



Zechariah - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Zechariah had returned from Babylonian exile with his grandfather Iddo in 538 BC 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.

I Zechariah 1:1-8:23 - Oracles and Visions

The lengthy vision sequence (1:7-6:15) dominates the first half of the book. It is punctuated by an oracle of restoration (2:6-13) after the third vision and concluded by the identification of the high priest Joshua as the pivotal agent of renewal (6:9-15). In the company of the angelic guide, the prophet, and the reader, encounters several tightly interwoven elements: the supernatural agents of God's will, natural powers as tools of the divine plan, the identification and equipping of the community's divinely appointed leaders, and the consistent plea for God's people to repent and cooperate with God's saving actions. In summary, God is moving, and the whole of creation is affected. This awareness of heavenly realities now reflected in human affairs was to become the hallmark of later apocalyptic literature. Chapter 7 attends

to the ethical state of the community. The trauma and triumph of Zion's restoration frame the whole (1:1-6 and 8:1-23), as it also does in the second half of the book, as confirmed by 9:9-13 and 14:16-21.

I.a Zechariah 1:1-6 - Israel Urged to Repent

After the exile, God invites his people to renew their commitment to him.

¹ In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, saying:

Zechariah 1:1

The second year of Darius is 520 BC, a time when stability was returning to the Persian Empire after a period of internal unrest. Interest in the old prophecies was stirred by the rebuilding work beginning on the temple under the preaching of Haggai, who had begun his ministry two months earlier.

The timing of Zechariah's prophecy sets it two months after Haggai's first prophecy (Haggai 1:1) and within a month after another prophecy of Haggai (Haggai 2:1). This was between October and November of 520 B.C. The prophecy of Zechariah is noted for its rich use of visions, pictures, and symbols. In this way it is much like the Books of Revelation or Daniel which also have significant visions.

The word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah. Little is known about this prophet, although Zechariah is a common name in the OT, with at least 27 different Zechariahs being mentioned in the Bible. The only details about this Zechariah come from Ezra: <<*Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them*>> (Ezra 5:1-2), and: <<*So the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of the prophet Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia*>> (Ezra 6:14).

Some confusion exists as to why Zechariah calls himself the grandson of Iddo while Ezra refers to him as the son of Iddo. It was quite common for even several generations to be omitted from Hebrew and Jewish genealogies, (and this is probably the case with Ezra's comments on Zechariah), with a significant biological ancestor, in this case his grandfather, listed as his father. Iddo is listed as one of the priests returning from exile in Nehemiah 12:4.

The name Zechariah means 'The Lord Remembers,' and is a fitting name for a prophet of restoration. This prophet was called to encourage and mobilise God's people to accomplish a task that they began yet lost momentum in completing. He encourages them indirectly by telling them about God's care for them and by keeping the presence of the Messiah very much in their minds. He worked with others, notably Haggai, Zerubbabel, and Ezra. He warned them of the consequences of neglecting God's work and he emphasised that God wants to do a work through his people.

Jesus mentioned the ministry and martyrdom of Zechariah: <<Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar>> (Matthew 23:34-35).

² The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. ³ Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. ⁴ Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or heed me, says the Lord. ⁵ Your ancestors, 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 overtake your ancestors? So they repented and said, 'The Lord of hosts has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he planned to do.'

Zechariah 1:2-6

The Lord was very angry with their ancestors, the generations whose sins caused the exile: <<The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy>> (2 Chronicles 36:15-16). Zechariah begins his prophecy with a call to repentance, and a call that remembers the poor spiritual heritage of Israel and Judah. The sin of their fathers doomed the nation to exile. Yet that need not be the Lord's attitude to this generation: if they would return to the Lord, then he would return to them in favour and blessing.

The name Lord of hosts occurs some 261 times in the OT. God is first called the Lord of hosts in 1 Samuel 1:3. The word Lord refers to Yahweh, the self-existent,

redemptive God. The word hosts is a translation of the Hebrew word *sabaath*, meaning ‘armies’ – a reference to the angelic armies of heaven. Thus, another way of saying the Lord of hosts is ‘Jehovah, God of the armies of heaven.’ There is a chart showing the usage of the phrase ‘The Lord of Hosts’ in the OT in the About section on the website.

Return to me, and I will return to you. Adverse circumstances discouraged God’s people, and they wondered why God seemed so far away:

- The land was still desolate after 70 years of neglect.
- The work was hard to rebuild and restore.
- They did not have a lot of money (Haggai 1:6) or manpower.
- They suffered crop failures and drought (Haggai 1:10-11).
- Hostile enemies resisted the work (Ezra 4:1-5).
- They remembered easier times in Babylon.

But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your ancestors? Their forefathers ignored the words of the Lord’s prophets and paid the price of God’s judgement. Even the prophets themselves died. Yet the Lord’s words and statutes that he spoke through the prophets were effective in bringing their threatened judgement. Now they also bore fruit in the response of the new generation, who repented (literally ‘returned’) and confessed the justice of the Lord’s judgements. This is the foundation for the following visions, which speak of the Lord’s returning to his people. God’s promises outlived and outlasted all the previous prophets and ancestors. Zechariah charges God’s people to not only rebuild the temple, which is the emphasis of his contemporary prophet Haggai, but to rebuild their relationship with him and learn from the lessons of their fathers. Zechariah’s words are a reminder of the need to return to the Lord: <<*If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored*>> (Job 22:23a), <<*Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts*>> (Malachi 3:7a), and: <<*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you*>> (James 4:8a).

The Lord of hosts has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he planned to do. The people of Israel had been warned what would happen to them if they were to forsake their God: <<*The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear. Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, because the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the Lord your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth*>> (Deuteronomy 6:13-15), and that is what happened: <<*The Lord has done what he purposed, he has carried out his threat; as he ordained long ago, he has demolished without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you, and exalted the might of your foes*>> (Lamentations 2:17).

I.b Zechariah 1:7-6:15 - Eight Night Visions and a Coronation

The eight visions that follow were all received in a single night shortly before the New Year, a date often associated in the ancient Near East with temple building.

I.b.i Zechariah 1:7-17 - First Vision: The Horsemen

In his first vision, Zechariah sees horsemen, who report to God the condition of the earth and prompt the angel of the Lord to intercede for Jerusalem.

⁷ On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo; and Zechariah said,
⁸ In the night I saw a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen; and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. ⁹ Then I said, 'What are these, my lord?' The angel who talked with me said to me, 'I will show you what they are.' ¹⁰ So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, 'They are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth.'

Zechariah 1:7-10

In the night I saw a man riding on a red horse! Zechariah's vision is simple enough in what he saw - one man on horseback leading other horses and their riders, patrolling throughout the earth. Zechariah sees them among myrtle trees, in a ravine, i.e. in the glen. Specifically, this reconnaissance mission examines the progress of rebuilding Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah. It is here to examine the work of God's people and to show them that the progress of their work is being monitored by God.

Red, sorrel, and white horses. Different commentators hotly debate the meaning of these colours. Some commentators say that connecting them with the four horsemen of Revelation 6:1-8 does not seem to work because these seem to be observers and not messengers of judgement as in Revelation. Some suggest that the different colours mean different angelic offices. Sorrel is sort of a dirty yellow or a spotted, brownish orange. This imagery is probably pointing out the different orders of angels in the heavenly host, which are employed by Christ in the defence of his Church. The different colours may point out the gradations in power, authority, and excellence, of the angelic natures which are employed between Christ and men.

I will show you what they are. The Lord reveals many things to his people; at least, the things they need to know but have failed to comprehend. He did this with Daniel's visions also: <<*I approached one of the attendants to ask him the*

truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation of the matter>> (Daniel 7:16).

The man who was standing among the myrtle trees. The myrtle tree is a laurel, which is evergreen and possibly a symbol of the people of Israel. This man is the Angel of the Lord, and is considered by many to be a theophany, an OT appearance of Jesus before his incarnation in Bethlehem. There are many examples in the OT of an encounter with a heavenly man known as the Angel of the Lord who is revealed to be God himself, such as in Genesis 16:7-13 and 22:11-18, Exodus 2:3-9, and Judges 2:1-4. Because of v.11, it seems most likely that this man is *the* Angel of the Lord, and that he is God.

Many theologians and commentators assume that this was God, in the person of Jesus Christ, appearing to Zechariah before his incarnation and birth at Bethlehem, because of God the Father it is said: <<*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known*>> (John 1:18), and: <<*It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen*>> (1 Timothy 6:16). Therefore, if God appears to someone in human appearance in the OT, and no one has seen God the Father, it makes sense the appearing is of the eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity, before his incarnation in Bethlehem.

¹¹ Then they spoke to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, 'We have patrolled the earth, and lo, the whole earth remains at peace.'¹² Then the angel of the Lord said, 'O Lord of hosts, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been angry these seventy years?'¹³ Then the Lord replied with gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.¹⁴ So the angel who talked with me said to me, Proclaim this message: Thus says the Lord of hosts; I am very jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.¹⁵ And I am extremely angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they made the disaster worse.¹⁶ Therefore, thus says the Lord, I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.¹⁷ Proclaim further: Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity; the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.

Zechariah 1:11-17

The whole earth remains at peace: <<*The whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing*>> (Isaiah 14:7). The patrol has found that the world is at peace, but it is not the right kind of peace: I am extremely angry with the nations that are at ease. God is angry with the nations of the world because they are at ease while God's people suffer. In God's thinking if the earth is at rest at the expense of his people, there is no rest at all.

How long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been angry these seventy years? The people of Judah went into Babylonian exile for seventy years as prophesied by Jeremiah: <<*This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon for seventy years*>> (Jeremiah 25:11), <<*For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place*>> (Jeremiah 29:10), and: <<*In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans – in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years*>> (Daniel 9:1-2). God's people often cry out for his grace and merciful judgement, such as: <<*My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O Lord – how long?*>> (Psalm 6:3), <<*Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe for ever*>> (Psalm 40:11), <<*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?*>> (Habakkuk 1:2), and: <<*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?'*>> (Revelation 6:9-10).

I am very jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. The angel of the Lord shows his heart of compassion for Israel and Jerusalem. God relented and allowed Israel back after seventy years of exile yet the effects of exile were still painfully evident. The word for jealous in ancient Hebrew comes from the idea 'to become intensely red' and it has the thought of a face becoming flushed with deep emotion. God is genuinely and deeply concerned about the state of his people.

They made the disaster worse. The nations of the world offered some help to the returning exiles, but even their help was polluted by evil motives or selfish ambition, looking for opportunities for their own gain.

My cities shall again overflow with prosperity. God solemnly promises to restore Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. This was an especially comforting promise

considering the lowly condition of the cities of the Promised Land in Zechariah's day. About four years from the time of this prophecy Zion was comforted and Jerusalem was specially chosen for the temple was rebuilt four years after Zechariah gave this prophecy, i.e. my house shall be built in it.

I.b.ii Zechariah 1:18-21 - Second Vision: The Horns and the Smiths

The second vision describes four horns, which are symbols of military strength. Four symbolises the totality of world powers responsible for the scattering of Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. Interpreters differ on the precise identity of these four. The view taken here is that they represent:

1. The Assyrians, who exiled the northern kingdom in 722 BC.
2. The Babylonians, who exiled Judah and Jerusalem in 586 BC.
3. The Persians, who were their current masters.
4. Greece, by prophetic prediction (9:13), Rome, or all other earthly powers that would attack Israel throughout the ages to come.

Another view, commonly held, is that they represent the same kingdoms as those mentioned in Daniel Chapters 2 and 7, i.e. Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome.

A third view is that no specific kingdoms are in view, but four represents all the national enemies of Israel, who would come from the north (Assyria, Babylon and Samaria), south (Egypt), east (Ammon and Moab), and west or southwest (Philistia). These nations had scattered God's people for their sins, just as the covenant curse of Leviticus 26:33 had threatened. The result was that they were bowed down under their oppressors' feet, unable to raise their head. The punishment of the horns fits their crime: those who raised horns against Judah will have their horns cast down by four blacksmiths or craftsmen, who represent other nations that will cut off the horns of Israel's tormentors and disturb their rest. The Abrahamic covenant promise to curse those who dishonour Abraham and his offspring (Genesis 12:3) is still in force.

¹⁸ And I looked up and saw four horns. ¹⁹ I asked the angel who talked with me, 'What are these?' And he answered me, 'These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.'

Zechariah 1:18-19

And I looked up and saw four horns. In Biblical times horns spoke of the strength and authority, because the power of a bull or an ox is expressed through its horns. Horns, the pride of a young bull, are an obvious choice symbol to represent invincible strength. They were used on one occasion to prophesy the outcome of an impending battle: <<*Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, 'Thus says the Lord: With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed'*>> (1 Kings 22:11).

These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. Since Zechariah reveals there were four horns many wonder which four nations Zechariah speaks of here. If he speaks of scattering in a broad prophetic sense, including scattering that had not yet come to God's people in his own day, then the likely four horns are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

²⁰ Then the Lord showed me four blacksmiths. ²¹ And I asked, 'What are they coming to do?' He answered, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no head could be raised; but these have come to terrify them, to strike down the horns of the nations that lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people.'

Zechariah 1:20-21

Four blacksmiths have come to terrify them. God raised up other nations to judge the nations that scattered his people. From of old, God promised to curse those who cursed Israel (Genesis 12:3). These blacksmiths are also translated more generally as craftsmen but their craft was often in the making of weapons: <<*See, it is I who have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon fit for its purpose; I have also created the ravager to destroy. No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgement. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, says the Lord*>> (Isaiah 54:16-17). Once again, the number four is debated.

To strike down the horns of the nations that lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people. God promises to break the power of those who use their power against God's people: <<*All the horns of the wicked I will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted*>> (Psalm 75:10). An ancient proverb puts it well: 'The church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.'