



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 20 Issue 17

April 25, 2021

Introduction to Zechariah

Zechariah 1:1-6

Thus far in our survey of the Prophets, we've examined fourteen prophetic books. We now come to another prophetic witness that God gave to His people, the book of Zechariah.

Things Aren't as They Seem

In 1941, the following poem was published in the French Nazi newspaper *Paris-Soir* during the Nazi occupation of Paris.

Overview of the Prophetic Corpus	
Joel	to Judah ~845 BC
Jonah	on account of Nineveh ~780 BC
Amos	to Israel ~765 BC
Hosea	to Israel ~750 BC
Isaiah	to Judah ~740 BC
Micah	to Judah ~735 BC
Nahum	to Judah ~650 BC
Jeremiah	to Judah ~627 BC
Zephaniah	to Judah ~622 BC
Habakkuk	to Judah ~605 BC
Daniel	to Judah ~605 BC
Ezekiel	to Judah ~593 BC
Obadiah	to Edom ~ 586 BC
Haggai	to Judah ~ 520 BC

We adore and admire Chancellor Hitler.
 The eternal English land is unworthy of
 life.
 We curse, we crush the people beyond the
 sea;
 On earth, the Nazi alone will survive.
 Support, then, the German Führer.
 The youthful sailors will finish the

Yet the poem isn't at all what it appears at first glance. For the intent of the author was to write two poems in one, both of which denouncing Hitler and his plans:

We adore and admire
 the eternal English
 land.
 We curse, we crush
 on earth the Nazi.

Support, then,
 the youthful sailors.
 To them alone belongs

Chancellor Hitler
 is unworthy of life.
 The people beyond the
 sea
 alone will survive.

The German Führer
 will finish the odyssey.
 A just punishment

This poem and the context in which it was written have many parallels to the Book of Zechariah. Zechariah's prophecy was written at a time when trial and difficulty had come upon God's people with little hope of immediate relief. As you know, the city of Jerusalem and the temple were in horrible shape. Yet the very ones called by God to effect repairs had shrunk back in their faith when their efforts were met with opposition (Ezra 4:1-5)!

In response God sent a drought on the land (Haggai 1:6) which served to reflect the hearts of God's people as it related to their zeal for the Lord (Haggai 10-11)! And even though God's people turned back to the Lord on account of the ministry of Haggai, nevertheless the road ahead was filled with peril, trial, difficulty, and distress! Their suffering in this state of sin and misery would NOT be short lived!

And so, in addition to Haggai, God raised up another prophet, Zechariah, who gave one of the more complicated prophetic discourses in the Old Testament — a discourse which on the surface doesn't seem all that encouraging. Yet when understood, this book becomes the poster child of any and every Christian in distress! For the promise here is NOT that everything will soon get better, BUT that God, in the coming Messiah, will overcome the world! If we were to summarize the overall message, it would be the words Christ told His disciples:

John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you [the persecution and trial that awaited them], that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

It is little wonder that the book of Zechariah was amongst the favorites of many of the reformers during the Reformation! Luther loved this book so much he wrote two commentaries on it, one in Latin and one in German.¹ John Calvin regarded it as incredibly applicable to his age.²

It is my desire simply to introduce you to this prophecy. Notice the background.

The Background: The Prophet, Context, Date, and Setting, Zechariah 1:1.

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

The Dating of Haggai's and Zechariah's Prophecies

Text	Year of Darius	Month	Date of New Moon	Day	Equivalent Date
Hag. 1:1	2nd	6th	Aug. 29	1st	Aug. 29, 520 BC
Hag. 1:15	2nd	6th	Aug. 29	24th	Sept. 21, 520 BC
Hag. 2:1	2nd	7th	Sept. 27	21st	Oct. 17, 520 BC
Zech. 1:1	2nd	8th	Oct. 27	UK	UK
Hag. 2:10, 20	2nd	9th	Nov. 25	24th	Dec. 18, 520 BC
Zech. 1:7	2nd	11th	Jan. 23	24th	Feb. 15, 519 BC
Zech. 7:1	4th	9th	Dec. 4	4th	Dec. 7, 518 BC

Comparing this verse with the time references in Haggai (see the chart) you will note that the first vision which Zechariah received from the Lord occurred during the same time that Haggai received his prophecies... which places the starting date of Zechariah in November of 520 BC.

Historically, you will recall the background. In 586 BC, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was taken into exile by the Babylonians. And yet, God's Redemptive Program was far from over. God promised in Jeremiah that He would restore His people to the Promised Land after seventy years in exile (25:11). This came about in 538 BC.

And yet, what is most notable about this return was *HOW* God brought it about. Prior to this time when a monarch conquered a region, stability was secured by transporting the powerful, wealthy, capable, and educated peoples to other parts of the empire. That is why the history of Israel involved four different exiles:

- 722 BC for the Northern Kingdom under Assyria.
- 605 BC, 597 BC, and 586 BC for the Southern Kingdom under the Babylonians.

Yet when the Medo-Persian king, Cyrus, rose to power in 539 BC things were quite different. For unlike most situations when a kingdom falls, Cyrus did NOT conquer Babylon through battle. He took over an incredibly weakened Babylon, shedding virtually no blood!³ Accordingly, he had to be careful lest all-out war broke out.

That no doubt is why if there was anything characterized his regency, it was that of a wise, tolerant, and compassionate shepherd (Isaiah 44:28) who ruled far more with diplomacy than with the sword (although he was a capable military leader when he needed to be).

We see it in how he initially handled the various and sundry people groups in Babylon. One of the last Babylonian Kings, Nabonidus, alienated much of the empire when he moved his capital city to the oasis of Teima in the Arabian desert where he built a shrine to his mother's god. In time he also transferred many of the gods of Babylon from the capital city to Teima! This alienated many as it was taken NOT ONLY as an abandonment of the nation, BUT ALSO of its religion — which is why when Cyrus became king, he played the role of a religious liberator.⁴ George Klein put it this way:

Cyrus sought to promote the religious traditions of each nation, granting Persian funds and posturing himself as the most devoted follower of each and every deity. Cyrus wished that the conquered peoples would view him [in contrast to Nabonidus] as a faithful worshipper of their national deities... This policy thus allowed diverse peoples under Persian control to exercise a significant measure of self governance as well as to retain their cultural and religious identity. (Klein, 2007, p. 36)

Accordingly, in 538 BC Cyrus issued a decree for the Jews of Babylon to return to Palestine and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:2-4). A relatively small group of Jews, 40,360 to be exact, took him up on the offer and returned — among whom was a priestly family who had a young boy named Zechariah!

Upon arriving the Jews quickly cleared off enough of the temple mount to reinstate their religious services. Yet opposition from the local peoples quickly stifled any and all attempts at rebuilding. This meant that the city of Jerusalem along with its temple would remain in disrepair for the next sixteen years.

Because of this, in Summer/Fall of 520 BC, God raised up two prophets to encourage Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and the people of God to resume the work of rebuilding the temple. And those prophets were Haggai and Zechariah.

In terms of Zechariah the man we know from Zechariah 1:1 that he was “the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo.” While we know virtually nothing about Berechiah (which

has led many to postulate that he most likely died when Zechariah was young), we do know a little about his grandfather, Iddo. His name is among the list of priests and Levites who accompanied Joshua and Zerubbabel in the original return from exile (Nehemiah 12:4). Later in the same chapter (Nehemiah 12:16) we read of Zechariah serving in the days of the high priest Joiakim, who held office a good eighty years later. Because of this, there is little question that Zechariah would have been a young boy in 520 BC. In fact, in Zechariah 2:4, he was referred to as a “young man”. His name means, “Yahweh remembers,” which is a fitting theme of the entire post-exilic prophetic witness!

Prophetic Ministry

Zechariah served as a prophet/priest over an eighty-year period from 520 to 440 BC.⁵

As both the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah overlap with Zechariah beginning his ministry after the aged Haggai, most view this prophecy as a reinforcement of and so a supplement to Haggai’s message. If Haggai provided the skeleton foundation for the people of God to rebuild the temple, Zechariah fleshed out many of Haggai’s themes! Joyce Baldwin wrote:

There is a marked contrast between Haggai and his contemporary Zechariah. If Haggai was the builder, responsible for the solid structure of the new temple, Zechariah was more like the artist, adding colourful windows with their symbolism, gaiety and light. (Baldwin, 1972, p. 61)

His Death

We read about it in Matthew. While condemning the unrighteousness of the Jewish leaders and predicting the coming Judgment, Christ said this:

Matthew 23:35, “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”⁶

So even though Zechariah served the Lord faithfully throughout his life, nevertheless, in keeping with the tenor of this book⁷, Zechariah himself would be assassinated by the very ones he was called to serve!

Outline and Content

The prophecy contains four sections.

- An Introduction, Zechariah 1:1-6.

- A Series of Eight Visions, Zechariah 1:7-6:15.
- Two Oracles/Sermons, Zechariah 7:1-8:23.
- A Series of Eschatological writings, divided into two parts:
 - Zechariah 9-11 and Zechariah 12-14.
 - This last section is dominated by struggle and tension!

Taken together, this prophecy prepared God’s people to live in a world where evil oft-times triumphs over good! Again, Baldwin put it this way:

There is no room in Zechariah’s thinking for glib optimism, but when evil has done its worst the Lord remains King, and will be seen to be King by all the nations. (Baldwin, 1972, p. 62)

That no doubt is why of all the prophets — as I stated at the beginning — Zechariah was one of the favorites among the Reformers as they endeavored to serve the Lord in adverse circumstances!

As to its literary brilliance, the book of Zechariah is a prophetic masterpiece richly steeped in allusions and many quotations of the preexilic prophets, among whom are Habakkuk, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁸ In fact, this book is sometimes referred to as “little Isaiah”, since it has more to say about the messianic shepherd-king than any other Old Testament prophetic book except Isaiah!

Of all the books in the Old Testament, Zechariah is the most messianic as well as apocalyptic. The book is filled with visions, prophecies, signs, celestial visitors, symbolism, and more, making it by far the most difficult of the Prophetic discourses to understand. And yet, Zechariah is the most quoted Old Testament book in the passion narratives of the Gospels and, next to Ezekiel, it had the most profound affect upon John when he wrote the Book of Revelation.⁹

Beyond all of this, it also is a literary masterpiece with the entire book arranged chiastically. We’ll talk more about this as we go along. All of this brings us to one of the more prominent themes of this book, that which was introduced to us in the very first section- namely the historical backdrop.

The Historical Backdrop of this Prophecy

Zechariah 1:1-2, “In the eighth month of the second year of Darius¹⁰ [again November 520], the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo saying, ‘The Lord was very angry with your fathers.’”

God is talking about the preexilic people of God who dove into sin and rebellion. On account of the preexilic doctrine of the Inviolability of Zion, the people of God believed

themselves to be unconquerable. And so, they lived as they pleased; for as children of Abraham they believed that God would always protect them!

However, they ignored the many warnings Moses gave that as a nation, their status before God could be forfeited if they rebelled (Deuteronomy 28:15-19; Leviticus 26:14-33; cf. also Jeremiah 25:8-11)! In fact, Jeremiah mocked the false teaching of the Inviolability of Zion when he exhorted the nation.

Jeremiah 7:4, “Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’”

it was believed that as long as the temple remained in Zion, Judah could NOT be conquered! Thus, any threat to the nation was met with, *“Do you see the temple of the Lord? Is it still standing? Then we have no cause for concern!”*

As such, the nation — from the leadership all the way down to the common man — dove headlong into sin!

The Divine Call to God’s People in the Present

Zechariah 1:3, “Therefore [in light of the past] say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Return to Me,” declares the Lord of hosts [I love this. God does NOT say, ‘Return to My law’ or ‘to My religion!’ RATHER He says, ‘Return to ME!’- the focus is the re-establishment of their covenant relationship with God!], “that I may return to you,”” says the Lord of hosts.”¹¹

There is no question that the preexilic Jews got it wrong! Sin could destroy the nation, the present generation that had just come from Babylon was proof of that! Accordingly, God called upon those listening to “return to [Him]”- to seek Him, love Him, cling to Him, and depend upon Him!

The word in the Hebrew for “return” is the word for “repentance”- שׁוּב (shub)! It is a massively important word in the Old Testament, being the twelfth most frequently used verb in the Hebrew Bible (appearing just over 1,050 times)! It means to turn or return and carries the idea of a 180 degree turn from one direction to the other. Yet theologically, it means even more than that! In the Greek, the word is μετάνοια (metanoia) which truly reflects the nuance of this term.

Recall what we talked about last time. On account of our Creation and the Fall, we have a Fallen Disposition which is comprised of four elements:

- A Default Program by which WE endeavor to relate to God on the basis of OUR conduct.

- A Default Passion by which WE endeavor to sit in judgment over and so control God.
- A Default Presumption by which We accuse God of all manner of ill toward us. We essentially think that God is NOT good!
- A Default Pleasure which seeks its fulfillment NOT from loving, knowing, and serving the Lord, BUT from doing what we want!

That essentially is our Fallen Disposition — which you must see it all about autonomy! It believes that God, His Redemptive program, this entire world revolves around US: OUR benefit, OUR happiness, OUR welfare, and OUR prosperity!

Accordingly, the biblical call — whether given in the Old Testament or New Testament — is that we as God’s people turn from this mindset, and so exchange our life of autonomy for a life of God-focused, God-directed, God-exalting service in His name!

That is the essence of שׁוּב (shub)! It is turning from/repenting of self! In the words of Christ we read:

Luke 9:23-24, “And He was saying to *them* all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?’”

That is the primary message of this prophecy (the word is used over sixteen times¹²)! Accordingly, God’s word to His people in Zechariah was for them to understand that this world as well as their redemption is NOT about them, their duty, their wants, their needs! It is about God and His desire to have and enjoy a relationship with man!¹³

What an important message! For when God gave Zechariah this prophecy, what were God’s people doing? As a people they were engaged in a spiritual revival in which they would labor the next four years to rebuild the temple! Yet God knew that for a significant portion of His people at this time, their efforts and concern were just a show-more religious duty which their Fallen Disposition would use to bolster themselves!

Recall one of the many revivals that occurred in the final years of Judah in which a significant portion of the people of God including the king turned from their rebellion unto God. Recall the message of Jeremiah to the nation during one of these times, it was one and the same as Zechariah’s, “Repent!” Standing in the temple which was overflowing with worshippers during one of the revivals, Jeremiah said this:

Jeremiah 7:9-10a, “Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal, and walk after other gods that you have not known, THEN come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name [the

word for 'stand before' is covenant language expressing a devotion and willingness to serve and obey!), and say, 'We are delivered!' ...?"

God is NOT after religious sentiment, emotion, sacrifices or burnt offerings! God did NOT send His Son to make us more religious! God wants us NOT our religious works!

Joel 2:12-13a, "'Yet even now,' declares the Lord, 'Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments...'"

That is the message that God gave the very people who responded positively to Haggai! *"Don't make what you are doing just another religious activity to placate your fallen disposition. RATHER, repent of self in all its forms and come back to Me!"*

Now, how relevant is this call to repentance? Though written 2,500 years ago, does this passage still apply to us?

The Relevancy of this Call

Zechariah 1:4-6a, "Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying,¹⁴ 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds."' But they did not listen or give heed to Me," declares the Lord.¹⁵ [sadly, that is how the nation responded to ALL of the prophets sent by God! // Yet that is NOT God's primary point here...] 5 "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? [IOW, both your fathers and all that they thought was so important AND the prophets who spent so many sleepless nights burdened by God's people... BOTH ARE DEAD AND BURIED! All their concerns... gone!!] But did not My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your fathers?...'"

Do you see the point? It is the same as Peter's, quoting from Isaiah 40:8.

1 Peter 1:24-25, "For, 'All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever.' And this is the word [1700 years later] which was preached to you."

That is what Zechariah is saying here!¹⁶ The call God gave to His people centuries ago still rests upon each one of us!

Brothers and sisters, don't miss it! Long after the concerns of COVID, racism, gender identity, the make-up of the supreme court, masks, police brutality, and so much more, the call of this text to a life of repentance and so self-denial/self-denunciation will endure! As that is the case, what ought we to do? What did Zechariah's generation do in the midst of their revival?

The Appropriate Response

Zechariah 1:6b, “Then they repented¹⁷ and said, ‘As the Lord of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us.’”¹⁸ - turning from the service of self, they said, “*God is good! As we are right where He wants us, let us devote ourselves NOT to religious activity, BUT to His love, honor, and service!*”

Family of God don't miss it! Such a disposition opens the child of God to the glories that come when we rest in the arms of Christ by “returning to Him!”

Boice put it this way:

Zechariah is going to unfold many rich and comforting promises both in the first and also the second sections of this prophecy. But riches like these are for people who have repented of sin and are ready to embrace the will and declarations of God. For this reason, the book opens with a message calling on the people to return to God and not be as their forefathers who refused to listen to him. (Boice, 2006, p. 488)

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End Note(s)

¹ Cf. (Boice, 2006, p. 486)

² *Ibid.*, p. 486.

³ Cf. (Klein, 2007, p. 36)

⁴ cf. (Boda, 2016, p. 9)

⁵ In Nehemiah 12:16, Zechariah took the leadership of the priestly clan during “the days of Joiakim” which is dated around 440 BC.

⁶ There, Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia references 34 different Zechariah's in the Bible. Along with the author of the Book of Zechariah, there was another Zechariah who was murdered in the temple. This Zechariah was the son of Jehoiada, who was the high priest during the reign of Joash of Judah. A godly man, Zechariah denounced the apostasy of the people from the Lord after his father's death, and Joash ordered him stoned to death in the temple court (2 Chronicles 24:20–21). As Zechariah was dying, he uttered a curse on Joash that was soon fulfilled (vv. 22–25).

⁷ Namely that life in this age is difficult; in Christ we remain aliens and strangers regardless of

where we might live.

⁸ Baldwin wrote, "It is clear from the messages which accompany the visions that Zechariah was steeped in the language of the pre-exilic prophets. He does not simply quote. It is rather that their language has become his own and bursts from him under the stress of the message welling up within him. Something of the range of his emotions is reflected in the imperatives he uses: 'cry out' (1:14), 'flee' (2:6), 'escape' (2:7), 'sing and rejoice' (2:10), 'be silent ... before the Lord' (2:13). Zechariah is no passive observer in these visions, but is fully involved in all that is going on, interjecting remarks, questions, suggestions. His call for silence is reminiscent of Habakkuk 2:20; another near quotation is the reference to a brand plucked from the fire (3:2; cf. Amos 4:11); the picture of men at peace under their vine and fig tree (3:10) recalls Micah 4:4 (cf. 1 Kgs 4:25). Over twenty other allusions to pre-exilic prophets are listed by H. G. Mitchell, including several from both parts of Isaiah, from Hosea, Amos and Micah in the eighth century, from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, his immediate predecessors." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 64)

⁹ "The New Testament writers cite or allude to several passages in reference or application to the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, including:

- coming from a low and humble station of life (9:9; 13:7; cf. Matthew 21:5; 26:31, 56)
- restoring of Israel by the blood of his covenant (9:11; cf. Mark 14:24)
- serving as shepherd to a scattered and disoriented people (10:2; 13:7; cf. Matthew 9:36; 26:31)
- being betrayed for a payment of silver (11:11–12; cf. Matthew 26:14–16; 27:1–10)
- being pierced and struck down (12:10; 13:7; cf. Matthew 24:30; 26:31, 56; John 19:37)
- returning in glory and delivering Israel from her enemies (14:1–6; cf. Matthew 25:31)
- ruling as king in peace and righteousness in Jerusalem (9:9–10; 14:9, 16; cf. Revelation 11:15; 19:6)
- establishing a new world order (14:6–19; cf. Revelation 21:25; 22:1, 5)." (Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, TOTC, p. 115)

¹⁰ "Since Zechariah prophesied at the conclusion of the exile, there was no king in Judah to whose reign the prophet's ministry correlated. Thus, Zechariah dated his service to the rule of the Persian king, Darius I or Darius the Great." (Klein, 2007, p. 79)

¹¹ As referenced earlier, much of this prophecy involves direct quotes or allusions to other passages of Scripture. For this opening section, see parallels in Deuteronomy 20:1-9; Joshua 1:1-11; 2 Chronicles 15:1-7; 19:6-7; 20:15-17; 30:6-9; Jeremiah 7:1-26.

¹² Cf. Zechariah 1:3 (2x), 4, 6, 16; 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 8:3, 15; 9:8, 12; 10:6, 9, 10; 13:7.

¹³ Boice wrote, "Like Haggai, Zechariah's message is one of encouragement. But he was aware that not all the returned remnant were fully sincere in their desires to serve God, and he therefore counseled them to repent of sin and return to God with all their hearts and minds." (Boice, 2006, p. 486)

¹⁴ Most likely quoting from Jeremiah 35:15 or possibly Jeremiah 18:11 or Jeremiah 25:5.

¹⁵ "Notice that the authenticity of earlier prophets is endorsed both by the fulfilment of what they predicted and by the testimony of the Lord as he speaks through the contemporary prophet. The pre-exilic prophets were already regarded as 'canonical'." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 95)(J

¹⁶ "No one escapes God's word. God's word is eternal. It is longer lasting even than the prophets who speak it. They passed away (v. 5), yet the word spoken through them lived on and was fulfilled in the people's experience (v. 6). Jesus said, 'Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished' (Matthew 5:18)." (Boice, 2006, p. 491)

¹⁷ This could NOT be in reference to those in earlier generations because Zechariah here just said that they did NOT repent (cf. v. 4). Accordingly, this must be in reference to the people standing before Zechariah receiving this message!