

Zechariah

Moving forward can be hard business, especially when someone is waving a sword in your face. However, sometimes the best way to deal with that sword is to look beyond it. When Israel was faced with the daunting task of reestablishing a center of worship in the middle of their enemies, God sent the prophet Zechariah with a divine perspective on the present and a prophetic overview of the future. Since Yahweh was in control of the nations and was preparing to send Messiah to rule over them, they should not be discouraged over their present opposition. If their ultimate deliverance was certain, then their present circumstance was clearly manageable by the Lord's Spirit.

Authorship

The book is attributed to Zechariah, son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo (1:1). This is the Zechariah mentioned in Ezra 5:1, who had been among the first exiles returning from Babylon. He was from a priestly family (Neh. 12:16), one of only three prophets with such a background (the others being Jeremiah and Ezekiel). This is significant in light of his ministry of encouragement directed toward the rebuilding of the temple. His name means "Yah(weh) remembers" which is suitable to his ministry of assuring Israel that God had not forgotten His promises to the nation. The unity of the book has been questioned in modern times due to the difference in subject matter and the non-specific time designation of the latter chapters (9–14). These arguments are not compelling since the differences may be explained in line with the eschatological purpose clearly entailed in Zechariah's prophecy.¹

Date

Zechariah's prophetic ministry is datable by the reference in Ezra 4:24 and the three dates given in the book itself, all with reference to the reign of the Persian Darius (1:1–520 B.C.; 1:7–519 B.C.; 7:1–518 B.C.). Chapters 9–14 are undated but were likely written later in the prophet's ministry, perhaps c. 480 B.C., after Greece's rise to world prominence.²

Historical Setting/Occasion

Zechariah's ministry takes place during the first generation of returnees from the Babylonian captivity. Jerusalem, and its temple, had lain in ruins for nearly seventy years, in

¹ For a summary of the issues of unity see Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 429-32.

² Stanley A. Ellison, *Knowing God's Word: Interpretive Charts and Outlines* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 265.

fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 25:12). Cyrus's enlightened policy of allowing captive peoples to return to their home land had been Yahweh's method of re-leasing His nation from their disciplinary exile (cf. Ezra 1:1-4). Now that they had re-turned, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Israel had set about rebuilding the temple so as to reestablish worship according to Torah. After intense and continual opposition (which lasted throughout Cyrus' reign) the inhabitants of Judea were finally able, at the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus, to bring construction to a halt, a situation which lasted for over a decade or until the second year of Darius (Ezra 4). It was at this time that Haggai and Zechariah were led to rekindle the building effort through their prophecies (Ezra 5:1-3).

Original Readers

Zechariah's prophecy is directed to Zerubbabel, the governor (4:6-9), and to Joshua, the priest (3:1-10; 6:9-15) as individuals. In addition the people and priests in general are addressed (7:4-7; see also Ezra 5:1). Thus, it was Israelites who were being directly affected by opposition to the rebuilding of the temple that were the recipients of Zechariah's prophetic word of exhortation and encouragement. It is clear from the record of Ezra-Nehemiah that opposition continued throughout the one hundred year long reestablishment of Israel in the land. In light of the context of Zechariah's original activity of prophecy, it is reasonable to conclude that he would have been directed to write down these words so that they could continue to have their intended effect on all the subsequent returnees.

Special Issues

The Nature of Messianic Prophecy. From very early in recorded revelation God had been proclaiming the coming of one who would rescue humanity and rule over His creation. Many promises and images were given whereby the expectation of this One's arrival was clarified and heightened. By the time of Israel's return from Babylon this expectation had been expressed in a number of ways, including especially the apocalyptic messages of Daniel and Ezekiel. The coming of this One would accomplish two main things: the spiritual redemption of both Israel and the nations (cf. Isa 53) and the exaltation of Israel above all the nations in fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Moses, and David. Zechariah draws together the various strands of prophetic material found in the rest of the Old Testament to give a composite Messiah's advent. However, though setting forth a definite sequence of events with respect to the coming of Messiah and His ministries, Zechariah does not specify the exact timing of those events. Hence,

there is a “prophetic compression”³ of the events depicting the first and second advents of Messiah, as we now know them to be. Therefore, when interpreting Messianic prophecy, one must be aware of the fact that the sequencing of the events of His arrival and ministry often contains large gaps of time. These gaps are only discernable through a comprehensive correlation of such Messianic texts with the totality of divine revelation, which includes both Old and New Testament. Thus, it is only when Zechariah is read in conjunction with Daniel, Malachi, the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation (not to be exhaustive) that his Messianic intent may be truly discovered. Even then, there are features that cannot be absolutely ascertained apart from their actual fulfillment. However, Zechariah contains enough clear revelation about the coming of Messiah to be an encouragement to those who were living in the shadow of failure and the fear of defeat. This is always the applicational intent of prophecy and is the way that the practice of the messianic interpretation of the Scriptures ought to be evaluated.

Theme Statement

Since Yahweh’s future rule on earth through Messiah is certain, the faithful should not be discouraged by present opposition but continue their work of witness, as enabled by the Spirit.

Outline

- I. Prologue: The Word of the Lord on Repentance.1:1–6
 - A. Israel is called to return to Yahweh.....1:1–3
 - B. Israel is warned about the consequences of not repenting.....1:4–6
 - 1. Because the word of prophecy is sure.1:4–6a
 - 2. Because the Lord of hosts is sovereign.1:6b
- II. The Word of the Lord for Israel’s Present Enabling: In light of Yahweh’s sovereignty over the nations the temple must be rebuilt.....1:7–8:23
 - A. The Word of the Lord in Visions: Yahweh is working on Israel’s behalf in order to establish His world-wide kingdom.1:7–6:15
 - 1. Four Night Visions: Yahweh is at work to avenge His people and city through His righteous servant.1:7–3:10
 - a. Vision of the Four Horses: Yahweh is aware of the plight of Israel among the nations.1:7–17
 - 1) The nations are found to be at ease.1:7–11
 - 2) Israel is found to be in need of avenging.....1:12–17
 - a) The nations had treated her with evil intent.....1:12–15
 - b) Yahweh will restore her temple and people.1:16–17
 - b. Vision of the Horns and Craftsmen: Yahweh will judge the nations that scattered Israel.1:18–21

³ This term is used in *The Nelson Study Bible*, Earl D. Radmacher, gen. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 1547.

- c. Vision of the Measuring Line: Jerusalem will be rebuilt and its people replenished.2:1–13
 - 1) Jerusalem will flourish, protected by Yahweh.2:1–5
 - 2) Israel must return from Babylon to enjoy His presence.2:6–13
 - a) Yahweh had disciplined Israel.....2:6–7
 - b) Yahweh is the protector of Israel.....2:8–9
 - c) Yahweh will dwell in Israel.....2:10–13
- d. Vision of Joshua the High Priest: The BRANCH will purify Israel.3:1–10
 - 1) Joshua represents the nation in its need for the removal of its iniquity.3:1–6
 - 2) Joshua symbolizes the BRANCH in His future removal of that iniquity.3:7–10
- 2. Four Waking visions: Yahweh is at work, through His Spirit-empowered servant, to establish His witness on the earth.4:1–6:15
 - a. Vision of Lampstand and Olive Trees: Yahweh will establish His witness via the temple.4:1–14
 - 1) Zerubbabel will complete his work, enabled by the Spirit of Yahweh.4:1–7
 - 2) Zerubbabel will validate Yahweh’s involvement.4:8–10
 - 3) Zerubbabel will be attended by Yahweh’s anointed.4:11–14
 - b. Vision of the Flying Scroll: Yahweh will establish His witness through the application of Torah.....5:1–4
 - c. Vision of the Woman in a Basket: Yahweh will establish His witness through the restraint of wickedness.5:5–11
 - d. Vision of the Four Chariots: Yahweh will establish His witness through sending peace to the whole earth.6:1–8
- 3. Conclusion to the Visions—the crowning of Joshua: The BRANCH will rule in peace.6:9–15
 - a. Zechariah is ordered to fashion a costly crown.6:9–11
 - b. Zechariah prophesies the BRANCH’s rule of peace.6:12–13
 - c. Zechariah deposits the crown as a memorial testimony.6:14–15
- B. The Word of the Lord in Messages: Yahweh has worked on Israel’s behalf in order to turn her sorrow into joy.7:1–8:23
 - 1. Israel inquires concerning their fasts of sorrow.7:1–7
 - a. The question of mourning their captivity is posed.....7:1–3
 - b. The question is answered: fasting was not the key to their past or present blessing.7:4–7
 - 2. Yahweh prescribes the celebration of holiness.....7:8–8:23
 - a. Israel’s scattering was due to violation of Torah with respect to treatment of fellow Israelites.7:8–14
 - b. Israel’s present blessing is due to Yahweh’s gracious restoration.8:1–17
 - 1) Yahweh is zealous for Zion.8:1–2
 - 2) Yahweh will dwell in Zion.8:3
 - 3) Jerusalem will be replenished with people.8:4–5
 - 4) It will be marvelous in Yahweh’s eyes.8:6

- 5) Yahweh will regather His people in truth and righteousness.8:7–8
 - 6) Yahweh will bless the remnant for building.....8:9–13
 - 7) Yahweh will bless them in the practice of love.....8:14–17
 - c. Israel must fast with joy and gladness over the promised blessing of Jerusalem.....8:18–23
- III. The Word of the Lord for Israel’s Continued Encouragement: Despite initial rejection, Yahweh’s King will eventually rule over the whole earth.....9:1–14:21
- A. Oracle of the Word of the Lord concerning the nations of the Gentiles: Though the nations are afflicted for the sake of Israel, Israel suffers due to abusive leaders and rejects Messiah at His first advent.9:1–11:17
 - 1. The surrounding nations will fall but Israel will be saved by a coming king.9:1–17
 - a. Neighboring states will be conquered but Israel protected. .9:1–8
 - b. Israel’s King will come with peace for the nations.9:9–10
 - c. Israel will be exalted in strength and beauty.....9:11–17
 - 2. Though Israel’s leaders will be abusive, Yahweh will regather and strengthen His people.10:1–12
 - a. Yahweh will invite Israel to ask for His blessing in light of the failure of her leaders.10:1–3a
 - b. Yahweh will regather Israel from the countries to which He had scattered her.10:3b–11
 - c. Yahweh will give Israel stability.....10:12
 - 3. Israel will be afflicted with abusive leaders.11:1–17
 - a. Israel’s shepherds will be destroyed for their failures.....11:1–3
 - b. Israel will fail to recognize their true Shepherd.11:4–14
 - 1) The nation will be fattened for slaughter under unmerciful leaders.11:4–7
 - 2) Three loathsome leaders are dismissed, signaling impending doom for the nation.....11:8–11
 - 3) The good shepherd is rejected, thus necessitating judgment.11:12–14
 - c. Israel will experience another worthless shepherd who will be maimed.11:15–17
 - B. Oracle of the Word of the Lord concerning the nation of Israel: Though Israel will suffer at the hands of the nations, she will be exalted through the rule of the Messiah King at His second advent.....12:1–14:21
 - 1. Through the final assault by her enemies Israel will experience salvation through faith in Savior-Messiah.....12:1–13:9
 - a. Introductory statement: Yahweh is creator of all things.....12:1
 - b. Yahweh will act in protection when Israel is besieged.12:1–9
 - c. Yahweh will act in salvation when Israel repents.....12:10–13:9
 - 1) He will pour out His Spirit unto repentance at the recognition of Messiah’s saving death.....12:10–14
 - 2) He will put away false prophecy because Messiah had been wounded.13:1–6
 - 3) He will refine His people because His Shepherd had been stricken.13:7–9

2. Through the final assault of her enemies Israel will be exalted through the universal rule of King-Messiah.14:1–21
 - a. Yahweh will fight against Israel's enemies.14:1–15
 - 1) Yahweh will fight from the Mount of Olives when Israel is besieged by the nations.14:1–5
 - 2) Yahweh will transform Israel's habitation.14:6–11
 - a) It will be a day of supernatural light.14:6–7
 - b) It will be a day of Yahweh's universal rule.14:8–9
 - c) It will be a day of perpetual safety for Israel.14:10–11
 - 3) Yahweh will strike Israel's enemies with plagues.14:12–15
 - b. Yahweh will exalt Israel above the nations.14:16–21

Theme Statement

Since Yahweh's future rule on earth through Messiah is certain, the faithful should not be discouraged by present opposition but continue their work of witness, as enabled by the Spirit.

Theme Development

Zechariah's prophecy is intended to be an exhortation to Israel to build the temple as well as an encouragement with respect to the Lord's ultimate sovereignty over the fortunes of that house and its builders. It has both a near view and a distant perspective. On the basis of Ezra 5:2 it is evident that the prophet's immediate aim was successful, that is, in instigating renewal of the construction effort begun by Zerubbabel. Zechariah's more remote purpose of encouragement is seen to have had fruition in the countless believers through the centuries who have expressed their hope in Messiah's advent and return, buoyed by the facets of his prophecy that have already, and most certainly, taken place. A basic lesson from Zechariah is that God's performance of His word in the past should elicit utmost confidence in the fulfillment of the promises that are yet future.

I. Prologue: The Word of the Lord on Repentance (1:1–6).

Israel's recent exile had stemmed from their obstinate departure from God and His Torah. This stood as a warning to the freed captives that a spiritual return to God was every bit as important as a physical return to the land. Without the former there was no guarantee that they would experience Yahweh's blessing in their promised domain.

II. The Word of the Lord for Israel's Present Enabling: In light of Yahweh's sovereignty over the nations the temple must be rebuilt (1:7–8:23).

This first main section of the book is marked by two specific dates, which divide the prophecy into revelation given by visions and that given by word (cf. 1:7 and 7:1). In this section,

Zechariah punctuates and reinforces the command to build the temple with assurance of Yahweh's sovereign control of the nations on Israel's behalf. Through image and precept, the prophet assures Israel that all history is under the Lord's control with the result that they may rest assured that their temple building will not be in vain, at least ultimately. In fact for Yahweh to complete His purposes on earth the temple is an intermediate necessity. Hence they should build and leave the rest to God.

A. The Word of the Lord in Visions: Yahweh is working on Israel's behalf in order to establish their kingdom (1:7–6:15).

The so-called "night visions" of this section are divided into two sets of images, arranged in a chiasmic pattern.⁴ The first set begins with a message about God's survey of the earth and ends in a signification through Joshua, the high priest. The second set begins with a signifying vision of Zerubbabel and ends with an image of God's movement over the whole earth. This division is further indicated by the wakening of Zechariah recorded in 4:1. The conclusion to the whole is indicated by the formula "the word of the Lord came to me . . .," which has to do with the crowing of Joshua as symbolic of the coming reign of the BRANCH. Even though this section contains both near and distant prophecy, it is designed for the immediate needs of this first group of returnees under Zerubbabel. Its overall message is that regardless of how it might appear, Yahweh is at work to establish His rule over the whole earth, through the leaders whom He has sovereignly chosen and enabled.

1. Four Night Visions: Yahweh is at work to avenge His people and city through His righteous servant (1:7–3:10). Far from being unconcerned about Israel, a conclusion that might have been drawn from their seventy-year exile, Yahweh is acutely aware of His special people's plight, and is intent on overturning their captivity. The vision of the four horses finds the earth at rest, that is, it finds the nations at ease though Israel is still in distress (1:7–11). The Angel of the Lord petitions Yahweh of hosts to have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and is comforted by His response (1:12–13), namely, that He is angry with the nations whom He had used as rods of discipline because they acted with evil intent toward Jerusalem and that He is resolved to see the temple rebuilt (1:14–16) and the nation replenished (1:17).

⁴ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 318 and Charles Dyer and Gene Merrill *Old Testament Explorer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 822.

By the vision of the horns and craftsmen, Yahweh indicates that he will punish the nations who had (and would yet) destroy Judah. These probably parallel the four nations described in Daniel 2 and 7, those being Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. These nations were (or will be) conquered respectively by Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Messiah.⁵ Though mere revenge is never ultimately satisfying, in the case of God's retribution the matter of righteous judgment is always at the core. Israel's wrongs at the hands of the nations will ultimately be redressed.

The vision of the measuring line looks forward to the time when Jerusalem will be so vast and so populated that walls are no longer needed (2:1-5). In that day captives will return from where ever they have been sent (2:6-7); they are so very precious to the Lord (2:8-9). Yahweh will dwell in their midst at that time (2:10-11), represented by a special One (cf. "me" — v. 11), and elevating Jerusalem above all cities (2:12). All earth will fall silent before Yahweh in that day (2:13).

The final vision of the first cycle concerns Joshua, the high priest, who stands before the Angel of Yahweh, opposed by Satan and in filthy clothes (3:1-3). On the basis of the removal of iniquity and the replacement of his clothing with rich robes, Joshua is called to rule over Yahweh's realm (3:6-7). This was symbolic of times to come when Israel would be cleansed and restored through Yahweh's servant, the BRANCH (3:8-10). These times would be characterized by peace and prosperity (3:10). This climactic vision of the first cycle, emphasizes the necessity of a Leader who could bring cleansing from sin, as the spiritual necessity to the full expression of God's kingdom. Thus, at an early point in Zechariah's prophecy, Messiah is set forth as the crucial agent of Yahweh's redemptive program.

2. Four Waking visions: Yahweh is at work, through His Spirit-empowered servant, to establish His witness on the earth (4:1-6:15). Whereas the first four visions focus on avenging Israel's mistreatment by the nations, the second cycle focuses on the effect of Messiah's advent on the world itself. In an inverse pattern, the cycles begin with the introduction of Messiah, as symbolized by Zerubbabel, and conclude with God's sway over the whole earth.

The vision of the lampstand and olive trees (4:1-13) probably looks at God's establishment of a witness to himself by means of the reestablishment of the temple and all its attendant articles and rites, the lampstand being one of the chief items in the Holy Place. As

⁵ See *ibid.*, 823.

Joshua signified Messiah as high priest, so Zerubbabel signifies Him as king. Zerubbabel will complete the temple by the empowerment of the Spirit (4:6–7) in such a way that Yahweh’s involvement will be validated (4:8–10). Once again, the presence of a unique person (“me”—v. 9) will embody the Lord’s presence. The two “anointed ones” must conjoin the roles of Joshua and Zerubbabel, thus joining the office of priest and king, fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the immediate effect of the chiastic structure of these vision cycles serves to join in one person these two offices, so necessary to the realization of Israel’s hope and glory. He will be the key to the temple’s glory.

The vision of the flying scroll looks at God’s judgment of the land by His Torah—the two curses being related to commands from the two sections of the Decalogue (5:1–4). Yahweh’s witness will be established when he applies the righteousness of Torah in removing all that offends from the earth. This might be taken as referring to Israel alone or to everyone on earth. If the former, then Zechariah is making the point that even though Israel has been returned from exile, each Israelite must continue to live in submission to Yahweh under His Torah.

The vision of the woman in a basket looks at the advent of righteousness in general through the confining of wickedness (5:1–4). Finally, the vision of the four chariots represents the giving of rest to the Spirit of Yahweh, apparently signifying the completion of His work of bringing peace to the earth (6:1–8). While judgment may be implied in going to the north (Babylon perhaps) the end result is that God’s Spirit is at rest (contrast the rest of the offending nations in 1:11). What was begun with respect to the judgment of Babylon by Cyrus (1:21) will be finalized by Messiah. The rest that ensues from His work will never be interrupted.

3. Conclusion to the Visions—the crowning of Joshua: The BRANCH will rule in peace (6:9–15). Since the crisis issue for Israel was where they stood as a nation among the nations, the first section is fittingly concluded with a symbolic enthronement of the coming King. Zechariah makes a crown from donated material and places it on the head of the high priest, Joshua (6:9–11). Once again the office of priest and king are conjoined in one individual, the BRANCH, who will build the (future) temple and rule in peace (6:12–13; cf. 3:6–4:14). With the crown deposited as a memorial object in the temple, others will be encouraged to continue in temple building (6:14–15).

B. The Word of the Lord in Messages: Yahweh has worked on Israel’s behalf in order to turn her sorrow into joy (7:1–8:23).

The third piece of dated material continues the Lord's revelation through Zechariah, though by means of spoken messages rather than symbolic visions. The messages are given in response to the people's desire to know whether or not to continue their fasts of mourning over the temple's destruction (7:1–3). Yahweh responds in such a way as to properly relate His sovereignty and Israel's responsibility.

1. Israel inquires concerning their fasts of sorrow (7:1–7). In response to their request, Yahweh indicates that those fasts had been more of a self-centered exercise of sorrow than a true act of contrition. What they should have been (and now needed to be) concerned with was true obedience (7:4–7). This was the key to their temporal blessing, not their ritual acts of manipulation. Zechariah is directed to cast the exile in its true light, summarized in three parts. First, Israel's exile was due to violation of Torah as evidenced in their mistreatment of each other; this they were now to correct (7:8–14). Second, Zechariah affirms, through a staccato series of "Thus says the Lord," that Israel's present blessing is due to Yahweh's grace in restoring them from captivity, not their deservedness nor their fasts (8:1–17). He is jealous for Zion after the elective counsels of His own heart (8:2), and obligated to preserve and restore Israel out of faithfulness to His covenant promises (cf. 8:8; 13). As a result of this present graciousness and the future prospect of Jerusalem's elevation to the head of the nations (8:22–23), Israel is commanded to hold fasts of joy and celebration (8:18–19). Only a remnant has been restored to the land (8:11). However, in light of the past, this should be sufficient reason to motivate right behavior (8:16–17) and confident expectation of the fulfillment of all God's promises concerning His city and people.

III. The Word of the Lord for Israel's Continued Encouragement: Despite initial rejection, Yahweh's King will eventually rule over the whole earth (9:1–14:21).

Chapter nine presents a marked change in "mood, outlook, style, and composition."⁶ Whereas the first series of prophecies (chapters 1–8) deal with events contemporary to Israel during Zechariah's ministry, the second part is dominated by an eschatological perspective. With respect to Israel's fortunes on the stage of world powers, their only real hope was in the coming of One who would defeat and dominate all nations, no matter how powerful and fierce they may have been historically. However, His coming would meet initial rejection (9:1–11:17) before issuing in acceptance and triumph (12:1–14:21).

⁶ Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 239.

A. Oracle of the Word of the Lord concerning the nations of the Gentiles: Though the nations are afflicted for the sake of Israel, Israel suffers due to abusive leaders and rejects Messiah at His first advent (9:1–11:17).

The first eschatological message begins on a positive note but ends negatively. Zechariah predicts that the nations who have troubled Israel will be dealt with decisively, paving the way for the coming of her anticipated King. However, her intermediate shepherds will initially taint that King's arrival so that they will reject Him and his reign.

1. The surrounding nations will fall but Israel will be saved by a coming king (9:1–17). By prophetically tracing the advance of Alexander the Great in 333 B.C.,⁷ Zechariah begins to assure Israel that the neighboring nations who have abused her will be judged (9:1–8). This will be followed (though the oracle does not say how long it follows) by a lowly King riding into Jerusalem with salvation (9:9). In this way messianic expectation was fostered over the long term. The result of the coming of this lowly King would be the liberation of Jerusalem, peace to the nations and a world-wide dominion (9:10). Once again, no mention of the exact time frame is included, just the order of events. This is an example of the telescoping of messianic prophecy, so common in eschatological passages of the Old Testament. As a result of His humble advent and victorious ascendancy, Israel will be exalted in strength and beauty (9:11–17). Having been set free and restored because of Yahweh's faithfulness to His covenant with them (9:11–13), Israel will be made into a beautiful adornment to their God (9:14–17).

2. Though Israel's shepherds will be abusive, Yahweh will regather and strengthen His people (10:1–12). The advent of Messiah would make it possible for Israel to ask and receive the latter rains of blessing, an eschatological concept elsewhere,⁸ since it was Yahweh who controlled all such sources, in contrast to the idols and diviners that had been trusted for blessing in the past (10:1-2). Such illegitimate objects of blessing only left Israel as sheep without a shepherd (10:2b). All of that will be rectified when Yahweh visits His flock and regathers it from among the nations (10:3–11). At that time Israel will be stable (10:12).

3. Israel will be afflicted with abusive leaders (11:1–17). However, in the meantime Israel will suffer further abuse at the hands of her shepherd-leaders. This section opens with a poem

⁷ See Dyer and Merrill, *Explorer*, 828 and F. Dwayne Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament Edition*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984),

⁸ See Hosea 6:3; Joel 2:21–25.

on the judgment of certain shepherds, referring perhaps to some of the coming rulers who would seek only their own interests (or perhaps this speaks of previous kings of Israel who had led the nation into captivity⁹). Through a prophetic enactment Zechariah depicts Israel's experience with her rulers. For them the nation had only existed for personal enrichment, just like fattened animals (11:4–7). Instead of leading the nation into the blessing and unity entailed in her covenant relationship with Yahweh, these shepherds led the nation into destruction (11:8–11). When the True Shepherd, represented by Zechariah in his ministry, would come the nation would severely underestimate His value and thereby be scattered (11:12–14). The only thing to expect after that would be the advent of a foolish and worthless shepherd who will have to be dealt with in an especially harsh way (11:15–17). This prophetic image will come to its ultimate fulfillment in the diabolical ruler of the last days (cf. Rev. 13:1–18; 14:9–12; 19:19–21; Dan. 11:36–45).¹⁰ The tragedy of this first major eschatological section lies in the fact that whereas Yahweh had undertaken to deal severely with Israel's failing leaders and sends the perfect Shepherd instead, when He arrived Israel did not properly value Him, dismissing Him out of hand to their own destruction.

B. Oracle of the Word of the Lord concerning the nation of Israel: Though Israel will suffer at the hands of the nations, she will be exalted through the rule of the Messiah-King at His second advent (12:1–14:21).

The rejection of Messiah, the True and Good Shepherd, at His first advent left the nation in a state of disfavor and disunity until it experienced final deliverance at His second advent. Thus, this final section begins at the “bottom” and proceeds toward the heights of Israel's final salvation and exaltation. Two things will need to happen for God's plan of universal blessing to be accomplished: (1) Israel will need to experience physical and spiritual deliverance and (2) Messiah will have to return and rule the earth on David's throne. These two themes are the substance of Zechariah's climactic prophecy.

1. Through the final assault by her enemies Israel will experience salvation through faith in Savior-Messiah (12:1–13:9). Just as the Creator is able to control all things toward the fashioning of what He pleases (12:1), so He is able to wield the events of history in the

⁹ Merrill takes the latter view—cf. *Haggai*, 284-87.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 302-3. It seems that since this is an oracle concerning the nations it may be better to view all of the shepherds of this chapter as referring to the Gentile rulers that Israel would experience until Messiah took up His rule.

accomplishment of His designs for Israel (12:2–9). When all nations shall lay siege to Jerusalem, drunken with lust for her destruction (12:2), Yahweh will protect her and strike her attackers, glorifying Himself in the process (12:3–9). However, He will not only effect the physical deliverance of His chosen people, they will also experience national, spiritual conversion (12:10–14). By means of the outpouring of His Spirit (which was initiated at Pentecost—Acts 2) Israel will come to the realization that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah—they will look on Him whom they have pierced. Their mourning of contrition will evidence their faith and all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26). The result will be forgiveness, with the consequent restoration of fellowship (13:1) and the putting away of all vestiges of that which had broken their fellowship in the first place (13:2–6), namely, the very spirit that produces all assaults upon the truth. It is because the Shepherd had been stricken that Israel could undergo purification (spiritually and nationally) and finally become in truth the people of Yahweh (12:7–9). Hence, Israel will be delivered not only from the destructive hatred of its enemies but from its own sin and rebellion.

2. Through the final assault of her enemies Israel will be exalted through the universal rule of King-Messiah (14:1–21). Once Israel has trusted in Messiah, her enemies will be finally defeated and her exaltation to the head of the nations accomplished (cf. Deut 28:13). The Lord will fight against all of Israel's enemies, utterly destroying them (14:1–5). Then He will transform Israel's physical habitation and personally rule over the earth from her midst (14:6–11). Jerusalem shall dwell in safety (14:11) because her enemies will have been struck with great plagues (14:12–15). All nations will worship the King, who will rule with a rod of iron, dispensing immediate consequences for failing to do Him homage (14:16–19). Israel will be blessed and will be a blessing as a people devoted to their Savior and King in holiness (14:20–21). Thus, Zechariah lays the capstone of Old Testament prophecy as it relates to the perfection of Yahweh's purposes in the rule of His King-Son.

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