

Lesson 2

What does the book of Zechariah say about Jesus?

Zechariah is a difficult book, but difficult or not, there is a very important reason why Zechariah should never be neglected. Zechariah is second only to Isaiah in the number of Messianic prophecies it contains.

It is wonderful to think about the returned exiles listening to Zechariah in 520 BC. They were focused on their current situation and the need to rebuild their earthly temple - and Zechariah was preaching Christ to them! It makes me think of Matthew 12:6 - "But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple."

Here are some of the key prophecies about Jesus in this short book, and, as I read them, think about the people who first heard them - who they were, where they were, and what they were doing. God lifted the spiritual curtain so that they could have a glimpse of the perfect priest-king who was to come - including glimpses of both his eternal glory and his perfect sacrificial death.

Pretend you are hearing them for the first time and that you know nothing about the New Testament because the New Testament has not been written yet. Pretend you are living in a ruined city and standing before a demolished temple, and you are asking, why bother? Why bother to rebuild it? Why bother to be faithful to God? And then you hear this:

Zechariah 3:8 - For, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.

Zechariah 6:12-13 - And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Zechariah 9:9 - Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Zechariah 11:12-13 - And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not,

forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.

Zechariah 12:10 - And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

Zechariah 13:7 - Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Zechariah 14:8 - And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.

Zechariah proclaimed Christ to God's people 520 years before Christ came into this world - and some of the descendants of Zechariah's listeners were ready and waiting when that great day came.

Luke 2:25 - And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Why were there faithful Jews in the first century? Why were they in Jerusalem? Why was there a temple in Jerusalem? Because of the faithfulness of the people we are now studying about. Because they understood their place and their importance in the plan of God. And how did they know that? Because of God's prophets, such as Haggai and Zechariah - as well as because of Ezra, Nehemiah, and many others.

What they were doing was vital to the plan of God. Isaiah had already prophesied that the word would go out first from Jerusalem. Daniel had already prophesied that the temple would again be destroyed. For those prophecies to be fulfilled, faithful Jews had to be living in Jerusalem, and that temple had to be rebuilt.

Their place in the plan of God was vital - and yet the reason why it was vital would not be evident until long after their death. Our place in the plan of God today is to plant the seed - and perhaps we, like them, will not live to see the outcome of that planting. But that should not make us discouraged.

Only God can look down through time and see what he is preparing for tomorrow using our faithfulness today.

The Coming King!

I want to say a few more introductory words about two of the prophecies we just read. (We will have much more to say about them when we get to them later in our studies.)

Zechariah 6:13 - Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, **and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne:** and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Zechariah 9:9 - Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: **behold, thy King cometh unto thee:** he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Do you see a theme there? They both speak of a great king who was to come. Why was that so important? And particularly, why was that so important in Zechariah's day?

The first king of the southern half of the divided kingdom was Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. If you start with him in 1 Kings 14 and start counting, you will eventually end up 20 kings later with Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, in 2 Kings 24. In the next chapter, Zedekiah was blinded and carried off to Babylon.

And with that, the kings of Judah seemingly came to an end. The royal line continued, but the line of kings did not. Why did that happen? A verse in 1 Kings answers that question. In this verse, King David is talking to his son, Solomon:

1 Kings 2:4 - that the LORD may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

In Zechariah's day, the people definitely lacked a man on the throne of Israel, which tells us what we already know - the previous kings had not walked before God in faithfulness.

But we also need to look at another important verse from Psalm 89:

Psalm 89:34-36 - I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

That promise was unconditional. In fact, in the previous verses of Psalm 89, God said that he would do this thing even if the people were faithless. How do we reconcile that with 1 Kings 2:4?

The answer is simple. If the people were faithless they would lack a king over Israel, but that lack would not last forever. At some point, God would restore the king to Israel, and of course that happened when Jesus sat on the throne of David.

Luke 1:32-33 - He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Now putting all of that together, it explains why these prophecies of a coming king would have meant so much to the people of Zechariah's day.

And that also explains something else - a puzzling verse in Acts 1.

Acts 1:6 - So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Why is that verse puzzling? Well, it is puzzling because of how we often explain it. We often say that the apostles were apparently still expecting an earthly physical kingdom, and so once again Jesus had to correct their misunderstanding. But a closer look at that verse, I think, shows that neither of those conclusions is correct.

First, Acts 1:6 says nothing about an earthly or physical kingdom, and second, Jesus never tells them they have a misunderstanding, only that they should leave the timing to God.

And there is another problem with what I will call the usual explanation - it seems to ignore what had happened to the apostles between the resurrection and the ascension here in Acts 1. Look first at the third verse of Acts 1.

Acts 1:3 - He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to

them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

The apostles asked their question in verse 6 after listening to Jesus speak about the kingdom for 40 days! I don't know about you, but that makes me think that they may have known exactly what they were asking in verse 6!

If they asked really about a physical kingdom in Acts 1:6 after 40 days of teaching about the kingdom, I think Jesus might have asked them in verse 7 if they had been listening to a single word he said! But he did not ask them that.

And also consider some things we learn in Luke.

Luke 24:27 - And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:45 - Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

I think we should very seriously consider the possibility that the apostles were *not* mistaken in any way with their question in Acts 1:6. That they were, in fact, asking about something Jesus had taught them, and they just wanted to know *when* it would happen.

If that is correct, then what does their question in Acts 1:6 mean? "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Don't we know the answer to that now? Didn't Jesus, in fact, restore the kingdom to Israel when he sat down on the throne of King David and became the first person to do that since King Zedekiah? And isn't that exactly what Peter said happened in Acts 2?

Acts 2:30-31 - Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

And remember the prophecy of Amos:

Amos 9:11 - In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.

And we also see that same prophecy later in the book of Acts.

Acts 15:15-17 - And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will **build again** the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will **build again** the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

We don't know what the apostles were thinking of in Acts 1, and who knows? Maybe they still did not understand the first thing about the kingdom even after having had their minds opened and having studied the kingdom with Jesus for 40 days. That is, maybe the usual explanation is the correct explanation, but I lean in the other direction on that issue. I think if we can interpret the apostles' question in Acts 1:6 so that it makes sense, we should do so, and I think we can.

How is the book of Zechariah related to the book of Revelation?

The book of Revelation quotes or alludes to Zechariah about thirty times, making Zechariah second only to Ezekiel in that regard.

For example, in Zechariah 1:8 we will read:

"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."

In Revelation 6 we will see what are often called the four horses of the apocalypse: the white horse in verse 2 of Revelation 6, the red horse in verse 4, the black horse in verse 5, and the pale horse in verse 8 on whom sat Death. So if the symbols are the same (multi-colored horses in this example), then Zechariah and Revelation must be pointing to the same things - right? Wrong!

Remember Rule 3 - similarity of speech does not imply identity of subjects. Just because we unravel a symbol in Zechariah does not mean we don't have to unravel the same symbol in Revelation. How the symbol was used in Zechariah (or elsewhere in the Old Testament) may certainly be helpful to us when we meet that same symbol in Revelation, but it is never dispositive. We will still have much work left to do.

One way in which Revelation and Zechariah are alike is that the initial readers of each were in great need of comfort and encouragement. The historical situation of God's people was different in

Zechariah and Revelation, but the needs of God's people were very similar. That is why we today, in a very different historical situation from both Zechariah and Revelation, can ourselves find comfort and encouragement from both of those books.

We will also see some other similarities between Zechariah and Revelation. Each book was written at a time of great dynastic change and uncertainty. With Zechariah, the dynastic family of Cyrus had just been replaced by the dynastic family of Darius. With Revelation, the dynasty of the Julio-Claudians (which ended with Nero) had just been replaced by the dynasty of the Flavians (which began with Vespasian).

Each book is an answer to the same question - how long?

Zechariah 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?

Revelation 6:10 - And they cried with a loud voice, saying, **How long**, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

Each book involves a judgment that was not immediately apparent. Isaiah had made a prophecy about Babylon long before the time of Zechariah, and yet that prophecy did not seem to have occurred yet, at least not literally.

Isaiah 13:19-20 - And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

Likewise, Revelation describes the judgment of the Roman empire - and yet the city of Rome did not fall until AD 476, and the Eastern Roman empire continued on for another 1000 years. How do we explain that? Stay tuned! We will spend a great deal of time looking at that question later.

Another similarity is that both Revelation and Zechariah show the people of God at a time when, in a sense, they were the most vulnerable. In Revelation, the church in its infancy was being persecuted by the mighty Roman empire. Who would ever have believed that the church would come out on top in that battle? And in Zechariah, the people of God are a ragtag remnant huddled together in their ruined city while the mighty powers of the earth are in motion all around them. Again, who would

have placed their money on the people of God in that situation? If those two books teach us anything, it is this - you should never bet against God!

Is Zechariah one book or many books?

Before we launch into Chapter 1, I want to consider one more introductory question: Is Zechariah one book or many books?

Since at least the seventeenth century, some commentators have argued that Zechariah is really two books - one book consisting of Chapters 1-8 and a second book consisting of Chapters 9-14. Some commentators create a third book by splitting Chapters 9-14 into two books, Chapters 9-11 and 12-14.

Some point to Matthew 27:9-10 in which Jesus attributes to Jeremiah some language that is similar to Zechariah 11:12-13, and they say that the second half of Zechariah was really written by Jeremiah. (We can't rule that out entirely, but it is certainly not necessary to explain Matthew 27 as we will see later.)

Zechariah 9:13 seems to anticipate a conflict between Israel and Greece, which leads some (at least some who don't believe in predictive prophecy) to conclude that Chapter 9 was written later than either the time of Jeremiah or Zechariah.

Others point to the mention of Ephraim (the northern tribes), Assyria, and Egypt to argue that the second half of Zechariah was not written later but instead was written earlier, prior to the exile.

Why do so many argue for multiple books? They do so because of the numerous differences between the first and second halves of Zechariah.

The handout shows a brief outline of what we are about to study in the book of Zechariah:

- A call to repentance (1:1-6)
- Vision #1: The Rider Under the Myrtles (1:7-17)
- Vision #2: The Four Horns (1:18-21)

- Vision #3: The Measuring Line (2:1-13)
- Vision #4: Joshua (3:1-10)
- Vision #5: The Lampstand (4:1-14)
- Vision #6: The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)
- Vision #7: The Ephah (5:5-11)
- Vision #8: The Four Chariots and the Crowning of Joshua (6:1-8)
- The Crowning of Joshu (6:9-15)
- A question about fasting (7)
- Future blessings for Jerusalem (8)
- A burden on Hadrach (9-11)
- A burden on Israel (12-14)

There is no denying that a significant change in tone and structure occurs between Chapter 8 and Chapter 9.

- Chapters 1-8 contain prophetic visions, while Chapters 9-14 contain two poetic oracles.
- Vocabulary and syntax that we find in Chapters 1-8 are not found in Chapters 9-14.
- We frequently see personal names and dates in Chapters 1-8, but we do not in Chapters 9-14.

But none of that requires us to split the book into pieces or requires us to date the second half of the book differently than the first half.

For example, Isaiah and Hosea both refer to Assyria and Egypt as images for enemies of God's people even though they had ceased to be much of a threat by the sixth century. (Revelation does the same thing with both Babylon and Jerusalem, even though both Babylon and Jerusalem had ceased to

be a persecutor by the time Revelation was written.)

But what about the reference to the Greeks in Chapter 9? First, Zechariah is a prophet, so we should not be shocked when a prophet describes something that had not yet occurred. That's what prophets do. Second, Greek traders and mercenaries had been active in the area for centuries prior to the time of Zechariah. (We see some Greek words in the book of Daniel.) The role of Greece was growing, and it did not take a prophet to see that they would soon be a serious threat to God's people.

What about all of the linguistic differences? The first and second halves of the book have different purposes and were written at different times. That alone could explain any differences in syntax. But we can go further than just explaining the differences - we can point out that there are numerous similarities and dependencies between Chapters 1-8 and 9-14.

- Both discuss the salvation of Jerusalem.
- Both discuss the return of the exiles
- Both discuss a cleansing from sin.
- Both discuss the salvation of the nations.
- Both refer to a promise of fertility.
- Both discuss a renewal of the covenant.
- Both discuss the outpouring of God's spirit.
- Both describe the coming of a triumphant Messiah.
- They have numerous themes in common.
- They also have words and phrases in common, including one word in 7:14 and 9:8 that appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Old Testament.

In my opinion, the book of Zechariah is one book, and Zechariah is the one author of every word in that one inspired book.

Chapter 1

Zechariah 1:1-2

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, 2 The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers.

What is our time frame? The word of the Lord came to Zechariah in "the second year of Darius." Darius the Great began to reign in 522 BC, which means that this word from God to Zechariah came in the year 520 BC.

Who were Berechiah and Iddo? We discussed them earlier. They were Zechariah's father and grandfather. Why are they listed here by name?

One reason is that it was important to establish Zechariah's prophetic and priestly credentials. Iddo, it seems, was a very well known priest. It is not clear whether the phrase "the prophet" in verse 1 refers to Zechariah or to Iddo. If it refers to Iddo, then Iddo was both prophet and priest.

Another possible reason their names are listed here may be because those names give us the theme of the entire book!

- Zechariah's name means "God Remembers."
- The name of his father, Berechiah, means "God Blesses."
- His grandfather's name, Iddo, means "in time."

Put them together and we have the theme of Zechariah: *God remembers and blesses his people at his set time.* And Zechariah will tell these people about God's greatest blessings, which would not come until about 520 years later.

Why is God "sore displeased" in verse 2? The people had returned from their exile with permission by the decree of Cyrus. They had almost immediately begun to rebuild the temple. But their neighbors had caused all sorts of problems for them, including sending false reports back to the Persians.

Even in the face of this opposition, the rebuilding project had continued - but by this time it seems that the rebuilding project had instead become projects directed at building large houses for themselves (Haggai 1:4). The work on God's house had come to a complete halt.

The people had returned to a land that was in ruins because of their disobedience - and the land remained in ruins. In fact, they could see that ruin all around them, and it should have reminded them of why that ruin had occurred in the first place. The ruin should have been a warning - but they seemed to have missed it.

Haggai was the first prophet to encourage the people to restart their work on the temple. His message came in the sixth month of 520 BC - two months before this word came to Zechariah. Both Zechariah and Haggai had the same message for the people - rebuild the temple! But the Holy Spirit caused the two prophets to convey that message in very different ways.

Zechariah 1:3-6

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. 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. 5 Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? 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.

Verses 3-6 are a call to repentance. In verse 3, God says "turn ye unto me." The Hebrew simply means "return." Yes, they were being called upon to repent, but the first step to repent is to return.

One phrase is repeated three times in verse 3, which immediately tells us that it is a very important phrase - "saith the LORD of hosts." This word from the prophet is not the prophet's own word. We know that from 2 Peter 1:20-21, but we also know that from verse 3 right here.

This word is from the Lord of hosts! It is a word from God - from the eternal, universal king who has the heavenly army at his beck and call. Yes, they were a small seemingly insignificant group in a small backwater town - surely just a footnote, if even that, to the great historical events that were occurring all around them - but things were not what they seemed.

This little group had the attention of the Lord of hosts! Of all the people in the world, it was to this group that God sent his word by the mouths of Haggai and Zechariah. It was to this group that God lifted the curtain so that they could see the Messiah who would come in about 500 years to bless the entire world.

With the command to return comes a gracious promise in verse 3 - "I will turn unto you." The verb here is the same verb found in the earlier phrase "turn ye unto me." When we read verse 3, we see that the parable of the prodigal son is not just a description of God under the new covenant. We see that same loving father here in verse 3 written under the old covenant.

Is the God of the New Testament different from the God of the Old Testament? Only to those who don't understand the Bible. Those who understand God's word know that God has *always* been a loving father.

In verse 4, the people are told not to be like their fathers who did not listen to or heed God's word. And what was the outcome of that failure? All these people had to do was open their eyes to see the outcome - a ruined city and a destroyed temple. It was all around them.

But, the people might have responded, that is all just ancient history. Our fathers and those prophets have all passed from the scene. We are different! Well, God has a response for that argument! In verse 6, God responds, "but my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?"

Literally, the verse asks, did not the word overtake the fathers? Their fathers also thought they could escape, but the word of God is inescapable. The word pursued them and caught them - as it will do to everyone. These people were no different from their fathers no matter how loudly they might proclaim otherwise.

But hadn't some of their fathers returned and recognized that what they were suffering was nothing more than what they deserved? Yes, but by then it was too late to save the city and the temple. The punishment had already occurred before the fathers finally understood what had caused it. Thus, the warning of verse 4 remained - be not as your fathers! Yes, they returned, but they did so too late.

And with that introduction Zechariah now recounts the first of his eight visions.

Zechariah 1:7

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,

Three months have passed since verse 1. The twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month in the second year of King Darius would have been February 15, 519 BC by our calendar. Haggai 2:18 tells us that the foundation of the temple had been laid in the interval between verse 1 and verse 7 of this chapter.

This vision also occurred in the wake of one of the most unsettled periods of Persian history. The monarchy had just shifted from the dynastic family of Cyrus to the family of Darius, who would establish his own dynasty. This transition was accompanied by numerous revolts and rebellions, including several in Babylon that were put down very harshly.

#Zechariah