### **Zechariah 1:11**

The angels answer the angel of the Lord and give their report. We know the identity of the angel of the Lord as being a preincarnate appearance of Christ. Compare the following verses on this subject: Genesis 16:7 ff., Exodus 3:1 ff., Numbers 22:22 ff., Judges 6:11-12, Judges 13:1 ff., and Zechariah 3:1 ff..

The report of the angels is that "the earth is at rest". In this context, they are referring to the fact that there is no war or turmoil in the world at that time. We know this was true from secular history. The first few years of Darius' reign were peaceful.

However, the word "rest" can have a negative meaning. When it is used in this sense, it refers to a state where there is a lack of necessary activity. Refer to Jeremiah 48:11 and Ezekiel 16:49.

### **Zechariah 1:12**

This is a most interesting verse in that we see one person of the trinity, the angel of the Lord = Christ, talk to another person of the trinity, the Father. Those who can't find the trinity in the Old Testament don't look too closely.

The cry of the angel of the Lord is for the deliverance of Israel. This reminds us of the fact that Christ intercedes for us in the presence of the Father (see Hebrews 4:14-16 and 1 John 2:1-2).

Note also the duration of God's wrath. It was threescore and ten or seventy years. This is the exact amount of time predicted by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 25:11.

### **Zechariah 1:13**

This verse serves as a transition between the plea for Israel by the angel of the Lord and the answer of God. If we look at verses 13 through 17 closely we can see the Father's immediate reply to the angel of the Lord thus giving us a glimpse into the inter-trinitarian fellowship enjoyed by the members of the Godhead.

### **Zechariah 1:14-17**

In these four verses we find the answer to the cry given by the angel of the Lord in verse 12. The answer is as follows:

1. God is jealous for Zion with a godly jealousy. The use of the term "Zion" is best understood in its figurative sense as referring to the nation of Israel. That God was jealous for Israel is a recurrent theme in the Old Testament. See Psalms 78:58, Joel 2:18, and Zechariah 8:2.
2. Because of this jealousy, God was very displeased with the nations that are at ease. This is an example of where the term "ease" is used in its negative sense. Basically, God is angered because the heathen are indifferent to the needs of his people.
3. Not only is God angered because of the indifference of the heathen, but he is also angered because the nations went beyond their bounds in their treatment of Israel. God used the godless nations to punish Israel, but these nations treated Israel more harshly than God intended.
4. Because of these reasons, God has once again turned to Jerusalem with favor. His anger has been fully satisfied in regards to the sin of Israel although it has just been kindled against the nations that treated Israel harshly. Note the following specific promises:

- a. God has returned to Jerusalem with mercy.
- b. The temple will be rebuilt.
- c. A line will be stretched over Jerusalem. This refers to the rebuilding and enlargement of the city.
- d. The cities of Israel will spread abroad through prosperity.
- e. The Lord himself will comfort Zion.
- f. The Lord himself will choose Jerusalem for his special favor.

Thus we see that the message of this vision is comfort. The angel of the Lord that had been silent for over 200 years is speaking once again and is promising restoration. For a people in the midst of severe trials and pressures, this is a most comforting message.

#### IV. Vision 2: The Four Hammerers - Zechariah 1:18-21

**1:18 Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. 1:19 And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What [be] these? And he answered me, These [are] the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. 1:20 And the LORD showed me four carpenters. 1:21 Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These [are] the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up [their] horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.**

We are introduced to this vision by the statement "Then lifted I up mine eyes". No doubt Zechariah lowered his head in a moment of meditation regarding the wondrous vision he had just seen. In fact, he does this throughout the sequence of visions. See Zechariah 3:1, 4:1, 5:1, 5:5, and 6:1.

#### **Zechariah 1:18-19**

Zechariah is shown four horns. Throughout the Old Testament, a horn was a symbol of power. Probably the most known use of this term is in Daniel 7, 8, and 9 and is used there to refer to the world empires.

The fact that Zechariah saw four of these horns is indicative of the fact that there were four empires that scattered Israel, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

There is almost universal agreement among Bible expositors that the four horns can refer to nothing else but these four world empires. In fact, the ancient rabbis held to this view as well.

#### **Zechariah 1:20-21**

Next, Zechariah is shown four hammerers. The word translated "hammerer" is "charashim" and refers to a worker in any material, metal, stone, or otherwise. From the context in verse 21, it would probably be best to translate this word as "hammerer" since it is their job to break the "horns in pieces".

The purpose of these hammerers is given in verse 21 as being the destruction of these four horns.

A much debated question at this point is "Who are the hammerers". It is probably best not to seek a definitive answer since we can hardly be dogmatic about it. Some think the hammerers refer to the agents of destruction of the four empires, those agents being the succeeding empires. Others say that the hammerers refer to some special angels whose task was to destroy these empires.

Probably the best way to think of the hammerers is to see them as symbols of God's agents of purpose. God always has a means to accomplish his will. Just as four empires rise to scatter Israel, so God will overthrow each one of them until the "stone cut without hands" grows to a mountain and fills the earth.

The message, therefore, of this second vision is one of future deliverance. Although Gentile powers would rise that would scatter Israel, they would not ultimately prevail. At God's intended time, they would fall to his "hammerer".