

Post-Exilic Prophet: Zechariah

INTRODUCTION

Zechariah, the author of this book, was both a prophet and a priest. He was the grandson of Iddo, who returned from Babylonian exile to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and other families (Nehemiah 12:4, 16) after Persia defeated Babylon.

When Zerubbabel and the exiles returned (around 537 B.C.), they began to rebuild the temple (Ezra, Nehemiah), which the Babylonians had destroyed. While things got off to a good start and the foundation was laid, the Persians heavily taxed God's people and building slowed. Morale fell lower when not all of the prophets' prophecies of restoration occurred immediately. People felt they lived in a day of "small things" (Zech 4:10), and they grew tired of faithful obedience.

Enter Zechariah. Almost 20 years after the exiles returned to Jerusalem (520 B.C.), the Lord spoke to Zechariah with a clear message and promise to His people—"Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts." (1:3) It is a call for repentance, an exhortation to return to living faithfully, and a promise that God will return to them. God *will* fulfill his promises and bless faithfulness.

It's also worth noting that the book of Zechariah is futuristic prophecy with lots of symbolism (particularly in the first six chapters). This means he foretells the future (as opposed to telling an immediate message from God). Much of the New Testament quotes Zechariah—particularly, Revelation.

Key themes include:

1. Repentance and returning to God
2. Serving God with sincerity
3. God's concern for his people
4. The blessing of Jerusalem
5. Messianic themes: permanent removal of sin, a Divine Warrior and Davidic ruler, pouring out of God's Spirit
6. End Times/2nd Coming of Christ: judgment, final triumph of God

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

Think of a time you were so hungry, you ate food you knew would be too hot—that piping hot slice of pizza or just-out-of-the-oven cookie? You *knew* it would burn your mouth—maybe even ruin your taste buds for a few days—but you did it anyway. Probably more than once, yes?

Some lessons we seem to learn over and over again. The Israelites—all God's people, for that matter—certainly did. They continued to fall into patterns of sin and faithlessness. Jesus knew this (Matthew 26:41), which is why he told us to be watchful, prayerful, and to "take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). If you're breathing, it's never too late to return to him!

BOOK ORGANIZATION

A sign-act is simply “visual aid” to help us understand and remember the point being made.

1. Oracles and Visions (1:1–8:23)
 - a. Intro
 - b. Eight night visions and a sign-act (1:7–6:15)
 - i. A Vision of a Horseman
 - ii. A Vision of Horns and Craftsmen
 - iii. A Vision of a Man with a Measuring Line
 - iv. A Vision of Joshua the High Priest
 - v. A Vision of a Golden Lampstand
 - vi. A Vision of a Flying Scroll
 - vii. A Vision of a Woman in a Basket
 - viii. A Vision of Four Chariots
 - ix. Sign-act: The Crown and Temple
 - c. Fasts to feasts (7:1–8:1-23)
2. Return of the King (9:1–14:21)

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

There are five major messianic prophecies that appear in Zechariah and are later fulfilled by Jesus:

1. **Branch from the tree of David (3:8-9).** The Lord says, “[B]ehold, I will bring my servant the Branch. . . . and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.” This echoes a prophecy in Jeremiah 23:5-6, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. And in his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” Jesus affirms this promise in Revelation 22:16.
2. **Coming King of Zion (9:9-11).** This passage specifically includes the prophecy of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11; John 12:12-19).
3. **Good Shepherd rejected; 30 pieces of silver (11:7-14).** Zechariah performs a sign-act, acting as shepherd. The flock rejects him, and he is paid a paltry 30 pieces of silver. This echoes Judas betraying Jesus for the same sum (Matthew 26:14-16).
4. **Good Shepherd struck and his sheep scattered (13:7-9).** Jesus makes the same prophecy in Matthew 26:30-35, directly quoting Zechariah 13:7. This prophecy came true when the disciples fled after Jesus’ arrest (Matthew 26:56).
 - a. Note! The second part of Jesus’ prophecy, “But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” was fulfilled in John 21 (the Sea of Tiberias was another name for the Sea of Galilee).
5. **Him Whom they have pierced (12:10).** This verse mentions that the Lord will “pour on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.” This prophecy was fulfilled in John 19:31-37.

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

OBSERVATION

- Author: Zechariah
- Context: after 70 years of exile in Babylon (Because of their rebellion against God), some of God's people were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. While the people started out strong, spirits quickly fell when they encountered hardship (e.g., heavy taxes) and didn't see God's promises fulfilled when they expected to. This pattern of fickleness/faithlessness and impatience was common for the Israelites, despite the fact that God had a history of holding true to His word.
- Organization:
 - Is Zechariah prophesying a promise or vision that will be fulfilled in the Old Testament; with the birth, death, or resurrection of Jesus; or the final days?
- What literary devices are used?
 - Is there an oracle of judgment, blessing, or redemption?
 - Is symbolism being used?

INTERPRETATION

- How do you read your passage considering the futuristic prophecy of Zechariah?
 - Revelation often quotes Zechariah, so try approaching it in the same manner. Many of the visions describe surreal details. Characters and events are portrayed indirectly through symbolism. An example elsewhere in Scripture you would be familiar with is when Jesus is referred to as the Lamb of God (John 1:29).
- Zechariah spoke to God's people who had returned to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile. Think about what is the intended message of this book, and where/how does it fit into the overarching narrative of Scripture? How does Zechariah want the reader to respond?
- Historical context: God's people were disillusioned by hardship (e.g. heavy taxes) and impatience to see God fulfill His promises.
- Cultural context: What customs, practices, actions, and attitudes were common then?
 - The forefathers of Zechariah's generation ignored God's calls for repentance. It was only after the kingdom of Judah fell, Jerusalem was destroyed, and its people taken into exile that they repented. God sees his people in this generation falling back into the patterns of their forefathers.

APPLICATION

- Read the book of Zechariah in light of Christ's life, death, and burial.
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to repent from?
- Is there a promise to cling to?
- Is there an example to follow? Or one to avoid?

PRAYER

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you break strongholds of sinful patterns in your life.
- Pray for God to illuminate unhealthy generational attitudes, practices, etc. that are impacting your spiritual growth.
- Pray for any changes of sincerity of heart needed as you serve the Lord daily.
- Pray for patience as you wait for God's timing.
- Praise God for His unfailing love and care for His people.

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Few books of the Old Testament are as difficult of interpretation as the Book of Zechariah; no other book is as Messianic. . . . The scope of Zechariah's vision and the profundity of his thought are almost without a parallel. In the present writer's judgment, his book is the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological, of all the writings of the Old Testament.

– George L. Robinson

"The quintessence of Old Testament prophecy."

– Martin Luther

The messianic emphasis of Zechariah accounts for its frequent citation by New Testament authors. Nestle and Aland list 41 New Testament citations or allusions to Zechariah's book (Eberhard Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*).

– Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*)