

BIBLE SURVEY

Zechariah

"...Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts." Zechariah 4:6

Who was Zechariah?

Zechariah was a young priest who was also a prophet. He was the son of Berachiah, the son of Iddo. Zechariah was the grandson of Iddo, who had returned to Jerusalem from Exile sixteen years previously (Nehemiah 12:4-16). Zechariah was a contemporary with the prophet Haggai. When Haggai had been preaching for two months, and the work on rebuilding the Temple had already started, Zechariah began his ministry.

Historic Background

Judah had been conquered. Jerusalem burned. The Temple demolished. The people led away into captivity to Babylon (2 Kings 24-25). In 538BC, Cyrus, the king of Persia, freed the captives from Judah to return to their land and resettle in the land surrounding Jerusalem, to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1-4 and 3:1-4:5). After seventy years of Babylonian captivity, about 50,000 exiles were permitted by king Cyrus to return to their land to rebuild the Temple. After Cyrus, king Darius ascended the throne of Persia. However, despite his kindly disposition toward the people in Judah, the work on the Temple ceased. Opposition, indifference and apathy caused the work of rebuilding the Temple to be abandoned (Ezra 4:24). Sixteen years later (Ezra 5:1-2), Haggai, and later Zechariah, were commissioned by the Lord to command the people to rebuild the Temple. As a result the Temple was completed four years later, in 516BC (Ezra 6:15).

The Message of Zechariah

Zechariah is a messianic, apocalyptic message of restoration and glory. Zechariah means *'the Lord remembers'*. Written primarily to the remnant who had returned from Exile in Babylon, Zechariah gives hope to God's people during a time of great difficulty, inspiring spiritual Revival by turning people's hearts, in repentance from their sin, to seeking the Lord. *"...Thus says the Lord of Hosts: 'Return to Me,' says the Lord of Hosts, and I will return to you"* Zechariah 1:3

"Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds. But they did not hear nor heed Me,' says the Lord." Zechariah 1:4

Zechariah asks: *"Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? Yes, surely My Words and My statutes which I commanded My servants, the prophets, did it not overtake your fathers?"* Zechariah 1:5-6. Zechariah uses visions, prophecies, signs, descriptions of angels and direct words from God to deal with repentance, salvation and holy living, giving practical guidelines for daily living.

Comparing Haggai and Zechariah

Haggai is one of the easiest of the minor prophets to understand, Zechariah one of the hardest. Zechariah is longer than the book of Haggai. While Haggai dealt primarily with the present and immediate problems, Zechariah looked far into the future. While the book of Haggai covers only a period of a few months, Zechariah was written over a number of years and spans centuries in its vision of the future. Much of Zechariah is presented in the form of poetry and apocalyptic visual images, symbols and word pictures. Much of the book of Zechariah resembles the second half of Daniel and some parts of Ezekiel. Much of Zechariah is quoted and alluded to in the book of Revelation. The message of Haggai was straight forward: The people must finish building the Temple and God will bless them. However, Zechariah's message is more complex.

The Rulers of Israel

During the 2000 years from Abraham to Jesus, for their first 500 years (from 2000 to 1500BC), the children of Israel were led by **patriarchs** (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph). During the next 500 years (1500 to 1000BC) they were led by **prophets** (Moses to Samuel). From 1000 to 500BC they were led by **princes** (or kings, such as Saul, David, Solomon...). From 500BC to the time of Christ **priests** (like Ezra) led the people of Israel. However, every kind of leadership failed. Our Lord Jesus Christ combined all these offices in His one Person. He is our Patriarch, Prophet, Priest and King.

Rebuke and Rebellion

The prophets who served after the time of the Exile had far greater success than the prophets before the Exile. After the Exile the people actually listened to the prophets and did what they told them! Zechariah reminds the people of the test of a true prophet: If what he has told you is going to happen does not happen then you know that he is a false prophet. Prophets should be tested. If their predictions do not come true then they must be rebuked for misleading God's people and misusing God's Name. We need discernment. Test all things. Be like the Bereans – study the Word of God daily to see if these things are true.

Satan is the Accuser of the Brethren

Zechariah speaks of satan standing at the right hand of the high priest Joshua to oppose him (Zechariah 3:1). When God works, we can expect the devil to try to undermine and oppose it. Just as satan appeared in Genesis 3, in the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve. And in the time of Job to torment him and tempt him to forsake God. As the devil prompted Pharaoh to order the killing of every male Hebrew in Egypt to prevent the rising up of a Deliverer. And as king Herod would seek to kill male babies born in Bethlehem to murder the Messiah in the manger. So here we see satan opposing the high priest, Joshua. Satan (in Hebrew), or *diabolos* in Greek, means accuser. Joshua is described as a branch plucked from the fire. Saved from destruction. However, although he was clothed with filthy garments, the Lord rebuked satan and ordered Joshua's filthy garments to be removed from him.

*"Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, 'Take away the filthy garments from him.' And to him He said, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.'" Zechariah 3:4. "Then the Angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of Hosts: **'If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My commands, then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here.'**" Zechariah 3:6-7. By God's grace, Joshua, in spite of his sin, and the sins of his people, was made clean in God's sight. And God promised that what He had done for this one man, He would one day do for the entire nation. "... For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the Branch. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua... Behold, I will engrave its inscription, says the Lord of Hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." Zechariah 3:8-9. The engraved inscription on stone symbolises permanence.*

Discipline and Blessing

The vision of four horsemen pictures the messengers of God. God was angry with His people for seventy years. "... for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of Heaven." Zechariah 2:6. Now God is angry with the nations who treated them so disgracefully. Zechariah's vision of the four craftsmen dehorning speaks of aggressors being disarmed. The man with the measuring line depicts dramatic future expansion of Jerusalem where the city will expand beyond its walls and its area is going to be too small for all the people who would come and live there.

High Priest Crowned

The two olive trees described by Zechariah stand for Zerubbabel the governor (prince) and Joshua the high priest. There was to be a dual leadership over the land. For the first time a high priest is crowned. Never before in the history of Israel had a king and a priest been united in one person.

This symbolised the coming of the Messiah who would not be from the line of Aaron, or Eli, but from the line of Melchizedek, both priest and king.

Those Who Persecute God's People Will Be Dealt With By God

Those who attack God's people will have to face the consequences from God. *"For I," says the Lord, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the Glory in her midst.'" Zechariah 2:5. "... for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye."* Zechariah 2:8

The Anointed Messiah

Zechariah proclaims a vision of a seven branched golden Lampstand in the Temple and a golden bowl filled with oil, replenishing the oil in the lamp. *"This is the Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: '**Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,**' says the Lord of Hosts."* Zechariah 4:6. Messiah means God's Anointed One (*Christ* in Greek). The inexhaustible reservoir of God's Holy Spirit will pour through Christ, blessing the nations.

Let the Earth Hear His Voice

"Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of Hosts has sent Me to you." Zechariah 2:11
And the Messiah will *"bring forth the capstone with shouts of '**Grace! Grace to it!**'"* Zechariah 4:7

*"Then speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of Hosts, saying: **Behold, the Man whose Name is The Branch!** From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the Temple of the Lord; Yes, He shall build the Temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His Throne; So He shall be a Priest on His Throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both... Even those from afar shall come and build the Temple of the Lord. Then you shall know that the Lord of Hosts has sent Me to you. **And this shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God.**'"* Zechariah 6:12-15

"For who has despised the day of small things?... " Zechariah 4:10. Great things can begin very small. Be faithful in small matters. God sees. God cares. Do all things to the glory of God.

The Flying Scroll

*"Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll. And he said to me, 'What do you see?' So I answered, 'I see a flying scroll'... Then he said to me, 'This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: '**Every thief shall be expelled...Every perjurer shall be expelled... I will send out the curse,**' says the Lord of Hosts; It shall enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My Name... and consume it, with its timber and stones."* Zechariah 5:1-4

The Blessings of Obedience and the Curses of Disobedience

There are blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Everything has consequences. As laid out in the giving of the Law (Deuteronomy 28) there are great blessings on obedience to the Word of God and tremendous curses upon those who violate the Law of God. God will curse whoever has been stealing or telling lies. Every promise has conditions and comes in a context. Great blessings are promised *"if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God."*

Fasting and Feasting

People asked the prophet how much longer they were supposed to be observing the two fast days and four feast days in their calendar. *"Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, **did you really fast for Me - for Me?** When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? **Should you not have obeyed the Words which the Lord proclaimed** through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?' Then the Word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, 'Thus*

says the Lord of Hosts: **'Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion, everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.'**" Zechariah 7:5-10

True Fasting is Abstaining From Sin

Here Zechariah speaks in similar words to Isaiah 58. Their fasting was actually a self-centred, empty religious ritual. What God wants us to do is **fast from dishonesty and cruelty**. God wanted them to be generous and kind, to help the helpless and to care for the needy. To execute true justice, showing mercy and compassion. The fast that God really wants does not involve doing without food as much as doing without **sin**. However, most people would prefer to do without food rather than to forsake their sin! It was precisely for these reasons that Jerusalem had been destroyed, the Temple demolished and the people exiled to Babylon for seventy years. Their selfishness and greed had condemned them. *"Then the Word of the Lord of Hosts came to me, saying, Thus says the Lord of Hosts: 'The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be **joy and gladness and cheerful feasts** for the house of Judah. Therefore **love truth and peace.**'"* Zechariah 8:18-19

Holy Days Must Focus On God

What God wants is not holidays, but holy days. Zechariah rebukes the people that their feasts are actually self-centred. Just concerned with food, fellowship and fun. Their focus was not on God, His Word, His Will, His worship and His work. Zechariah makes clear that it was because the people of Judah had refused to listen to the Word of God and made their hearts like flint that the wrath of God had fallen upon them and they had been scattered among the nations and their land made desolate (Zechariah 7:11-14).

Truth and Justice

The prophet commands **"... Speak each man the truth to his neighbour; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace. Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbour; and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate," Says the Lord.**" Zechariah 8:16-17

Jesus in Zechariah

Jesus is **God's Servant, The Branch** (3:8); **The Good Shepherd** (9:16; 11:11); **the smitten Shepherd** (13:7).

The Messiah would enter Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, a colt, a foal of a donkey: **"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."** Zechariah 9:9

Christ would be **betrayed** for 30 pieces of silver. *"... Thus the poor of the flock, who were watching me, knew that it was the Word of the Lord. Then I said to them, 'If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages;... So they weighed out for my wages **thirty pieces of silver**. And the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter' – that princely price they set on Me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the House of the Lord for the potter."* Zachariah 11:11-13. Matthew 27:9-10 quotes from Zechariah 11:13 to apply this prophesy of the betrayal of Christ for thirty pieces of silver to Judas Iscariot.

The Messiah's hands would be **pierced** (12:10). The Messiah would be **wounded** in the house of my friends (13:6).

The Messiah shall **"speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."** Zechariah 9:10

The Messiah shall be *"a fountain shall be opened from the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. It shall be in that day, says the Lord of Hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirits to depart from the land."* Zechariah 13:1-2

The Cross and the Crown

In order to understand the visions of Zechariah one needs to read them in the light of both the Cross and the Crown. Zechariah speaks of The Good Shepherd, the suffering Shepherd. *"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion," says the Lord of Hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered..."* Zechariah 13:7

"And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be – the Lord is One, and His Name One." Zechariah 14:9

"And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem..." Zechariah 14:8

"In that day 'Holiness To the Lord' shall be engraved on the bells of the horses..." Zechariah 14:20

"... Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You." Zechariah 14:5

Reject False Prophets and Worthless Shepherds

False prophets are condemned: *"It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, 'You shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the Name of the Lord.' And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies. And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies..."* Zechariah 13:3-4

The prophet Zechariah speaks of a time of **"confusion... madness...blindness"** (Zechariah 12:4).

"Woe to the worthless shepherd, who leaves the flock..." Zechariah 11:17

The Delusion of Idols

The vanity of idols is condemned: ***"For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; They are in trouble because there is no shepherd. My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goatherds. For the Lord of Hosts will visit His flock..."*** Zechariah 10:2-3

Nations Shall Be Judged

Zechariah prophesies judgement upon the nations. *"He shall pass through the sea with affliction, and strike the waves of the sea: All the depths of the river shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart."* Zechariah 10:11. Zechariah speaks of **"the burden of the Word of the Lord against the nations"**, against Tyre and Sidon, Ashkelon, Gaza, Akron, *"a mixed race shall settle in Ashdod and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. I will take away the blood from his mouth and the abominations from between his teeth."* Zechariah 9:6-7

"Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord." Zechariah 8:22

Visions in Zechariah

The **horns** represent military power and the **blacksmiths** and the **craftsmen**, those who will disarm the enemies of God.

The **measuring line** speaks of the coming expansion, prosperity and abundance that God will bless His people with.

The **filthy garments** of the high priest symbolise the total depravity of man. The removal of these filthy garments and replacement with clean garments represents God's grace in removing our sins and cleansing us.

The **golden candle sticks** symbolise the Messiah, the Light of the world.

The **golden bowl** the reservoir of the oil of the Holy Spirit.

The **flying scroll** represents the Word of God which brings curses upon the disobedient.

The **ephah born on divine wings** removes wickedness from the land.

The **four chariots** represents God's angels administering righteousness throughout the earth and restraining evil.

Dismissing the Three Worthless Shepherds

In Zechariah 11:8 The Good Shepherd is described as dismissing the three worthless shepherds in one month. *"I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred Me. Then I said, 'I will not feed you. Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish. Let those that are left eat each other's flesh.'* And I took my staff, *Beauty*, and cut it in two, that I might break the Covenant which I had made with all the peoples. So it was broken on that day. Thus the poor of the flock, who were watching Me, knew that it was the Word of the Lord." Zechariah 11:8-11

Jesus, the Messiah, is the Good Shepherd who, in His earthly ministry confronted the hypocrisy of the religious leaders: the priests, elders and scribes of Judea, disowning them with scathing denunciations. The destruction of the nation in AD70 heralded the end of the rule of the prophets, priests and kings of Judea. Henceforth **Christ alone is our Prophet, Priest and King.**

Christ Will Rule the Nations

Our Lord Jesus Christ is **The Good Shepherd** who was struck and wounded for the sins of His people. He has become the Fountain to bring cleansing from sin. The Lord will be **King** over the whole earth. In that day the Lord will be the only Name and all nations shall come to Christ.

Judgement on Jerusalem

"The burden of the Word of the Lord against Israel. Thus says the Lord, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him: 'Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.'" Zechariah 12:1-3

Saved To Serve

*"And it shall come to pass that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. **Do not fear, let your hands be strong.**" Zechariah 8:13*

We are saved to serve. We are blessed in order to be a blessing.

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