

Through the Bible Book by Book

Old Testament

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Zechariah

Theme: The historical background of the prophecy of Zechariah is the same as that of Haggai, both prophets ministering during the same period and having a similar mission. Zechariah's mission was to encourage by the promise of present success and future glory, the Jewish remnant, who were disheartened by present distresses and who were slow to rebuild their temple.

The people had good reasons for being discouraged.

They had once been a free nation, having king and constitution. But now they had returned to a country under foreign rule, to a country without a king, and stripped of power. Their present condition presented a dark picture, but Zechariah made this serve as a dark background of a more glorious scene, as he, by a series of visions and prophecies, depicted a restored Jerusalem protected and indwelt by the Messiah, and capital of a nation exalted above all others.

Besides the promise of future glory, the prophet gave promises of present success and achievement, for he assured the remnant that their temple would be rebuilt in spite of opposition. But Zechariah could offer no permanent encouragement short of the promise of Messiah's coming.

Israel's present experience is but a foreshadowing of their future experience. As it was through the chastisement of the Babylonish captivity that the nation was purged of the sin of idolatry, so it will be by the fires of the great tribulation that Israel will be purified from its sin of sins - the rejection of its Messiah and King (13:8, 9; 12:10; 13:1).

We shall sum up the theme as follows: An encouragement to the nation to serve their GOD faithfully through present distress, in view of the future glories of the times of the Messiah.

Author: Zechariah was probably born in Babylon. He entered the ministry while yet a young man (2:4), and began prophesying a short time later than Haggai, whose colleague he was.

His mission was to stir up the flagging zeal of the people and encourage them by taking their eyes off the dark present and directing them to the bright future.

CONTENTS:

We shall divide the book into the following three sections:

- I. Symbolical: Visions of Hope (Chs. 1-6).
- II. Practical: Exhortations to Obedience and Piety (Chs. 7, 8).
- III. Prophetical: Promises of Glory through Tribulation (Chs. 9-14).

I. Symbolical: Visions of Hope (Chaps. 1 to 6)

Chapter 1:1-6 forms the introduction to the book. The remnant are admonished to take warning from the fate of their fathers, who disobeyed the voice of the prophets, and suffered in consequence. The people are to obey the message of the present prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, whose words will be fulfilled as surely as those of the former prophets.

Then follows a series of visions conveying messages of GOD's care and protection of His people.

1. The vision of the rider among the myrtle trees (1:7-17). The rider who, together with the horses represents GOD's agents in the earth, informs the angel of the Lord that the whole world is at rest and still, thus symbolizing that the time had come for the fulfillment of GOD's promises in relation to Israel's restoration. In response to the angel's intercession, the Lord says that He is displeased with the heathen who have exceeded their commission in regard to punishing Israel. He will return and rebuild the cities of Judah.
2. The vision of the four horns and the four carpenters (1:18-21), teaching the destruction of those who are Israel's oppressors.
3. The vision of the man with the measuring line (Ch. 2), symbolizing the rebuilding of Jerusalem. It will be rebuilt without walls because of the coming increase in population and because the Lord Himself will be as a wall of fire round about her.
4. The vision of Joshua the high priest (Ch. 3). The high priest, divested of his filthy garments, and re clothed with clean raiment, typifies the cleansing of the Jewish remnant, whose representative he is (vv. 1-7). Joshua and his fellow priests are a type of the Messiah, who will effect the final purification of Israel (vv. 8-10).
5. The vision of the golden candlestick and the olive trees (Ch. 4). By the Spirit working through Zerubbabel and Joshua (the two olive trees), will the rebuilding of the temple (the golden candlestick) and the restoration of the nation be effected, and not by human power (v. 6).
6. The vision of the flying roll (5:1-4), teaching that, after the completion of the temple, GOD will punish those violating His laws.
7. The vision of the ephah (5:5-11). The teaching of this vision seems to be as follows: Israel's sins will be removed - especially the sins of idolatry and rebellion - and they will be carried to

Babylon, the center of idolatry and the scene of the first rebellion, and probably the scene of the final apostasy and rebellion.

8. The vision of the four chariots (6:1-8) teaching the swiftness and extent of the Lord's judgments against Israel's former oppressors.

9. The symbolic crowning of Joshua, the high priest (6:9-15), signifying the crowning of the Messiah as King-priest, and the building of His spiritual temple in which He shall be enthroned as ruler and intercessor.

II. Practical: Exhortations to Obedience and Piety (Chaps. 7, 8)

The above exhortations were partly occasioned by the enquiry of representatives of the people as to whether they should continue to fast in commemoration of the fall of Jerusalem (7:1-3).

The following lessons are contained in the prophet's answer:

1. GOD desires obedience rather than fasting. It was the disobedience of the people that brought on the Judgments that were the occasion for the fasts (Ch. 7).

2. When the cause of fasting and mourning is removed, then Israel's fasts will be turned into feasts (8:19). That day is coming, for Israel will be finally regathered and Jerusalem will become the religious center of the earth (Ch. 8).

III. Prophetical: Promises of Glory through Tribulation (Chs. 9 to 14)

Following Dr. Gray's suggestion, we shall divide this section according to the periods of Israel's history: Israel under Grecian rule (Chs. 9-10); Israel under Roman rule (Ch. 11); Israel under Messiah's rule (Chs. 12-14).

1. Israel under Grecian rule (Chs. 9, 10).

(a) A prophecy concerning the conquests of Alexander, emperor of Greece, a king who lived about three hundred years before CHRIST (9:1-8).

Verses 1-7 record his conquests along the west coast of Palestine; and verse 8, the deliverance of Jerusalem out of his hands.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, gives us an account of the last-named event. He tells us that, after the conquest of Tyre and Gaza (mentioned in 9:1-7), Alexander set out for Jerusalem to punish Jaddus, the high priest, who had refused to submit to him.

The Lord, in a dream, commanded Jaddus to open the gates to the conqueror, and dressed in his high-priestly garments, and attended by his priests, to receive Alexander in triumph. Jaddus obeyed, and Alexander, seeing this imposing procession, saluted the high priest and adored the GOD whose name was on the golden plate attached to the priest's headgear.

Alexander then explained that, while in Macedonia, he had had a vision of this procession, and this vision had been brought to his mind by what he had just seen. He afterwards treated the Jews with great kindness.

(b) The coming of Messiah, who in contrast to Alexander, is the true King and world conqueror (9:9-12).

(c) A prophecy of the defeat of Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria (about 165 B. C.), one of the divisions of Alexander's empire (9:13-17). Antiochus, seeing that the Jews' religion stood in the way of their perfect submission to him conceived the plan of abolishing it and substituting the cults of Greece. He captured Jerusalem, defiled the temple, and interdicted the worship of the Lord.

Persecution ensued and continued until Judas Maccabeus and his brothers, the sons of the high priest placed themselves at the head of a Jewish army that drove the Syrians from the land. We may look upon this deliverance as the foreshadowing of Israel's final deliverance (Ch. 10).

2. Israel under Roman rule (Ch. 11). This chapter deals mainly with the rejection of the Messiah and the judgments following. Many of the predictions were through symbolic actions, such as the breaking of the staffs, etc. (vv. 10, 14). Taking this entire chapter as Messianic, we shall note as its contents:

(a) A picture of judgment, probably the one following CHRIST's rejection (vv. 1-6).

(b) Messiah's ministry - that of a Shepherd to Israel (vv. 7, 8).

(c) Messiah's rejection by the flock (vv. 9-11).

(d) Messiah's valuation by His people-thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave (vv. 12, 13; compare Matthew 26:14-16; 27:3-10).

(e) The rejection of the true shepherd followed by the rise of a false shepherd-a type of Antichrist (vv. 15-17).

3. Israel under Messiah's rule (Chs. 12-14).

(a) The siege of Jerusalem and her deliverance by the appearance of Christ (Ch. 12).

(b) The purification of Israel (Ch. 13).

(c) The exaltation of Israel (Ch. 14).

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