

## **Zechariah; the Man and His Work**

Zechariah was born in the midst of a very dark age for the Hebrew people. They had become strangers in a strange land, serving a sentence of seventy years of captivity in Babylon. They were forced to say goodbye to their homeland and with it their center of worship. However, as Zechariah's name means, Yahweh remembers. God had prepared specific men to specific works to see to it that His chosen people were not lost or forgotten. Zechariah was one of these men. A prophet, a man sent from God, with a message of hope for a hopeless people.

### **I. The Man**

#### **A. Born in Babylon**

Zechariah began his prophetic work in 520 B.C. as a "young man" (Zech. 2:4). This indicates that the place of his nativity was almost certainly Babylon. His knowledge of the homeland would have consisted in what he had been taught as a youth in this strange land ruled by Nebuchadnezzar.

#### **B. Lineage**

He was the grandson of Iddo of the priestly tribe of Levi (Neh. 12:4, 16). This would have made Zechariah one of at least three prophets who were also of a priestly lineage, the other two being Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The influence of the Priestly office seems to be evident in the nature of his prophecy.

#### **C. Contemporaries**

Zechariah was a contemporary with Haggai. He was the younger of the two. Their work overlapped by one month and Zechariah's first vision came three months after Haggai's final prophecy.

#### **D. Age**

As previously stated, it is commonly accepted that at the time of his prophecy, Zechariah was a young man. It can be reasonably assumed that in comparison with the more aged Haggai, his youth may have helped enforce the fact that the people were not just rebuilding their material kingdom but were building the spiritual future of God's people.

### **II. Life for the Jews in Babylon**

#### **A. Cause of Captivity**

A general pattern of disobedience was the underlying cause of captivity for the children of Israel. However, idolatry was the repeated offense which greatly displeased God and led to their captivity.

**B. The Splendor of Babylon**

Once in Babylon the Jews were exposed to a material kingdom unlike anything they had ever seen. It has been said that Babylon was surrounded by four walls which each ran for fifteen miles. Twenty-four streets ran north to south and the same ran east to west producing 100 gates in the surrounding walls and making 600 square blocks. It has also been said that at the center of each square was a garden and the famous hanging gardens created by Nebuchadnezzar for his wife were one the seven ancient wonders of the world.

**C. Changes brought about by the captivity**

Many changes came about during this time of captivity for the Jewish people. The freedom which they once enjoyed was now lost. Opportunities for personal wealth surrounded them and no doubt many took advantage of such opportunities, trading their faith for wealth. Over time many of the Jewish people began to intermarry with the Babylonians and much of their identity as the people of God was lost.

**D. How it affected their religion**

This period marks a drastic change in the religion of the Jews. Up to this point, their religion was largely viewed as being national. Jehovah was to be worshiped in Jerusalem but they were no longer in Jerusalem. "How shall we sing the Lords song in a strange land?" (Ps. 137:4) During this period their religion became personal. They gave greater emphasis to those parts of their religion that they could still control such as the Sabbath, fasting, and family worship. Without a temple to worship at, smaller houses of worship were developed, later known as synagogues.

**E. Benefits of the exile**

Though this was a very difficult period for the people of God, there were some distinct benefits which arose from their trials. Their religion became more personal and thus more spiritual. Between this and the prosperity to be had in Babylon, there was a great purging of the dedicated followers of God from the insincere. This made those who remained a far more united people. Among the most notable benefits was that they seemed to have finally learned their lesson about idolatry and never again do we see them fall into idolatrous practices as they once did.

**III. Returning to Jerusalem****A. Reason for their return**

Their return had been predicted by Isaiah and Jeremiah and when the seventy years had expired, God providentially opened the door for them to return. The Persians took Babylon, or as some say Babylon surrendered without a fight and a very unique man named Cyrus rose to power. He allowed all the slaves of Babylon to return to their homeland if they desired. For those who had remained faithful to Jehovah and

his cause the time to return had finally arrived. There could have only been one motivation to do so, faith in their God and His cause.

#### **B. Condition of the City**

The journey alone was a great undertaking of 800 miles. Upon their return they found a city utterly destroyed and overrun by the people of neighboring countries. There must have been a collective gasp of shock when they considered how great the tasks which lie before them would be. The temple must be built, the law must be instituted, the walls of the city must be built and all the while they must build homes for themselves.

#### **C. Condition of the people returning**

Those who returned were zealous for their God and for the mission that was before them. They had come back to their homeland with the support and provisions of the Persian King Cyrus and brought with them an eagerness to begin the work. Zerubbabel was the leader of the first group that returned. Within two years of their return they had laid the foundation for the temple in the same location where Solomon's Temple had been those many years before. Some were old enough to have remembered the former glory of the temple and wept at the new, knowing that it would never compare in natural glory to the former.

#### **D. Obstacles for those who returned to rebuild**

Despite the fact that the returnees were of the most spiritually minded of God's people and the most eager to work, there were obstacles which stood in their way. The primary obstacle they faced were the people of the surrounding nations that had moved in to occupy as much of the area in and around Jerusalem as possible. They offered their help to the Jews in the rebuilding of the temple but their help was rejected. (Ez. 4:3) The reason for this rejection is that these people were not worshippers of Jehovah but were idolaters. As a result of this rejection the people of the surrounding lands turned their efforts toward hindering the people of God. They were successful in doing so and the work of rebuilding the Temple was stopped for fourteen years.

It is at this point in the history of the restoration of Jerusalem that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah come on the scene. The primary purpose for their ministries was to encourage the people to strengthen their hands and continue the work that they had begun.

### **IV. His Work**

#### **A. The Condition of the People**

Zechariah began his work at a time when those who had returned to Jerusalem had stalled in the work of rebuilding the temple. Though they had returned 16-17 years earlier with a great zeal and desire to rebuild the temple, the molestation of their enemies had caused them to cease from this effort and instead they began to focus

on the improvement of their own homes. Zechariah was sent by God to remind the people of the reason they had begun the work in the first place and encourage them to continue in the building of the temple.

### **B. A Call to Repentance**

Zechariah begins his work by calling on the people to repent of their sin. This message of repentance is also seen later in his messages to the people.

Zechariah 7:13 "Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts:"

Zechariah 1:4 "Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD."

### **C. The Visions and Messages**

The book contains eight night visions and four messages which were designed to encourage the people to continue the work of rebuilding the temple. They teach that Yahweh remembers his people and has not forgotten their affliction. He returns to them in their hour of need to comfort them. For He is a Jealous God, jealous for His people and will therefore avenge their enemies, restore His people and cause them to again prosper.

#### **1. Yahweh Remembers, God has not forgotten His people**

- Zechariah 1:16 "Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem."

#### **2. God will Comfort Zion**

- Zechariah 1:13 "And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words."
- Zechariah 2:10 "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD."

#### **3. God is Jealous for His people**

- Zechariah 8:2 " Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury."
- Zechariah 2:8 "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

#### **4. God will destroy their enemies**

- Zechariah 1:21 "Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it."

- Zechariah 8:7 "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country;"
- 5. God will restore his people**
- Zechariah 3:4-5 "And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by."
  - Zechariah 8:3 "Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain."
- 6. God will build up His people and cause them to prosper**
- Zechariah 1:17 "Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem."
  - Zechariah 2:4 "And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein:"
  - Zechariah 8:13 " And it shall come to pass, *that* as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, *but* let your hands be strong."

#### D. The Messianic Prophecies

##### 1. The King is Coming

- Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."
- Zechariah 1:8 "I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that *were* in the bottom; and behind him *were there* red horses, speckled, and white."

##### 2. He will Build a Temple

- Zechariah 6:12-13 " And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name *is* The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

### 3. He will gather a People

- Zechariah 8:20-22 " Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *It shall yet come to pass*, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD."
- Zechariah 9:16-17 " And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they *shall be as* the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. For how great *is* his goodness, and how great *is* his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.
- Zechariah 9:10 "...and his dominion *shall be* from sea *even* to sea, and from the river *even* to the ends of the earth."

Ezra 6:14 " And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished *it*, according to the commandment of the God of Israel"

Zechariah 4:10 "For who hath despised the day of small things?"