

# **Zechariah**

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# Zechariah

Zechariah is a post exilic prophet. That means he functioned after 586 B.C.E., and almost certainly after 530 C.E. He was contemporary with Haggai and Malachi. His book is in two parts - each part seemingly very different. We'll look at that issue when it comes up. Zechariah has had a profound influence on the N.T., especially in the book of Revelation. But he has a message of his own to give, and that's what we are going to be looking for.

Our main texts are the Masoretic, the Septuagint (LXX), the Targum, the Peshitta and the Vulgate. Unfortunately, the Dead Sea scrolls have given us only a fragment of 1:1-4, but this need not concern us unduly. The transmission of the O.T. texts has been, generally, very good.

## Zechariah 1

**In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:**

**"The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty. Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? "Then they repented and said, 'The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'" (1:1-7)**

Zechariah starts off by laying out the Old Testament Gospel.

**"The Lord was angry with your forefathers."**

This is, theologically, a difficult start. God was "angry." (Heb "qatsaph") This translates as:-

- \* to be displeased, be angry, fret oneself, be wroth.
- \* to be full of wrath, to be furious.
- \* to provoke to wrath or anger.
- \* to put oneself in a rage, anger oneself.

The Hebrews may have wanted to guard God's holiness - that's why they used the "Yahweh" for God. But they saw him as an emotional being. He has feelings, and one of them is "anger." We see the same in Jesus. (Mark 3:5) It's worth noting here that the O.T. does not accept the expression "God hates sin but loves the sinner." Here, within the covenantal promises which his people had broken, God's anger is directed towards "your forefathers." We need not make a big deal of this, but just note how easily nice sounding phrases slip into our understanding.

**"Return to me, and I will return to you."** This is classic repentance theology. If we turn to him, confessing, God is ever ready (and only he knows why!) to turn back to us. **Our Gospel, O.T. and N.T. is as gospel of love,** of a God who can't wait to forgive. We meet this in our study of Romans chapter 6. Let's not give in to the old hackneyed "The O.T. God is a God of anger, and the N.T. God is a God of love." This kind of mis-thinking riddles the Church, but is not biblical at all.

There is also a consequence for not turning - **"Where are your forefathers now?"** (v5) The people of Zechariah's day hardly needed reminding of what happened to the people who rejected Jeremiah's message. There are two ways, no matter how much our generation wants to rubbish judgment. Remember Romans 6 - "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life." It's the same thing here - there is a choice, and making no choice, ignoring God's call, is seen by him as a choice.

**"Where are the prophets? Did not my word...overtake your forefathers?"**

Two things here - the word or the Lord endures forever. Killing the prophets makes no difference. The genuine word endures the passing of generations, and will achieve that for which it was spoken, though a thousand years pass between the speaking and the action. Trying to ignore God's revealed word is not a sensible option. I take great encouragement from this myself, and so do all prophets. Being ignored is part of the calling, but we cannot be ultimately ignored, if we have spoken truth.

The word of the Lord **"overtakes."** has a hunting background. The Lord's word pursues, as a hunt pursues game. Wow! Better not be seen to be taking it lightly then!

**"Then they repented."** Who repented? The forefathers, as they reflected on things in Exile, or Zechariah's listeners? Does it really matter? The O.T. Gospel has power - power to challenge and power to change, just as the N.T. gospel does. We are blessed by having it all manifested in Jesus, but even our O.T. predecessors could know the forgiveness of God.

**On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo.**

**During the night I had a vision—and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses.**

**I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are." Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth."**

**And they reported to the angel of the Lord, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace."**

**Then the angel of the Lord said, "Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?" So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.**

**Then the angel who was speaking to me said, "Proclaim this word: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity.'**

**"Therefore, this is what the Lord says: 'I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,' declares the Lord Almighty. "Proclaim further: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.' " (7-17)**

This is the first of a number of visions which Zechariah has in chapters 1-8. They disclose the purpose of God for Zion. They follow a similar pattern:-

- \* Introductory words.
- \* Vision which Zechariah sees.
- \* Angelic explanation.
- \* Oracle. (Usually)

Zechariah starts by seeing a man on a red horse, but after that things get a bit confusing. Hold on to the fact that the first "angel" Zechariah sees is the one who is with him though all the visions. Is this the same one as is standing among the Myrtle trees? Who then is the "angel of the Lord" who was also standing among the Myrtle trees? It appears to work like this:

The angel on the red horse asks the angel who is standing among the myrtle trees. Also, (so it appears) the angel of the Lord is standing among the myrtle trees. If this isn't the one that the riders on the horses report to, who then reports it to the Lord? (Sometimes the angel of the lord is a title for God himself - not so here apparently.) Horses are symbols of war, and of prestige.

**“I saw”** (v8) is translated “I had a vision.” Note that this is not a dream, even though it came at night. He sees emissaries of the Lord on horses, having returned from a mission. The colours, as you can imagine, have produced reams of comment. But the problem is that we are not completely sure what the colours are, and no attempt is made by the prophet, or his companion, to explain them.

Take “red”. This has been translated as red, reddish brown, speckled (Latin, Syriac) May be they are details which were just that – background details, and no more.

**“The whole world at rest and in peace.”** (v11) Good news or bad? Apparently, as we look at verse 15, this is bad news. The world may be at peace, but there is trouble all around, and as a consequence, the Lord has to plan to return to his people to give them peace and security. What date can we place on this period? Choices are various, but let's pass them over - this discussion doesn't forward our thinking. What Zechariah wants to know is when will the Lord act to bring peace to Jerusalem, and it's a reasonable question.

The returning exiles didn't exactly find things easy. Haggai chapter 1 shows the poor economic conditions of the people, and Nehemiah shows the dangerous security situation, with no wall or defense. The world scene was hardly stable. Egypt was always a giant waiting to wake up and strike. Cyrus had his hands full, and the nations surrounding Israel were still strong. *It's as we grasp this situation, that we begin to feel the heart of Zechariah. He wants to encourage the people, but what were God's purposes? They had offended him and this had led to their own downfall.* They have tried to respond to Ezekiel, Haggai and Zechariah, but things were hardly going well.

Now God speaks: - he is angry with those nations who are threatening his people. Is this fair? After all, he used them as agents of his judgment. But they overstepped the mark. Now the Lord is going to have mercy, (compassion, tender love) on his people. He is going to return, (an opposite to the departure seen by Ezekiel) and the building (measuring line) could begin. The walls weren't going to be built for many decades yet, but the reconstruction could begin, because Yahweh had said so. He would comfort (See Isaiah 40) his people, who had found no comfort up till now.

Here we see a classic prophet in action. His task was to look beyond the present, into the spiritual realm, to see what is happening. He sees that the days of hardship are coming to an end. God is going to provide comfort, prosperity and new security to his people. What a contrast from what Jeremiah had been called on to say. Note also that God's judgment, once it is over, it is over. God bears no grudges.

**Then I looked up—and there before me were four horns! I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these?" He answered me, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem."**

**Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. I asked, "What are these coming to do?" He answered, "These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head, but the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people." (18-20)**

Horns signify strength and power - as they do in Revelation. Our forefathers were tempted to define the four horns, but there is no biblical support for this. We could just as easily say "four" represents the four points of the compass - in other words totality. There is an order in verse 19 - "Judah, Israel and Jerusalem", because it is usually the other way round. The LXX omits "Israel".

The craftsmen overthrow the horns. It is odd that craftsmen would do this, and not armies. I don't think we need to push the imagery here. Basically, this second vision just confirms and strengthens the first. However great world powers might think they are, they have met their match in Yahweh, who will defeat them and prosper his people.

## **Zechariah 2**

**Then I looked up—and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand! I asked, "Where are you going?" He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is."**

**Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord 'and I will be its glory within.'**

**"Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north," declares the Lord, "for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven," declares the Lord.**

**"Come, O Zion! Escape, you who live in the Daughter of Babylon!" For this is what the Lord Almighty says: "After he has honored me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye - I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me.**

**"Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling." (1-13)**

It's difficult for us to appreciate how hard it was for the Hebrews to lose Jerusalem. It was the Lord's sanctuary, the heart of the covenant, and the place of the Temple. The thought of it being lost was unthinkable. But lost it was, and even then, for the ten years between the first and the second deportations, the exiles in Babylon refused to listen to Ezekiel's warning, while those who had escaped to Egypt were nowhere in their understanding, blaming Jeremiah for preventing them worshipping the queen of heaven.

The Exiles had to come to terms with their loss, however, and even on their return, their hearts were still heavy. Things were not working out well, and they were obviously fearful that Jerusalem would be lost again.

We have to remember this when we read Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The prophets had to heal a terrible wound. Here, in chapter 2, we see Zechariah getting down to his task.

**Then I looked up—and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand! I asked, "Where are you going?" He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is." Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord 'and I will be its glory within.**

The man with the measuring line signifies the preparations for building. Remember, this is happening in the heavenlies. Zechariah is saying, in effect "The building has started!" But almost immediately another messenger proclaims "Jerusalem is going to be massive!" God's people in Zechariah's day were the same as us - we think too small!

When did this prophecy find its fulfillment - in Nehemiah's day, or Jesus day? I think we have to say that Jerusalem only overflowed when God's Christian people expanded all over the world. We are the ultimate fulfillment of this word. This is not only exciting, but is a very Christian way of viewing the prophecies of the O.T. This is not a misuse of biblical prophecy. We have viewed the word in context, and seen that as a prophecy, it didn't find its fulfillment, even in the days of Jesus. So we look deeper, and have to say that spiritual Jerusalem didn't overflow until the Apostles had fulfilled the command "To Jerusalem, Judea and the ends of the earth." We might even have to go further and say that this prophecy finds its fulfillment when the New Jerusalem finally comes down from heaven.

**"A city so big, it doesn't have the space for walls!"** The immediate response would be – "no walls! How are we going to keep the enemy out?" Answer:-

**And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord 'and I will be its glory within.**

God is going to protect, and God is going to add his glory to the city. So there was no need of walls. It takes courage to trust solely in the protection of a God we cannot see. This is the heart of what the post exilic prophets were trying to say. Things had to be different. The people had trusted in walls and the Temple, but this had not protected them. Now Zechariah is asking for a new heart, (as Ezekiel did before him) a new spirituality and a new confidence in spiritual things.

This is a big challenge, and a good example of how thoroughly we have to study Zechariah, if we are not going to miss the message. The chapter ends with a repeat of the promise to Jerusalem.

### **Zechariah 3**

**Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"**

**Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."**

**Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.**

**The angel of the Lord gave this charge to Joshua: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.**

**"Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. "'In that day each of you will invite his neighbour to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the Lord Almighty."**

Having dealt with the world situation and Jerusalem, now he is going to prophesy about the position of the high priest, and the establishment, once again, of true religion in Jerusalem.

**Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"**

This time, we are standing in the heavenly court. There seems to be a trial in progress. The angel of the Lord, probably on this occasion the Lord himself, stands in the court. Joshua, the high Priest is also there, and so is Satan, more precisely “The Satan”, the accuser. This same figure occurs in the court scene in Job chapter 1. He is the accuser, not yet the fully demonic force which we meet in the N.T.

Notice the Lord's words, **“The Lord rebuke you Satan.”** There is no discussion with the demonic, just the rebuke. (See these same words in Jude 1:19) This is a strong word, in both O.T. and N.T. understanding. We should take note of how the Lord deals with the accusations of the enemy. He may attack, but a rebuke sends him away. One writer says “When the Lord rebukes, you stay rebuked!”

**“The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem”** - yet another encouragement to the people to trust in the Lord alone. **“A brand plucked from the burning”** ( see also Amos 4:11) was obviously a popular saying, and one which John Wesley applied to his own salvation.

**Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."**

Joshua's **“filthy clothes”** have been variously interpreted, but in some way they symbolize the sin of the Nation. Then comes another pearl of great price from Zechariah - **“I have taken away your sins.”** Isaiah had a similar experience. God is a forgiving God, and a God who can forgive nations. How can he do this with just a word, when we believe that the blood of Jesus is the key to forgiveness? Two things here:

- \* **First**, this is the O.T. Gospel, a “type” of what is to come in the fullness of the N.T.
- \* **Second**, our God is a forgiving God, and if he chooses to forgive with a word, who are we to argue!

**“And I will put rich garments on you.”** It is not just forgiveness which God offers, it is also restoration, and a new beginning.

Think how encouraging this must have been to the people. Not only was God going to tabernacle with them, he was going to forgive them, by symbolically forgiving the high priest, and by setting him back in his position as the spiritual head, watchman and intercessor of the nation.

**The angel of the Lord gave this charge to Joshua: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.**

The Old Testament Gospel isn't without conditions. Having been forgiven, Joshua must walk in the Lord's ways. This is no easy believism Gospel. It's got teeth!

**“Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.**

**“The branch”**

The branch is a servant. (See Isaiah 40-43) He also reappears in ch 6:12-13, where the identity of the servant is Zerubbabel. But is Zechariah looking forward to the stone which the builder rejected, (1 Peter 2:7-8)?

**See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. 'In that day each of you will invite his neighbour to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the Lord Almighty."**

A sudden change of picture from “branch” to “stone” has caused a lot of textual rearrangement by different translators. But notice how easily I slipped from “branch” to “stone” above, when I quoted 1 Peter. The stone could be a foundation stone. This would explain the inscription. It was and is common to find inscriptions on foundation stones. However, there was also engraving on the stones on the High Priest's breastplate. (Ex 28:9-12 and 21) There is some virtue in this, as the stone and engraving are linked to the forgiveness of sin.

**“Seven eyes”** seems to be right, although R.S.V. translates “eyes” as “facets.”

Now try this! One translation changes “eye” for “spring.” (Hebrew could support.) Then the cleansing of the land in a single day would be accomplished by the opening of seven springs. As Moses struck the rock and a spring of water came out, so God would cleanse the land in a single day. (See Zech. 12, where the prophet says a fountain will be opened etc.)

**“In that day”** is not just any day, but THE day, (the last day) when God will accomplish his final purposes. Then harmony would be restored to humanity.

*This chapter is as thrilling as the last one. In Chapter 2, God would tabernacle with his people in Jerusalem. In Chapter 3, he will cleanse his people, restore true religion, and the people could look forward to “that day!”*

## **Zechariah 4**

**<sup>1</sup> Then the angel who talked with me returned and woke me up, like someone awakened from sleep.<sup>2</sup> He asked me, “What do you see?”**

**I answered, “I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lamps on it, with seven channels to the lamps.<sup>3</sup> Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.”**

**4 I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" 5 He answered, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I replied.**

**6 So he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.**

**7 "What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!' "**

**8 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. 10 "Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.**

**"(These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the earth.)"**

**11 Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstands?"**

**12 Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?"**

**13 He replied, "Do you not know what these are?"**

**"No, my lord," I said. 14 So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."**

After all the promise of the previous chapters, any human would be asking "How can all this possibly come to pass? It's all so big, and we are a small struggling community." It's to this attitude that Zechariah now challenges.

**"I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.**

This lampstand is not the Menorah, the Jewish lamp with which we are familiar. The earliest example of this we have found is 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. All we can say is that Zechariah saw an inspiring lamp. The explanation of the two olive trees has to wait till later.

**So he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.**

This may be a misplaced oracle, but it is a verse which has inspired God's people ever since it was uttered. For Zechariah's time it was most appropriate. Put simply - "Israel, remember your God!" Whatever forces were opposing the post exilic community, they were nothing to Yahweh Sabbaoth. The returning exiles were a

disheartened and beaten people. In such circumstances it is easy to lose focus. The prophet turns their eyes back to the powerful God they know, and who has made a covenant with them.

But take this verse out of this context, and put it in any context, anywhere, any when, where God's people are struggling, and it fills us with power and hope.

Where does a verse like this fit in to Israel's history? They rejected the Messiah - even killed him. Does that mean God's covenant with them is ended? Does the verse now read "Not by might, not by power but by my Spirit for the new Israel only."? God doesn't cancel his covenants. But where does that leave Israel today? Whenever I study these post exilic prophets, I always end up facing this question. Apostle Paul has an answer in Romans 9-11, but I have always felt a little unconvinced by those chapters. Difficult isn't it?

**"Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.**

The encouragements just keep flowing. In context, the prophet is saying that Israel will know the truths of the promises when they see Zerubbabel getting the building started. But the pearl for us is **"Who despises the day of small things?"** We live in a culture where success, power and size are everything. But this isn't, and has never been God's way. He loves to use the small, the irrelevant, the helpless, and the hopeless to begin his works. Small things may start small, but they can grow. What a relief!

**So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."**

So back to the olive trees. The descriptions are not easy to interpret, as we have little or no archaeological evidence to help us. In Zechariah's context, they probably represent Joshua and Zerubbabel, or they could represent the Temple and the Jewish community. (Or both) There is a reference to them in Revelation. (11:3)

Taking an overview of this chapter, it might go like this: - The post exilic community, built on community and Temple, led and guarded by Joshua and Zerubbabel, fed spiritually by the Spirit of the Lord, will achieve his purposes. From the Christian perspective, we also are a community, sustained by the Spirit, led by the Lord. We too have a covenant and a destiny. We too are watched over by the power of God. We too are facing hard times. We too must draw on the spirit of the Lord, obey his voice, and do that which is set before us. So whether we were listening to this from Zechariah himself (the Jewish people) or hearing it through the Spirit (The Christian people) it's a pretty super piece of prophecy. Be uplifted.

## **Zechariah 5**

**1 I looked again—and there before me was a flying scroll! 2 He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. " 3 And he said to me, "This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. 4 The Lord Almighty declares, 'I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.' "Then the angel who was speaking to me came forward and said to me, "Look up and see what this is that is appearing." 6 I asked, "What is it?" He replied, "It is a measuring basket." And he added, "This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land."**

**7 Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman! 8 He said, "This is wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth. 9 Then I looked up—and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth. 10 "Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me. 11 He replied, "To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When the house is ready, the basket will be set there in its place."**

These images, at first glance, are a little strange! Not the sort of thing we might read in our newspapers today, although the truths behind them should be read. This chapter is sometimes entitled "Evil meets retribution", and that's where we are in this sequence of prophecies. We've had the promises, and now must come the cleansing of the people. God's grace is total, but evil has to be dealt with, and remember we are looking at the OT Gospel here. The blood of Jesus is still to come.

### **The scroll.**

The scroll must not be rolled up, and stacked in some archive, where it can be forgotten. It must be public.( "flying") It reminds of the moral law, and the "curses" which go with covenant breaking. In the O.T., covenants contained blessings and cursings - blessings for those who kept the covenant, and curses for those who disobey. The scroll is reminding the people of God's law, and warning that the curses element is about to become active. Notice that the sword is active in itself. God's word does not need human agents for it to be active. The word from his mouth lives, because of where it comes from. Prophets have always known this. Even speaking God's words in an empty place will activate them. We don't need an audience, and nor does God.

## The iniquity in the basket

Zechariah sees the everyday measuring vessel, found in every home, for measuring grain. **“This is iniquity”** he says. A more accepted translation (maybe) is “This is their eye.” Remembering that giving short measure was one of the things prophets spoke against again and again we get this meaning “Their eyes (heart, motives) are full of corruption.” Bit of a brain bender, but it works. Zechariah is saying that there is corruption and moral laxity in almost every home in the post exilic community. There is a desperate need for repentance, (See Zech. 1:2)

The woman? “Evil has a face!” The N.T. also personifies evil

## The two women

These two spiritual beings remove evil. God's grace is evident here. He willingly and freely removes wickedness from his people. (Parallel is the sacrifice of Calvary) He takes the wickedness to Babylon, international centre of wickedness, the antithesis of Jerusalem, and the last place destroyed in Revelation, before the coming of the new Jerusalem.

This chapter has a lot of interest for us.

\*It reminds us, first and foremost, that **we are not dualists**. We do not believe in two kingdoms, of equal power, slugging it out for world domination. There is only ONE kingdom, the Kingdom of God. Wickedness may, in his purposes, have a place, but its defeat is total. (Notice there was no fight from the woman in the basket). O.T. and N.T. are in total agreement here. When we lose sight of this truth, we spend too much time fighting Satan, and not enough time bringing in and living the Kingdom.

\* **God word has power**. The scroll was active, whether or not it was read. This ought to encourage us to keep reciting scripture over people, places and situations. Nothing may seem to happen, but in the heavenly places, everything has happened.

\* **Victory is assured**. The basket will be dumped in Babylon, and Babylon will fall. World powers come and go. Our God reigns forever.

## **Zechariah 6**

**1 I looked up again—and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains—mountains of bronze! 2 The first chariot had red horses, the second black, 3 the third white, and the fourth dappled—all of them powerful. 4 I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?" 5 The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. 6 The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south."**

**7 When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth. 8 Then he called to me, "Look, those going toward the North Country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north."**

**9 The word of the Lord came to me: 10 "Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. 11 Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak. 12 Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. 3 It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.' 14 The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. 15 Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the Lord, and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God**

### **1-8: The four horses.**

There is similarity between this and the first vision of horses. Again, the Lord sends his representatives out to patrol the earth. There has been a suggestion by some scholars that the first vision took place at night, and this one at daybreak, symbolizing a new beginning for God's people - unproveable, but, theologically, possible. We have discussed colours before.

## **1 I looked up again—and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains—mountains of bronze**

The two mountains symbolise the gateway to heaven. There have been many suggestions about them. See the two bronze pillars of 1 Kings 7: 13-22, which, in the apocalyptic mind, have grown. For bronze - see Jeremiah's call (Jer 1:18)

## **5 The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world**

It's encouraging to see that even Zechariah is sometimes puzzled, and has to ask for explanation. The four spirits/winds (Hebrew is "ruhot" - derivative of "ruah") go throughout the earth. God rules the world, and he sends his messengers for their report. What an encouragement to Israel. For us, "all authority on heaven and earth is given to me (Matt 28:20) does the same job. God rules, and as we are his people, we are safe. Yet again, we see the continuity of O.T. and N.T.

## **8 Then he called to me, "Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north."**

So – who is this angel, making such a bold announcement? It can only be the angel of the lord, and indeed the Lord himself - **"my spirit"**

Victory is gained by the Lord in "the North" - in other words in the place from which all (or most) evil has come. God's people can be at peace. Ultimate victory is guaranteed. The victory is that of a person, not an event. We see the same in Revelation, where the victory is not Armageddon, but that of the rider on the white horse. Spiritual, and therefore physical, victory is about a person. Again, O.T. and N.T. are in perfect harmony.

So the angels are meant as yet another encouragement to God's returned exiles. They need to repent, but all is well if they do. The Lord of all the earth will protect them, and give them ultimate security. If ever there was a message we need to live by and proclaim, in our dark days, it must be this one.

## **The crown for Joshua (9-15)**

Not a vision here but a prophetic word. It's been argued that it has been displaced from another part of the book. The word begins not with the angelic figures, but with the prophet, addressing people he knows and can see. (Must have been a relief!)

**9 The word of the Lord came to me: 10 "Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon.**

These names of returning exiles from Babylon all express a relationship with the Lord:- Toboiah "The Lord is my good", Yedaiah "God knows and cares for" and Josiah "The Lord supports" and Zephaniah "The Lord hides" . Obviously, some measure of faith survived in Babylon.

**11 Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak**

Hebrew has plural for "crown." This could be just a superlative way of identifying the crown. Who was crowned? Joshua according to our text, but Zerubbabel is the spiritual leader of the community. This is the kind of detail which escapes a cursory reading of the text. My complaint of the modern church is that we ignore these tiny issues. But once we start doing that, we will soon start picking and choosing what we want to believe and preach

For some reason, Joshua gets the crown!

**Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord.**

The mystery deepens, because it is Zerubbabel. Get a hold of this:

\* "Whose name is the Branch" is a cryptic description of the phrase "Lo, a man, shoot by name" and this could be an allusion to Zerubbabel's name, which means "Shoot of Babylon." Anyway, it was Zerubbabel who was the Temple builder (4:9) But there's more.

\* "Branch of the Lord" is from Isaiah 4:2, and refers to the cleansing of the land. Jeremiah's use of the term (23:5) 33:15) refers to the coming Davidic king, where sin will be atoned for. David himself saw himself as a branch from the stump of Jesse, from which the divine King would come.

Here's our deduction. "The Branch" was a figure which was expected by the people to fulfill both physical and spiritual functions - king and priest. So both Zerubbabel (spiritual) and Joshua (physical) would wear the "branch" crown. So probably Zerubbabel and Joshua both understood this, when Joshua got the crown. This understanding explains verse 14 - And **there will be harmony**

Why bother with all this technicality! I'm just a simple Christian who wants to live for Jesus. This is why Islam makes such advances - because so many of God's people have forgotten their heritage, and won't go to the trouble to study the Bible in its detail.

So - "The Branch" represents a combination of physical and spiritual leadership, which will ultimately find its fulfillment in Jesus – Lord of all, King and Priest. ( See Hebrews.)

## **Zechariah 7**

**1 In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev. 2 The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat the Lord 3 by asking the priests of the house of the Lord Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"**

**4 Then the word of the Lord Almighty came to me: 5 "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? 6 And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? 7 Are these not the words the Lord proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?' "**

**8 And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: 9 "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.' 11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry.**

**13 " 'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the Lord Almighty. 14 'I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.' "**

The discussion in this chapter spreads over into chapter 8. The background is that a delegation from Babylon has come to ask questions about liturgical issues, so that the Jews in Jerusalem and Babylon could keep their calendars co-coordinated.

## **Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"**

The fifth month marked the destruction of the Temple. The ninth day of the fourth month marks the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem. The fast of the seventh month marked the murder of Gedeliah and the tenth day of the tenth month marked the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's besieging of the city. The delegation do not get a direct answer, (typical of prophets) but a sermon. (v4-14)

The sermon asks -"**Do you fast for God, or for yourselves?"** The destruction of the whole land, North and South gives a clear answer. Their fasts were not pure, their remorse not genuine. They had all the outward signs of religion but none of its power. If their fasting had been genuine, then it would have resulted in works of goodness - **Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.**' In the prophet's estimation, the absence of this fruit proves the emptiness of their fasting.

**11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry.**

Zechariah exposes the hearts of those who had gone before. They "turned a stubborn shoulder" to the Lord, set their hearts like flint against any communication from the Lord, and so paid the ultimate price:-

**13 " 'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the Lord Almighty.**

I remember teaching this once, and someone got really angry, telling me that God would never do this. I pointed out that I didn't write the bible, only expounded it! But if there is no judgment on sin and rebellion, then our whole concept of a moral God and a moral universe is fatally flawed. Righteousness demands judgment. There is no theological way round this argument. Loving Father wants only our return, but righteous Yahweh must punish unconfessed and hardened sin. Many, even among God's people, don't like this theology, and seek to weaken it. But they are failing to truly perceive the nature of a loving God, who loves us, but has to judge those who reject him. Judgment doesn't show harshness, but throws into sharper focus his loving and patient nature towards us.

## **Zechariah 8**

**1** Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me. **2** This is what the Lord Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her."

**3** This is what the Lord says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain."

**4** This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. **5** The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."

**6** This is what the Lord Almighty says: "It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?" declares the Lord Almighty.

**7** This is what the Lord Almighty says: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. **8** I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God."

**9** This is what the Lord Almighty says: "You who now hear these words spoken by the prophets who were there when the foundation was laid for the house of the Lord Almighty, let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built. **10** Before that time there were no wages for man or beast. No one could go about his business safely because of his enemy, for I had turned every man against his neighbor. **11** But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past," declares the Lord Almighty.

**12** "The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. **13** As you have been an object of cursing among the nations, O Judah and Israel, so will I save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong."

**14** This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Just as I had determined to bring disaster upon you and showed no pity when your fathers angered me," says the Lord Almighty, **15** "so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid. **16** These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; **17** do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the Lord.

**18** Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me. **19** This is what the Lord Almighty says: "The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will

**become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace."**

**20 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, 21 and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.' 22 And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him."**

**23 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.' "**

There is a sudden change of gear here, and we have to wonder whether this was an independent text of sayings associated with Zechariah, which has got inserted here. I'm not saying this is so, but it might be.

The passage is very clear - a series of blessings and encouragements for God's people. We have met most of them before in Zechariah. The prophet finally answers the fasting question in v 18-20. The passage finishes with a hint of what we find in Revelation 20-21 - the New Jerusalem. This is an interesting theological inclusion, as we are about to jump away from chapter 1-8, into the much more apocalyptic chapters 9 to 14

## **Chapters 9-14.**

It has been almost universally accepted that these chapters are not by Zechariah. Why?

- \* Because Zechariah is not mentioned by name.
- \* Because there are no historical allusions, whereas 1-8 is full of them.
- \* Because Temple building, a key part of 1-8 is nowhere mentioned.
- \* Because there are no visions, whereas 1-8 has plenty! Nor is there any mention of the guiding angel.
- \* Because "Word of the Lord" or "thus says the Lord" are absent.

These chapters have been assigned to various people (Jeremiah?) and various dates. A date in the Greek period might be reflected in chapter 9.

And there's more. It has been suggested that 9-14 is actually 9-11 and 12-14. The shepherd theme, appearing in each, has linked them. In fact there have been suggestions that we have 3 little books here - 9-11, 12-14 and Malachi forming the third.

*Could these chapters be as mosaic, to which many people have contributed?* Such an idea is not beyond consideration. Our ancestors were very keen to preserve tradition, and if a number of people contributed to these texts, they would all be put under the one name of Zechariah. So we have the one author title, and under him, a number of contributors. Without the Zechariah superscription, they would never have got their material into the canon. One very famous scholar sees these chapters as “an anthology of prophetic oracles.”

What are we to make of all this? I find it all very fascinating, and believe that we must seek as far as possible, to understand dates and authors. It makes a difference to the way we interpret the material. Take 9:4-6. This points to the destruction of the Philistines. If we date this material in the Greek period (fourth century) then we have a problem, because the Philistines ceased to exist when the Babylonians arrived in the sixth century B.C.E. So do these verses actually come from before the Exile? (586 B.C.E.)

We apply the same principle to the N.T. We use to think that Matthew was the primary Gospel, until we discovered this by John the Presbyter, quoted by Papas:-:-

“This, too, the presbyter used to say. ‘Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's.’”

If this is true, then Mark becomes the primary Gospel, emanating from Peter. This makes a huge difference to our understanding of the teachings of Jesus on divorce. It's all this digging in to dates, backgrounds and sources which helps us get the clearest and original content of the bible.

But in the end, I also come back to one simple principle when studying the Bible - *what is the writer trying to say to me?* I take all the rest into consideration, but stick to my main principle. Of course, it may be argued that I can't fully understand what an author is saying unless I understand the background to what is being written, and that date and authorship will affect this understanding. We can take the same approach to writers like Dickens. It is in understanding his times, that we can better understand his writings. I agree with all this, and also accept that in the case of Zechariah 9-14, getting to the truth of author and date is, at the current time, very difficult.

**9: V 1-8** are very interesting. They take us on an international tour of conquest. In the past, all the Nations mentioned have attacked God's people. Now God is

attacking and destroying all his enemies. But as we have already seen, this text seems to be a bit confusing - some coming from one period and some from another. But this misses the point which is that *these chapters are apocalyptic*. What Zechariah is saying is that the time will come when God will destroy all his enemies, and bless Zion, which is exactly what he does in verses 9-13.

**9: v 9-13** is the culmination - the king comes. But look how he comes: - **“righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on as colt, the foal of a donkey.”** Remind you of anyone? Interesting to see that Matthew got in a bit of a muddle with this verse - getting Jesus sitting on 2 donkeys!

Why donkeys? They are the complete opposite to war chariots. The Lord doesn't need a war chariot. He won! There is no opposition to him. He comes to bless, heal, restore and release. This is our God - who only judges to bless, and bring us more blessing than we had before any judgment.

vs. 12 is difficult. There is a muddle in the Hebrew, and there are various Greek translations, some of which leave out “from the waterless pit.” (which is in the Hebrew.) RSV translates “I will restore to you double” for “twice as much.”

#### **9:14-end**

These verses don't quite seem to fit with the idyllic picture of 9-13. Here we see a theophany, a great appearing of the conquering God, who will fight for his people. May be we have a piece of the mosaic here. As we look at the whole chapter it fits - defeat of Israel's enemies and the coming of the victorious Messiah - both as gentle victor and conquering king.

The key themes of these chapters are beginning to emerge here. The powerful Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth, will, is, and always has been the protector of his people. Those who attack Zion will ultimately be defeated by the Lord himself. Now- who said that books like Zechariah have nothing to say to us today? This is where I part company with those who dismiss the O.T. as no longer relevant. For surely, we must take this chapter seriously as we look at twenty first century Jerusalem, with enemies all around, and Gaza now within sight of the city itself. What happens in Jerusalem, and our attitudes towards it, will have a powerful influence on world affairs – it always has and always will have.

## **Zechariah 10**

**Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime;  
it is the Lord who makes the storm clouds.  
He gives showers of rain to men,  
and plants of the field to everyone.**

**2 The idols speak deceit,  
diviners see visions that lie;  
they tell dreams that are false,  
they give comfort in vain.  
Therefore the people wander like sheep  
oppressed for lack of a shepherd.**

**3 "My anger burns against the shepherds,  
and I will punish the leaders;  
for the Lord Almighty will care  
for his flock, the house of Judah,  
and make them like a proud horse in battle.**

**4 From Judah will come the cornerstone,  
from him the tent peg,  
from him the battle bow,  
from him every ruler.**

**5 Together they will be like mighty men  
trampling the muddy streets in battle.  
Because the Lord is with them,  
they will fight and overthrow the horsemen.**

**6 "I will strengthen the house of Judah  
and save the house of Joseph.  
I will restore them  
because I have compassion on them.  
They will be as though  
I had not rejected them,  
for I am the Lord their God  
and I will answer them.**

**7 The Ephraimites will become like mighty men,  
and their hearts will be glad as with wine.  
Their children will see it and be joyful;  
their hearts will rejoice in the Lord.**

**8 I will signal for them  
and gather them in.  
Surely I will redeem them;  
they will be as numerous as before.**

**9 Though I scatter them among the peoples,  
yet in distant lands they will remember me.  
They and their children will survive,  
and they will return.**

**10 I will bring them back from Egypt  
and gather them from Assyria.  
I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon,  
and there will not be room enough for them.**

**11 They will pass through the sea of trouble;  
the surging sea will be subdued  
and all the depths of the Nile will dry up.  
Assyria's pride will be brought down  
and Egypt's scepter will pass away.**

**12 I will strengthen them in the Lord  
and in his name they will walk,"  
declares the Lord.**

#### **Chapter 11: 1-3**

**1 Open your doors, O Lebanon,  
so that fire may devour your cedars!**

**2 Wail, O pine tree, for the cedar has fallen;  
the stately trees are ruined!  
Wail, oaks of Bashan;  
the dense forest has been cut down!**

**3 Listen to the wail of the shepherds;  
their rich pastures are destroyed!  
Listen to the roar of the lions;  
the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!**

**1-3a** This chapter begins with 4 verses of judgment on the leaders of the people. This theme will reoccur in the next chapter. The people were looking for help from diviners, while the shepherds were failing to give the lead. Consequences -

**“My anger burns against the shepherds.”** (See God's response to Moses' reluctance to answer the call.)

**v2.** The people “wander off”. The Hebrew means “set off on a journey.” In this case, the wrong journey, because there was no help from the leadership. Note that as a consequence of this, they are **“afflicted.”** Every mistake of the shepherd leads to suffering for the sheep. That’s why false shepherds must be removed from their posts. To keep them leads to sorrow for all concerned. Take a look at Ezekiel 34:6 “My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.”

**v4.** The shepherds and the leaders (literally “he goats” - not very complimentary!) will be punished. Deliberately misleading the sheep, or even failing to care for them is a major failure of leadership. God does not tolerate it - why do we? Why do we fail to remove failed shepherds from Office?

Does all this look alarmingly familiar? Where is the voice of the Church today, as we face many difficult and critical decisions? Are the shepherds giving the lead, or too concerned with political correctness and the pursuit of comfort and worldly power?

### **3b -11:3 “Jubilation and restoration!”**

We now return to the victory themes of chapter 9. The shepherds issue will return in chapter 11, so we are not finished with it yet. I will leave you to read and enjoy 1- 3b – 11.1-3. It needs little explanation

### **Chapter 11:4-17**

**4 This is what the Lord my God says: "Pasture the flock marked for slaughter. 5 Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, 'Praise the Lord, I am rich!' Their own shepherds do not spare them. 6 For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land," declares the Lord. "I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands."**

**7 So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock. 8 In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them 9 and said, "I will not be your shepherd.**

**Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh."**

**10 Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. 11 It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the Lord.**

**12 I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.**

**13 And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"-the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.**

**14 Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.**

**15 Then the Lord said to me, "Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. 16 For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs.**

**17 "Woe to the worthless shepherd,  
who deserts the flock!  
May the sword strike his arm and his right eye!  
May his arm be completely withered,  
his right eye totally blinded!"**

We are now entering the stormy waters of Zechariah 11:4 to the end of the book. These chapters are packed with theology, difficulty and controversy. Helmets on!

First is the story of the shepherd. This is a big theological passage. Its main theme - and this is Zechariah's great insight – is that if a Nation could find a godly shepherd, who would rid the Nation of hypocrisy, sin and crime, and replace it with godly government, he would not be welcomed, but positively hated and rejected. Jesus must have known of this passage, and also Ezekiel 34. They formed the backdrop to his ministry. His linking of the shepherd, kingship and the suffering servant certainly had some of its roots in this passage.

But what is it, and who is this shepherd? The general consensus is that this passage is an allegory. This form of writing is not unknown - see the allegory of the vine in Isaiah - but isn't found in the N.T. For some reason our biblical writers ignored this type of writing, opting for parables - a very popular Jewish form of writing. There

have been attempts to allegorise the story of the Good Samaritan, where the oil and wine represent the Eucharist for example. But we have generally rejected this interpretation, preferring to treat that story as parabolic. I've put 11:3 - end in my browser, and many/most interpreters go for the allegorical interpretation. So here it is:

**4 This is what the Lord my God says: "Pasture the flock marked for slaughter**

The "sheep" prepared for slaughterer, are men and women, suffering under oppression.

**5 Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, 'Praise the Lord, I am rich!' Their own shepherds do not spare them.**

The "buyers" are the occupying powers, and the sellers are the Jewish authorities, hoping for influence and money.

**6 For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land," declares the Lord. "I will hand everyone over to his neighbour and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands."**

There is no hope of salvation. The deal is done.

**7 So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favour and the other Union, and I pastured the flock. 8 In one month I got rid of the three shepherds.**

The two staffs "Favour" - a characteristic of God's attitude towards us. "Union" - is the result of good quality leadership. The 3 shepherds? Take your pick - just about everyone has been suggested, and in every possible combination. Let's move on!

**The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them 9 and said, "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh."**

The shepherd, seeing the heart of the situation, stood back, and let events take their inevitable course. Incidentally, this is the attitude I think the Lord has taken towards England and Europe.

**10 Then I took my staff called Favour and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. 11 It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the Lord.**

The shepherd brings to an end the age of favour. Here's another struggle we have. Some tell me that God would never do this, because he loves us. But there are two biblical answers to this: -

\* First, righteousness and forgiveness demand judgment on those who refuse this blessing. Otherwise the moral universe becomes lawless.

\*Second, God's love to us is not in question. It is our love to him which brings us into these positions.

**12 I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. 13 And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"-the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter.**

The wage offered was equivalent to the price to be paid if your bull should gore another man's slave- in other words, a derisory price. The people have no time for the shepherd, and they insult him. So he throws the money into the house of the potter.

This is decidedly difficult. Let's first see it from Zechariah's perspective. There were certainly potters within the temple, because of the amount of pottery needed for sacrifice. But 30 pieces of silver wouldn't buy much, and anyway, what does he want to buy? It has been suggested that 30 pieces would get you a small clay figurine - almost a useless piece of pottery. So is the shepherd responding in kind? "You give me a worthless amount and I will spend it on a worthless thing. "

But then look at these verses:-" When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself."

The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me." (Matt 27.)

What's happened here? First, Jeremiah bought the field, but the coin throwing comes from Zechariah and in Zechariah, there is no mention of buying the field. How

do we tackle this kind of issue? First, remember that the N.T. writers, especially Matthew, were great at looking for proof texts – O.T. verses which confirmed N.T. experiences. Secondly, they probably couldn't read Hebrew, so they were dependent on the Septuagint writings, the Aramaic targums or the Aramaic Peshitta. They also depended a lot on oral tradition - people learning and remembering the Scriptures down the generations – a process which has been proved to be accurate, but not foolproof.

As a mixture of proof texts, it does work. The coins are thrown into the temple, and later used, as Jeremiah suggested, as a sign of God's continuation with his people, however many invaders came to destroy them. The snag is that this requires that we give a pre-exilic date to Zechariah, so that he and Jeremiah could have overlapped, hence the symbolism in their teachings. But this passage is considered by many to be post Exilic. Fun isn't it!

**14 Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.**

The unity between North and South is broken. Even after the fall of Samaria, (720B.C.E.) many Jews continued to live in Northern Israel. That link is now ended.

**15 Then the Lord said to me, "Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. 16 For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs.**

The people need to know what a worthless shepherd will be like, now they have abandoned the true one. So Zechariah is now to demonstrate that kind of shepherd.

**17 "Woe to the worthless shepherd,  
who deserts the flock!  
May the sword strike his arm and his right eye!  
May his arm be completely withered,  
his right eye totally blinded!"**

The Lord reigns. The worthless shepherd will not rule forever. Even though the people have rejected the good shepherd for the false, God has not rejected His place in history. The worthless shepherd will one day fall, never to rise again.

So there we have it. The lesson is plain. Responsibility for human chaos lies squarely on human shoulders. If men reject God's shepherd, they can only expect trouble, and it will come in great quantity. Wow!

## **Zechariah 12**

**1** This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: **2** "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. **3** On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. **4** On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness," declares the Lord. "I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations. **5** Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God.' **6** "On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

**7** "The Lord will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah. **8** On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord going before them. **9** On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.

**10** "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. **11** On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. **12** The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, **13** the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, **14** and all the rest of the clans and their wives.

**v 1-9** expresses the Lord's passion and concern for Jerusalem. This is a principle we have seen before, and one we should certainly keep in mind in our 21st century political scene. For some reason, the Nations decide to take on Jerusalem, but find (2-3) that they have taken on more than they expected. **"On that day"** the Lord strikes the attackers, (v 5) and this will have a profound effect on God's people, who had rejected the shepherd, but discover "the Lord Almighty is their God." (v5) It appears that Judah was among the enemies of Jerusalem, but the Lord will turn this to advantage, when Judah begins to inflict damage on the enemy. (v6) The enmity between Judah and Jerusalem will end. "On that day "the Lord will destroy all nations that attack Jerusalem." (v 9)

As I have already said, we must take careful note of passages like this. Jerusalem is a key centre of spiritual affairs, and ultimately, God will be the protector of Jerusalem. When the situation seems beyond repair, then the Lord will intervene. He has done it before. We must be aware that he is ever ready to do it again.

**10-14** Big change of gear here, from celebration and victory to mourning and repentance.

**10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.**

God pours out the grace – the grace of forgiveness for a murder committed. The difficulty comes in the words “**look on me.**” The later version changed this to “him,” obviously finding it hard to put such a verse into the mouth of the Lord. But textual convention takes the hardest reading as original, so we go with “me.” (John gives us this translation 19: 37 “and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.) But, as we have already seen, the N.T. writers use the O.T. rather freely, and didn't have the textual recourses available to us.

So what are we to make of this enigmatic verse? Some think that this may be an allusion to a real assassination, but as we can imagine, the list of candidates is long. Others take “me” to be God, thrust through in the person of his representative. Some see this as allegorical, God being “mortally wounded “by the sins of his people.

This is an enigma, and no suggestion has yet satisfied as to who “**me**” might be. It's easy for us to see this verse applied to Jesus, and perhaps it makes more sense viewed from history, and that's quite O.K. with prophecy, but doesn't help us see the verse in its actual context. Let's move on, and see if we can make sense of it in its wider setting.

**10 On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.**

This is another verse which has caused great controversy. Is, for example, **Hadad Rimmon** a place, (as Jerome thought), a reference to the fertility cults, where the god “died”, the people mourned, and then the god “rose again.” Or is it a reference to some long forgotten tradition in Israel, perhaps built round Absalom?

This kind of discussion is vital, if we are to get at the truth of God's revelation. Sometimes, given our knowledge of Hebrew, the changes in the Hebrew/Gk/Aramaic text, and the evidence of early theologians just isn't enough for us to get to the heart of what is being said,

We could make some kind of effort to interpret 10 and 11 like this - a death has occurred in Jerusalem, the victim being in some way linked to the Lord, which has led to an outpouring of repentance by the people, whose fault the death is. This repentance opens a new way of experiencing God. It appears that the piercing and the death of the servant of the Lord is connected with the forgiveness of sins. Zechariah does not identify the person, either as servant or king.

## **Chapter 13**

**1 "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.**

**2 "On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. 3 And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the Lord's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him.**

**4 "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. 5 He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth. ' 6 If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body ?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'**

**7 "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,  
against the man who is close to me!"  
declares the Lord Almighty.  
"Strike the shepherd,  
and the sheep will be scattered,  
and I will turn my hand against the little ones.**

**8 In the whole land," declares the Lord,  
"two-thirds will be struck down and perish;  
yet one-third will be left in it.**

**9 This third I will bring into the fire;  
I will refine them like silver  
and test them like gold.**

**They will call on my name  
and I will answer them;  
I will say, 'They are my people,'  
and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.' "**

**1-6:** Purifying begins with the leaders and in this case the false prophets, who had done so much to lead the people to disaster. The word "prophet" in these verses is derisory. In fact the cleansing will be so powerful, that those who had pretended to be prophets would deny their calling. His family would deny him, and he would pretend that his "wounds," inflicted in ecstasy were really the marks of manual labour.

**7-8.** Now the shepherd is struck. It's not, as you expect, straight forward! The Lord calls for a sword to strike his shepherd. The leaderless flock flounders and undergoes severe testing, resulting in a deeper sense of God's protection.

Why does the Lord call on a sword to strike "**his**" **shepherd**"? Why strike the one close to him. (See also Isaiah 53:10 -"Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him.") The consequence is that the poor suffer persecution. Two thirds of the land is killed, but even those remaining are put through the fire for purification. But this suffering has a constructive purpose - to purify, and to lead to the people calling on the name of the Lord. This will give them a new and closer relationship with the Lord.

Who then is the Shepherd? Zechariah does not identify him, though he could have done so by identifying with the Davidic line or the servant passages in Isaiah 53. Again, for us, looking at it from a Christian perspective, it makes sense in the death of Jesus. The whole shepherd theme is an enigma - perhaps that's what it was meant to be, so that we would reflect on it, and seek God for the truth. We might look at the context of Matthew 26:32

## **Zechariah 14**

**1 A day of the Lord is coming when your plunder will be divided among you.  
2 I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.  
3 Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. 4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Adel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.**

**6 On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. 7 It will be a unique day, without daytime or night-time—a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light.**

**8 On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.**

**9 The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.**

**10 The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. 11 It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.**

**12 This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. 13 On that day men will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other. 14 Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected—great quantities of gold and silver and clothing. 15 A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps.**

**16 Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. 17 If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. 18 If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. 19 This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.**

**20 On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. 21 in the house of the Lord Almighty. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord Almighty.**

The end is in sight! As you can see, the first part of the book has a continuity which 9-14 lacks. The suggestion that it was a number of texts, all put together begins to make a little sense as we have looked at these chapters. They do jump around a bit, and there are many complex issues in them, not all of which we can resolve with our current level of linguistic and theological experience.

Yet despite this, I have always had a great interest in, and love in chapters 9-14. It has a strong apocalyptic flavour, and many echoes in the N.T. Jesus was obviously familiar with 9-14, as were the early church Fathers. If they picked up on it, then we should be glad to follow. Ultimately the message is clear - it is the simple message of all apocalyptic - God is Lord of history, loves his people, and will do all in his power to keep us close to him. Ultimately, we will not be lost, even if we do have to suffer many things.

**v1-2:** Jerusalem is defeated. It receives the judgment it has deserved. All the Nations fight - that would be physically impossible. But what is happening is that the satanic world order wanted Jerusalem removed at any cost. Babylon was rising, and wanted Jerusalem out of the way.

**v 3 Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations,**

The early church fathers - Cyril, Theodoret and Eusebius translated this as "The Lord fights *with* the Nations. The Hebrew could allow this, but modern interpretation sticks with "**against**." The context rules here. Surely if the Lord fought against Jerusalem, there would be no hope whatsoever. Jerusalem is the apple of his eye, and ultimately, he will stand with his people. A tricky verse even so, with the Hebrew being inconclusive.

**4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.**

An apocalyptic image of the Lord coming not to the Temple mound, currently occupied by the heathen, but to the Mount of Olives. (First mention by name in the Bible.) "**You shall flee**" is the Hebrew, but the Aramaic and Greek translate "you shall be stopped." Context supports "flee" - the people will be given a divine means of escape.

"**Then the Lord my God**." is the Hebrew, but Gk translates "your God." "holy ones with him" but Hebrew is "with you." Credit here to the NIV which has "my God". NIV often uses words which distance us a little from God. Here, it has gone the emotionally powerful way of "my God."

**8 On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem** - see John 7:38. Did Jesus have Zechariah in mind?

**9-11 The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.**

This is the great hope of God's people - finally fulfilled. The mountains will no longer be needed to protect, so they can become flat.

**12-15.** All those who oppose will be destroyed - see the destruction of Sennacherib's army.(2 Kings 19:35)

**16-24** - The Lord is worshipped as King overall. Alleluia!!

We've made it! Commentaries on Zechariah are scarce, so we have tackled something that is not so often the subject of study. I have always had a great interest and love for Zechariah. He encourages me to believe that God reigns. Alleluia!