

The Book of Zechariah—Part I

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This article is the first in a series of articles that are designed to give an exposition of the Old Testament book of Zechariah, the next to last book of the twelve Minor Prophets. In particular, this first article will introduce the book by (1) giving some background information to assist the reader in understanding it and (2) providing a brief outline and summary of the flow of the entire book. The framework will then be in place for the later articles in the series that will walk through the book paragraph by paragraph and verse by verse. The worthiness of such a study comes from the twin truths that the Gospels refer to the book of Zechariah frequently, especially in the passages covering the death of the Savior, and Zechariah is one of the most cited Old Testament books in the New Testament book of Revelation.

The name ***Zechariah*** means “Yahweh remembers” or “the LORD remembers.” It is a fitting name for the prophet of a book wherein the LORD demonstrates to the nation of Israel that He has not forgotten it. As to the identity of the prophet, little can be said because the Bible gives limited information about him. In addition, around thirty other men in the Bible have the same name. However, it is possible to know from contemporary information given by Nehemiah that this Zechariah, the grandson of Iddo (Zech. 1:1, 6), was a Levitical priest (see Neh. 12:1-16) as well as a prophet.

Zechariah began his prophetic ministry roughly two months later than Haggai (Zech. 1:1; cp. Hag. 1:1). This places him among the post-exilic prophets and contemporary with Nehemiah, Ezra, Zerubbabel, and Joshua the High Priest. It also places the start of his ministry around 520 B.C. (second year of Darius). A second passage giving chronological information is Zechariah 7:1. This verse shows that this particular chapter was given in the fourth year of Darius or roughly 518 B.C. Since the rebuilding of the post-exilic temple was completed around 515 B.C., most scholars see the early visions and messages of Zechariah (chapters 1-8) taking place during this rebuilding phase. The final chapters (9-14) are assumed to be later in the ministry of the prophet.

However, the unity of the entire book lends itself easily to an understanding that the prophet Zechariah is the one who has written the book in its entirety. While liberal scholars question whether Zechariah wrote the whole book, they do so largely based upon the biased assumption that God cannot pre-write history through a human prophet (especially note the prediction about the second-century Greek period in 9:13). Conservative scholars, on the other hand, accept the supernatural and point out several truths shared by both sections of Zechariah including but not necessarily limited to mention of the Messiah as King of Israel, references throughout to the nation of Israel and its future rewards for obedience, knowledge of earlier prophets, and judgment upon the enemies of Israel.

In addition, an examination of the style of the book of Zechariah has led to the conclusion by some scholars that the book is *apocalyptic*. It is true that there are many elements of visionary language, angelic involvement in interpretation, and end-time scenarios of both judgment and blessing. However, stylistically only the first eight chapters follow this tendency closely. Other sections give admonitions, exhortations, and oracles of negative prophecy with respect to the nations but positive prophecy with respect to Israel. Zechariah appears on the surface to be somewhat obscure because of the varied symbolic language that is used. However, it must be noted that literal interpretation (grammatical-

historical) takes into account symbols, figures of speech, and various types of literature. The reader should not seek hidden meanings, but look for clues in the context as to the meaning of the symbols and figures that Zechariah uses.

There are three themes that combine to form the major purpose of the book of Zechariah, which is one of encouragement for God's people Israel. *First*, God has promised to preserve the nation of Israel in spite of all oppression and opposition from Gentile powers. Within the flow of the book of Zechariah, there is a near application of this promise (Zechariah's time and the few centuries immediately following his time) as well as a promise that takes Israel to the end times when Messiah would come to set up God's ultimate kingdom on earth (see chapter 14). *Second*, related to this theme is the destruction of the enemies of Israel. The Gentile powers will not last and will be judged by God. This would be especially encouraging to the post-exilic Jews who still lived under Gentile domination even though they had returned to their homeland. *Third*, the accomplishment of the judgment of Israel's enemies and the preservation and restoration of the nation of Israel itself is based completely upon the activity of God Himself. This relates ultimately to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will one day return visibly and literally to this planet. He will return personally to Jerusalem (the Mount of Olives, Zech. 14) and set up his kingdom over the nations while headquartered in Jerusalem.

The structure of the book of Zechariah is rather easy to determine and can be outlined as follows:

Part I

Introduction (1:1-6)—Call to national repentance

Eight Night Visions (1:7-6:15)

1. The Red-horse Rider (1:7-17)—judgment of the nations and blessing for Israel
2. The Four Horns and Craftsmen (1:18-21)—judgment of the nations
3. The Surveyor (2:1-13)—future blessing for Israel
4. The Cleansing of Joshua (3:1-10)—Israel's future cleansing
5. The Golden Lampstand and Two Olive Trees (4:1-14)—Israel as the light to the nations
6. The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)—judgment on individuals in the nation
7. The Woman in the Ephah (5:5-11)—removal of sin from the nation
8. The Four Chariots (6:1-8)—judgment on the nations
9. The Coronation of Joshua (6:9-15)—conclusion to the eight visions

Part II: Question About Fasting with Answers

1. The Question (7:1-3)
2. The Rebuke (7:4-7)
3. The Admonition (7:8-14)
4. The Restoration of Favor (8:1-17)
5. The Removal of the Fasts (8:18-23)

Part III: Two Oracles

1. The Oracle of Hadrach (9:1-11:17)—the rejection of the King
2. The Oracle of Israel (12:1-14:21)—the victory of the King

Future articles will give an exposition of each of these sections of Zechariah.