

Introduction to Zechariah

1. Author. The author is Zechariah. This is a common name in the OT. It means “*Yahweh remembers*.” How fitting this name! The words of Zechariah are directed towards Israel, who had just come out of Babylonian exile and were given the task of rebuilding the temple. He wanted them to know God had not forgotten them, and will indeed do what He has promised (later on this in application).

In v. 1 he is called the “Son of Berechiah” and the “Son of Iddo.” We see nothing more about “Berechiah,” but in Neh. 12:4 we see that Iddo was the chief priest of his household, who had come out of the exile. This makes Zechariah, his grandson, a part of the priestly line in their family. It seems that Zechariah is very familiar with the priesthood (See cp. 3, 6:9-15; 9:8, 15; 14:16, 20, 21).

2. Historical Context. With this in mind, let’s consider the context of Zechariah and his words. In v. 1 we read: “**In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah.**” These words of prophecy began in 520 and continued for about 16 years, which turn out to be a very important period of time for Israel. If you remember, going back to 587/6 BC, the Babylonians completely conquered Jerusalem, the city walls, and the temple, carrying most everyone into captivity throughout the Babylonian Empire. And, after putting down roots in Babylon for more than 40 years, there was another war. The Babylonians were conquered by the Persians under the leadership of Cyrus the Great in 539 BC. Then, something wonderful happens for the Jews. Cyrus, who is trying to solidify and unify the kingdom, starts allowing conquered peoples to go home and reestablish themselves. This is great news for the Jews! In Ezra 1:1-4 we read: “**In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared: “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem”** (Ezra 1:1-4). Though Cyrus’ motivations were political, this decree fulfills God’s promise that they would return to the land, reestablish Jerusalem, its walls and rebuild the temple. So, with this decree began the influx of Jews back to their homes and their land!

It is hard to describe how they must have felt. I think of Kristen and our trips to Australia. What a joy for her to return home, see her friends, eat meat pies, see beaches with big waves and beautiful sunsets. I remember after living in Mexico for two years and then returning to the NC mountains, thinking “there is no place like this.” I think of Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, saying, “There is no place like home, There is no place like home.” But . . . Israel’s home was God’s land of milk and honey, God’s city where his kingdom been established on Mt. Zion. Anyway, you can imagine the celebrations.

At the same time, there were many obstacles. There was a complete shift in power, in policy, in political structure, even shifts a more dominant Persian language (modern day languages like Pharsi). Israel was merely a province of Persia. Foreigners had moved into the land. And as they returned and began to rebuild the temple, the city and the walls (See Ezra and Nehemiah)?

Another king took Cyrus' place. And there was great opposition and construction on the temple came to a standstill for almost 17 years, yes, 17 years. Can you imagine their emotions, thinking, "Is God really faithful?" "Does he really care for his people?" "Is his word really true?"

Seventeen years is a long time! I get frustrated in downtown Kannapolis when I think they are taking too long in their construction on the new apartments. Or even worse, I get upset that they aren't building those new restaurants quickly enough! Well, this is the kind of environment to which God sent the prophets Haggai Zechariah. God did not forget his people in captivity! And he gave them his Words so they could have fresh theological lenses to get them through!

3. Major Themes. So, what are some of the major themes and characteristics of Zechariah?

i. Renewal. Throughout the book, we see themes of renewal. This makes sense. Zechariah is preaching to those who have been in exile. And NOW, they are coming back. Because of their sins against God's law, specifically those of the Mosaic Covenant, they were all but destroyed. NOW, times of renewal are promised. In 1:3, God says, "**Return to me and I will return to you.**" In other words, in turning back to me there are good times of renewal ahead. Past generations were filled with hard hearted people, but now times are changing. Look over at 3:4-5 In Zechariah's vision of Joshua the priest, he says, "**The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." And to him he said, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with the apparel; and the angel of the LORD was standing by.**" Look over at 8:11-13: "**But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. Just as you have been a cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.**" We see such words of renewal throughout the Book.

ii. Visions. Over half the book is filled with visions given to Zecharia. This is one of the characteristics that makes the book so difficult. Chapters 1-6 are filled with eight visions given to Zechariah during the night. The language found here is very similar to the language of the Book of Revelation (and other prophets). We see visions of horses and their riders, horns, golden lampstands, plumb lines, olive trees, golden pipes, flying scrolls, a woman in a basket, and chariots. This kind of language fills the prophets of the OT. So, why such apocalyptic language? Why do the prophets speak like this.

Well, the prophets spoke to the people of Israel (and others that would listen). And not all of Israel had faith. There was always a remnant a small number who had faith. And these are the folks who understood the visions. They would hear Zechariah preach, and they would understand the meaning. And these visions brough "hope" and "comfort" and "peace" and all kinds of gracious responses. But what about those who did not have faith? They did not understand. They

thought, “what a crazy man,” or “what stupid words.” Or, they got angry and upset with such words. We must remember that the prophets always spoke to everyone, but particularly to those who “have ears to hear” and “eyes to see.” . . .

Jesus did exactly the same thing in the NT with parables. In Matt. 13, the disciples asked Jesus, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand’” (Matt. 10:10-13). So, in these visions of Zechariah, God’s people of faith (remnant) hear. They see. They understand. Their faith is strengthened. Those who are not of faith do not hear. They do not see. They do not understand. There is no faith to be strengthened. And in fact, they are hardened even more. The same is true for us as we hear the Word of God. Now, we won’t understand every little detail, but the more we study and understand the entire Bible, particularly the person and work of Christ, his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and his rule in these days taught in the NT, the more we will understand these visions. In fact, CHRIST will be the lens through which I preach and teach these visions.

iii. Messiah. The Book of Zechariah (like all the other prophets) are full of prophecies about the coming Messiah and the reign of the coming Messiah. Zechariah’s hope for his people in troubled times was bound up in a “humble,” “servant,” “deliverer,” a “shepherd-king,” who would come one day and save them from all their enemies and rule over them forever. Let’s look at just a few verses. Zech. 3:8-10: “Behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree.” In Matt. 21:42 Jesus says, “haven’t you read the Scriptures, *“the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”*” Zech. 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Does this sound familiar; the humble king Jesus, riding into Jerusalem down the Mount of Olives. Zechariah saw this in his day.

Speaking of the new covenant we read in Zech. 9:11: “As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.” Throughout the book, Zechariah describes the people as those without a shepherd. But, he knows the true shepherd is coming! He speaks of the true shepherd (Jesus) being rejected and sold out for 30 pieces of silver (Zech 11:7-14). In Zech. 12:10 and 13:7, we see that this shepherd will be pierced and struck down. In Zech. 14 we see a final deliverance through the Messiah. Throughout the book, we see a priest-king who will rule in true righteousness (Zech. 6:9-15; 9-9-10; 14:9, 16) and establish a new world order (Zech. 14:6-19). Brothers and sisters, “What a great Book to read and study and preach.” We are here today because these prophecies came true. The Messiah did come. He was born of the virgin Mary. He lived a perfect life. He laid down his life as a sacrifice. He conquered death and rose again. He ascended to the right hand of

the Father and reigns forevermore. I pray God will give us great knowledge of the HOLY ONE we find in this Book!

iii. NT use of Zechariah. The Book of Zechariah COMES ALIVE in the NT. We see it's ultimate fulfillment. This is of utmost importance, which is why preaching Zechariah in a New Covenant Context is so important and very helpful! One can look at Zechariah all by itself in it's historical context and see the return of the exiles and the restoration to the land, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, its walls, and the temple. And, at one level, one can find some encouragement. But, if this book is not read in the context of the New Covenant, there is no real help, there is no real hope, there is no real comfort. All you have is a city, a land, a people, in this sinful world. But we know better. As the writer of Hebrews says, "**But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering . . .**" (Heb. 12:22). This means that as I preach Zechariah, the NT, the NC, the Messiah who reigns NOW, is my lens for preaching. I am very interested in how the NT authors use and interpret the prophecies of Zechariah (and others). This will help us understand that . . . TODAY in the church, we have the fulfillment of what Zechariah prophesied. (I hope we will see this as I preach the book.)

4. Applications.

i. God is faithful. As we read Zechariah we are reminded of the faithfulness of God to his people. Zechariah means "Yahweh remembers." How fitting is the name of this prophet! In the midst of difficult times (to say the least) Zechariah reminds God's the exiles that God has not forgotten them! There is never a time where God forgets his promise to save a sinful people through his Messiah (Gen. 3:15)! "**For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life**" (John 3:16). For us this is the best news! We are the recipients of this promise. This also means God will never fail to bring his promises to pass. All his promises will be fulfilled in Christ! So, know that when you hear the word "Zechariah," know that God will not leave you nor forsake you! And now, in the New Covenant, we have an escalation of this promise as He gives us the Holy Spirit.

ii. God always works in our lives at the right times. In our text, Israel's judgment and punishment had come to an end. They were returning. They were establishing lives in the land again. And God's words through Hagai and Zechariah came at the appointed time. As Christians, this is a marathon, not a sprint. And God knows how to bring us along, even in our ups and downs, in more sinful times or less, in good times and bad times. Now, there will be consequences for our choices to sin. But, we also will not be sent into exile under Christ and the New Covenant.

iii. Repentance. As we read Zechariah, we are reminded of God's command for sinners to repent. God is always calling sinners to repent! We see this right from the beginning of the book. He begins his words by saying, "**The Lord was very angry with your fathers. Therefore, . . . Return to me and I will return to you . . . Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds**" (1:2-7). This command of repentance highlights Zechariah's emphasis on renewal. Think about it. Israel rebelled against God, his covenant, his commands, his rule over their lives as a

nation. And now, Zechariah is calling them to repentance. Nothing has changed in principle today. No one will see God without repentance!

iv. We cannot live the Christian life in our own strength. Israel's return to Zion was a miracle. God worked in the heart of King Cyrus, and later in the heart of Darius so that God's people would return. This principle is still the same today in the church, for those who are in Christ. Look over at 4:6i: **"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts."** You cannot share the gospel in your own power. You can pray properly in your own power. Husbands, you can't love your wives in your own power. Wives, you can't love your husbands in your own power. Christian children, you can't obey your parents in your own power. Listen to the fruits of the Spirit: **"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"** (Gal. 5:22).

There is so much more! But, we will get to these if God wills in the coming weeks!