



Summary of Zechariah

Introduction

The Book of Zechariah is narrative history, prophetic and apocalyptic in genre. It is a post-exilic book, meaning it was written after the return from exile in Babylon. The prophet Zechariah wrote Chapters 1-8 in approximately 520-518 BC, before the temple was completed, and then wrote Chapters 9-14 in approximately 480 BC, after the temple is completed. Zechariah is among the most precisely dated books in the Bible. Key personalities are Zechariah, Zerubbabel and Joshua.

The purpose of this book is that Zechariah wrote to encourage the remnant, who had recently returned from exile. Their faith in God was weak and they were not motivated to build the temple. They needed to learn and conform to the law of God again.

In Chapters 1-8, Zechariah recorded his visions, encouraged the people to reinstate the priesthood, and other religious laws that were forgotten during the 70-year exile. Zechariah gives great hope and encouragement about the coming Messiah Jesus Christ, who will set up his throne and rule as the mighty branch, the High Priest, who will offer up the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world: **<<say to him: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he that shall build the temple of the Lord; he shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule on his throne. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them>>** (6:12-13).

Chapters 9-14 are difficult passages to understand, many are prophetic and apocalyptic. Zechariah writes judgement against the neighbouring enemies. Most importantly he declared the first coming of the Messiah who would be mounted on a donkey (9:9), his betrayal (11:12), and his crucifixion (12:10). Finally, he writes about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ descending from heaven the same way he had left in Acts 1:11, in the clouds: **<<On that day his feet shall stand on the**

Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that half of the Mount shall withdraw northwards, and the other half southwards>> (14:4).

Chapter One

Zechariah had returned from Babylonian exile with his grandfather Iddo in 538BC but did not receive his first vision until the reign of King Darius I of Persia, whose empire now ruled Judah. His opening statements are a warning from God for the people not to return to the ways of their ancestors but to return to the faithful ways according to the commandments of God.

The first vision is of a group of angels on red, sorrel, and white horses. Their leader was the angel of the Lord who proclaimed to Zechariah, and through him to the Jewish community in Judah, that the Lord would once again have compassion on his people if they obeyed him and there would be prosperity in Jerusalem, where God's house would be rebuilt, and in all the cities of Judah.

Zechariah was shown four horns, representing four military powers that had scattered the nation of Israel; and four blacksmiths who would be sent to oppress these nations for the protection of Israel.

Chapter Two

In this vision Zechariah anticipates a renewed Jerusalem, so full of people that it overspreads its walls. It will attract those Jews who remain in exile, as well as countless Gentiles. This is also the expectation for the New Jerusalem.

Chapter Three

In this chapter, in which the Lord rebukes Satan, Zechariah sees Joshua, the high priest, allowed to represent the people before God and called to live faithfully, with the assurance that God is preserving his people for the messianic branch. What should not be missed in this account is that Joshua was the Hebrew version of the Greek word translated Jesus.

Chapter Four

Zechariah sees lamps on a golden lampstand, a symbol of God's watchfulness and power to fulfil his promises to David's house, represented by Zerubbabel.

Chapter Five

There are two further visions described in this chapter. The first is a large flying scroll that goes throughout the earth pronouncing judgement on wickedness, especially on thieves and liars or blasphemers, those who swear falsely in God's name.

The second vision is that of a woman in a basket. She was securely held in by the lid and represented wickedness that was to be symbolically transported away to a far land and punished there.

Chapter Six

The chapter commences with the final vision of eight, which sees four chariots being sent out to patrol the earth's on behalf of the Lord.

The concluding passage recounts the coronation of Joshua as the High Priest, looking forward to the completion of the temple. It also bears all the hallmarks of a future Messianic time, when God will anoint his Son as the High Priest.

Chapter Seven

Two years has passed since Zechariah had received the eight visions. Some men came from Bethel to enquire of the Lord as to whether they should fast. The Lord's response through Zechariah is that, like those in exile, they fast only for themselves and not as an act of worship.

The people who had inhabited the land before the exile had failed to follow God's laws and requirements; instead they followed their own hearts. This is the reason why God had sent them off into exile, leaving the land desolate.

Chapter Eight

God states that, although it may seem improbable to the remnant who were currently living there, God would once again fulfil his promise to have Jerusalem teeming with young and old alike because of his great love of them.

God will protect his people from their enemies and, indeed, will not treat them as he did their ancestors so that they will become a blessing for the other nations. However, there is a command for them to be obedient.

The people are called to be a joyful people, holding festivals throughout the year. This would show that God was with his people so that people from every nation would be drawn to Jerusalem to seek the Lord for themselves.

Chapter Nine

The first half of the chapter is a prophecy against five of the major western coastal cities that had been powerful commercial centres and the major cities of the Philistines, one of Israel's main enemies for generations.

The focus then shifts to the coming of the Messiah who will arrive in Jerusalem in triumph and a rapturous welcome by its inhabitants. He will be the one to bring spiritual freedom with a prophecy of a future time when he will rule over all things, the Second Coming.

Chapter Ten

This is a call to prayer to God, as contrasted with the idol-worship which had brought judgements on the princes and people. These are the blessings promised in answer to prayer: God's people will be rulers of themselves; there will be conquest over their enemies; there will be restoration and establishment of both Israel and Judah in their own land in peace and piety.

Chapter Eleven

Zechariah's focus turns from the flock back to the shepherds. The fable of vv.1-3 conveys impending destruction, but of what or whom? Interpreters differ on this question and on several details in the rest of this difficult section. The regions described may be the primary referent, just as Egypt and Assyria were in the preceding verses, in which case the metaphors anticipate the destruction following the fall of the shepherds of Judah.

From a plurality of shepherds, attention turns in vv.4-17 to a single shepherd who, once appointed, acts briefly on behalf of the flock before abandoning them. He is equipped with two staffs, one symbolising an international covenant and the other a national covenant between Judah and Israel, both broken in succession. Verses 15-17 see the reappointment of a foolish shepherd, whose carelessness results in the devastation of the flock and who thus stands condemned.

The allusive and symbolic language poses problems for interpretation. Were the actions assigned to the shepherd carried out as sign-acts, or are the instructions more parable-like, themselves communicating the divine message? Who is the single shepherd who receives these instructions: simply Zechariah, or is a different figure envisaged in vv.15-16? Is it possible, or desirable, to identify the three destroyed shepherds of v.8? While one coherent line of interpretation is followed, such questions occasion caution at the level of detail. They also have the effect of promoting the fundamental truths enshrined in the text: that the fate of the community for good or ill lies in God's sovereign hands; that God reveals his will to his people; and that God's agents remain responsible for their own actions in response to the divine word.

Chapter Twelve

This chapter sees the start of a new prophecy, in which God indicates that he will defend his people and their primary city against all the people that will come against them. However, the Jews will also undergo a time of great mourning when they realise that they have played a major role in crucifying their Messiah.

Chapter Thirteen

God promises, not only to eliminate idolatry from the land but also the false prophets who promote the idols that the people have worshipped. In addition, the Lord will allow his anointed Shepherd to be killed, resulting in the flock being scattered. This will be a period of severe testing for the people of God.

Chapter Fourteen

The Lord warns the people that a great future battle still awaits the city of Jerusalem that will lead to half the population being taken into exile once more. However, there will come a day when the Lord will become the King of all the earth. He will fight against and subdue all who have opposed him. The opponents who survive the battle shall come to worship the Lord and all things will be restored.