

Introduction to Zechariah

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Background

Prophet's Name

The name זְכַרְיָהּ, Zechariah, is derived from the verb זָכַר, which means *to remember*. With the הֵי ending (*Yah*, short for *Yahweh*), the composite meaning of the name is *Yahweh remembers* or *Yahweh has remembered*. Archer suggests that he presumably received this name from his parents because, from their point of view, God remembered their prayers for a baby boy (*SOTI*, p. 423). At least 29 different men in the OT have this name.

Identification

Zechariah Himself

In 1:1 Zechariah is called the son of Berechiah who, in turn, was the son of Iddo. No doubt Iddo is the priest mentioned in Neh. 12:14,16 who returned with the first group under Zerubbabel (538 or 536). Thus, Zechariah was from the tribe of Levi and was probably born in Babylon shortly before the end of the captivity. He was still a "young man" (נָעַר) in 520 (2:4), perhaps about 20 years old. His father was Berechiah, but in view of Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, where Zechariah is called the son of Iddo, Berechiah probably died early in life. Jewish tradition holds that Zechariah was a member of the Great Synagogue, a body which supposedly gathered and preserved the sacred writings and traditions of the Jews after the exile. The reference in Matt. 23:35 is debated: some, like Archer, believe this "Zechariah" to be the post-exilic prophet rather than the Zechariah of 2 Chr. 24:20-21 (contrast the note in *New Scofield*, p. 1032). If this identification is true, then our prophet died a martyr's death at the hands of a mob on the Temple grounds--providential irony because it was through the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah that this Temple was rebuilt.

His Style

From a literary standpoint the book of Zechariah is mixed. Part of it contains highly symbolic visions, part of it apocalyptic descriptions, and part simple and direct language. As far as style is concerned, Zechariah is remarkably free of Aramaisms. It is written in good, pure Hebrew.

Date

1. The historical setting of Zechariah is the same as Haggai. Both prophets were raised up by God in 520 (Haggai preceding Zechariah by 2 months) to urge the people to complete the rebuilding of the Temple, a project abandoned for some 14 or 15 years after the foundation was laid and altar erected around 536 or 535. See the notes on Haggai for more details; cf. also Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Ezra 5:1; 6:14.
2. There are three dates given in the book itself: 1:1 (520), 1:7 (520, three months later), and 7:1 (518). These would place chapters 1-6 in 520 and chapters 7-8 in 518. Most likely chapters 9-14 are to be dated several decades later, perhaps after 480. This estimate is based on the mention of Greece in 9:13. Judah during Zechariah's lifetime was under the dominion of the Persian Empire. From 480-479 the Persians under Xerxes I (486-465) suffered defeats by the Greeks at the battles of Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale. These events would be sufficient to bring the Greeks to the attention of all peoples throughout the Persian Empire. It is against such a background that a prophecy of a defeat of Greek forces by Judah (fulfilled in Maccabean times, c. 165) would take on special significance (9:11-17).
3. Liberal higher criticism views chapters 9-14 as a separate composition by some unknown author. The *preexilic theory*, now largely discarded, argued that it was written perhaps even as far back as 734. The *post-Alexandrian theory*, the prevailing view today, considers composition to have occurred after the rise of Alexander the Great (336-323). For details see Archer, *SOTI*, pp. 425-30, and Ladd, "Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?" *JBL* 76(1957):192-200.

Basic Theme

As stated above, Zechariah was the partner prophet to the senior Haggai, both of whom were raised up for the rebuilding of the Temple from 520-516. However, the scope of Zechariah's prophecies extends far beyond that of Haggai's. These prophecies, both the vision

section (chapters 1-6) and the apocalyptic section (chapters 9-14) carry the reader from the then present time to the far distant future including the battle of Armageddon and the glories of the millennial reign of Christ. Archer summarizes as follows (*SOTI*, pp. 423-24): "The theme of his prophecy was: God is going to preserve His remnant from all the world powers which oppress them and threaten their extinction; these Gentile empires shall be destroyed, but Israel shall survive every ordeal to come, because she is the people of the Messiah. It is He who shall someday establish the kingdom and rule over all the earth after vanquishing all heathen opposition."

Outline With Interpretive Comments

I. Messages *during* the building of the Temple (1:1-8:23)

A. *First message*: a call for national repentance (1:1-6)

B. *Second message*: the eight night visions (1:7-6:15)

1. *The Horseman among the myrtles* (the Angel of Yahweh) (1:7-17)

This is a general vision which introduces the two themes of the remaining visions:

- Eventual blessing for Israel
- Eventual judgment for the nations

Visions 2, 3, and 4 are amplifications of statements occurring in this vision:

- 1:15 ----- 2nd vision (judgment)
- 1:16 ----- 3rd vision (physical blessing)
- 1:17 ----- 4th vision (spiritual blessing)

The Horseman among the myrtles is the *Angel of Yahweh* and is to be distinguished from the *interpreting angel*, both prominent figures in these visions.

Theme: The sovereign God stands ready to intervene in the falsely peaceful world scene in order to bring judgment on the Gentile nations and blessings on Israel.

2. *The four horns and the four craftsmen* (1:18-21)

Theme: Judgment on the four great Gentile empires of Dan. 2 and 7: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.

3. *The measuring line* (2:1-13)

Theme: Jerusalem measured out for (physical) blessing.

4. *Satan and Joshua* (3:1-10)

Theme: Israel is to be cleansed spiritually. Joshua stands here not personally but officially and representatively as high priest. This vision would encourage *Joshua* in his work and restore the people's confidence in the priesthood and its service.

5. *The golden lampstand* (4:1-14)

Theme: Israel's *ideal* position as the light of the world energized by the inexhaustible supply of the oil of the Holy Spirit. This vision would encourage *Zerubbabel* in his work of rebuilding the Temple.

6. *The flying scroll* (5:1-4)

Theme: Israel's *actual* position at that time: judgment to fall on Israel *individually* for sin.

7. *The ephah and the woman* (5:5-11)

Theme: Israel's *actual* position at that time: judgment to fall on Israel *nationally* for sin. Here ungodliness is consigned to and will culminate in a specific place for judgment.

8. *The four chariots* (6:1-15)

a. The vision (6:1-8)

Theme: Judgment is to fall on the Gentile nations.

b. Instructions for the symbolic crowning of Joshua (6:9-15)

The judgment on the nations is to culminate in the reign of Messiah, the priest-king.

C. *Third message:* the question of fasting and God's response (7:1-8:23)

1. The question about the exilic fasts raised (7:1-3)
2. The four-fold response of God (7:4-8:23)
 - a. Examine your motives! (7:4-7)
 - b. The lesson of history (7:8-14)
 - c. Exhortation to present labor in view of future (millennial) blessing (8:1-17)
 - d. Final answer concerning fasts (8:18-23)

II. Messages *after* the building of the Temple (9:1-14:21)

A. *First message*: the burden of Hadrach (9:1-11:17)

The general theme here is the 1st advent and rejection of Messiah.

1. The King announced (the Triumphal Entry) (9:1-10)
 - a. The campaign of Alexander the Great south into Palestine (Syria, Phoenicia, and Philistia) (9:1-8)
 - b. The entry of the Messiah contrasted with that of Alexander (9:9-10)
2. The preparations for the King (9:11-10:12)
 - a. The Maccabean victories (9:11-17)
 - b. The people encouraged to seek blessing from the Lord (10:1)
 - c. The lesson of history again repeated (10:2-3)
 - d. The Messiah to come from Judah (10:4)
 - e. Assurance that from this Messiah will flow complete regathering and ultimate victory of which the Maccabean triumph is but a foretaste (10:5-12)
3. The 1st advent and ministry of the King 11:1-17)

- a. The result of rejection announced in advance (11:1-3)
- b. In a vision, Zechariah representing the Messiah, is commissioned to symbolically enact his earthly ministry--the *Good Shepherd* (11:4-14)
- c. Israel has rejected its Messiah but will accept an imposter--the *foolish shepherd* (Antichrist) (11:15-17)

B. *Second message: the burden of Israel* (12:1-14:21)

The general theme here is the 2nd advent and reign of Messiah.

- 1. Prelude to Armageddon: the nations gather to attack regathered Israel; the Israelis are strengthened by the Lord (12:1-9)
- 2. The pierced Messiah (12:10-13:7)
 - a. Israel's spiritual conversion at the 2nd advent (12:10)
 - b. The results of this conversion (12:11-13:5)
 - c. The historical results of piercing the Messiah (13:6-7)
- 3. The results of Armageddon (13:8-9)
- 4. Further details of Armageddon and the 2nd advent: the order of events (14:1-21)
 - a. Jerusalem besieged and captured (14:1-2)
 - b. The 2nd advent of Messiah (14:3-8)
 - c. The earthly reign of Messiah (14:9-21)
 - (1) Kingdom blessings for Israel (14:9-11)
 - (2) The bitter end for the armies of the nations which came down against Israel (14:12-15)
 - (3) Perpetual, worldwide celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (14:16-19)
 - (4) Universal holiness throughout the world and the complete sanctification of the people of God (14:20-21)

Important Passages and Problems

A. It should be carefully noted that all 12 tribes are represented by the exiles who returned under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah: see Ezra 6:17 and 8:35. Zechariah fully confirms this view: 8:13; 9:1,13; 11:14. There is no such phenomenon as the "lost 10 tribes of Israel."

B. The Angel of Yahweh is an important Character in the OT (see Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-12; Exod. 3:2-6; Judg. 6:11-24; 13:1-23; *et al.*). He appears several times in Zechariah: 1:11; 2:8-11; 3:1-2; 12:8. From the passages in Genesis through Judges, this Angel is clearly deity; he is called God and Yahweh both there and in Zechariah. Also in Zechariah we have Yahweh sending Yahweh (2:8-11) and Yahweh calling upon Yahweh to rebuke Satan (3:2). These phenomena are impossible to explain apart from a plurality of persons within Yahweh. Since it is the Son who reveals the Father (John 1:18), we conclude that the Angel of Yahweh, who is himself Yahweh, is none other than the preincarnate Christ, periodically taking on human appearance.

C. The four fasts of 8:19 have their historical background in the fall of Jerusalem in 2 Kgs. 25.

1. *4th month*: Nebuchadnezzar takes Jerusalem (586).
2. *5th month*: the Temple is burned (586).
3. *7th month*: the assassination of Gedaliah (586).
4. *10th month*: the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem (588).

According to Jewish tradition, those fasts were kept during the intertestamental period when the nation was in trouble and suspended in times of peace and prosperity. Since 70 A.D. they have been kept continually.

D. The citation of Zech. 11:13 in Matt. 27:9 presents a very difficult problem. Unger lists no fewer than 9 explanations (*Zechariah*, pp. 200-1). The most important are these:

1. Some ancient Syriac and Coptic translations of the NT omit the name of the prophet (syr^{s,p,pal}, cop^{bo^{ms}}). In addition, no other NT citations of Zechariah mentions the prophet by name (see, e.g., Matt. 21:4-5; 26:31; John 12:14; 19:37). According to this theory, the name Jeremiah in Matt. 27:9 was a scribal addition to the NT text.

This would be an ideal solution were it not for the fact that *Jeremiah* has overwhelming textual support (Ⲛ, A, B, C, L, W, X, Γ, Δ, Θ, Π, most minuscules, most Old Latin texts, Vulgate, etc.).

2. According to another theory, the citation by Matthew is from an apocryphal work, no longer extant, attributed in his time to Jeremiah. That such a book existed is certain: Jerome rejected its canonicity and portions still exist in Coptic and in a Sahidic Lectionary. But to claim it contained this quotation is gratuitous.

3. In addition to Zech. 11:13, Matthew, according to a third theory, was also influenced by Jer. 32:6-9 (cf. also 18:2; 19:2, 11). He thus attributed the entire quote to Jeremiah, the larger work. A precedent is found in Mark 1:1-2. However, it is debatable whether the texts in Jeremiah are really relevant to the Matthean context. Archer prefers this view as well as Freeman and Laetsch.

4. A fourth theory holds that Matthew actually cites Zechariah but labels the citation from Jeremiah because Jeremiah was found at the beginning of the prophetic scroll which also contained Zechariah's book. Jeremiah is not at the head of the prophetic works in our present day Masoretic text, but there is manuscript and Talmudic evidence that Jeremiah at one time did occupy this position. The difficulty with this view is that there is no precedent for this manner of citation. The closest parallel would be Luke 24:44 where the entire third section of the Hebrew canon is called "Psalms." Feinberg opts for this explanation.

5. There are several excellent commentaries on Zechariah.

Baron, David. *Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*. Reprinted in Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972.

Feinberg, Charles Lee. *God Remembers*. Wheaton, Ill.: Van Kampen, 1950. (An abbreviated version of this out-of-print book is found in *The Minor Prophets*, also by Feinberg.)

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