

Zechariah

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Zechariah

*God's Covenant—
from the Old to the New*

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Contents

Introduction	Why study the prophet Zechariah?	1
	Zechariah and his message	3
	The structure of the book	7
	The covenant of God	8
Zechariah 1:1–6	God’s action in the exile acknowledged	14
Zechariah 1:7–6:8	Eight visions:	16
1:8–17	Man and horses among the trees	17
1:18–21	Four horns and four workmen	18
2:1–13	Man with a measuring line	19
3:1–10	Cleansing of Joshua the high priest	20
4:1–14	Gold lampstand and two olive trees	22
5:1–4	Flying scroll	25
5:5–11	Woman in a basket	27
6:1–8	Four chariots	28
<i>Assignment Questions</i>		30
Zechariah 6:9–15	Crowning of Joshua	31
Zechariah 7:1–14	True fasting	35
Zechariah 8:1–23	True celebration	37
Zechariah 9:1–14:21	Two oracles:	39
9:1–11:17	God’s rule and human rulers	39
12:1–14:21	On that day	49
<i>Assignment Questions</i>		54

Introduction

WHY STUDY THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH?

Jesus and His Apostles

We study the prophecy of Zechariah first of all because we are directed to it by Jesus and his apostles. Zechariah is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament at highly significant points, particularly in the gospels and the Revelation.¹ Jesus and the apostles saw the gospel events clearly delineated in the prophecy of Zechariah. Jesus saw his ministry in terms of Zechariah 10:2 (see Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34). Jesus deliberately chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey in direct fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9 (see Matt. 21:5; John 12:15). Jesus saw the meaning of his death encapsulated in Zechariah 13:7 (see Matt. 26:31, 56; Mark 14:27, 50; John 16:32). Direct reference is made to Zechariah 11:12–13 in connection with Jesus' betrayal by Judas (see Matt. 26:15; 27:9–10), and to Zechariah 12:10 with regard to the piercing of Jesus' side with a spear, together with its significance and its outcome (see John 19:37; Rev. 1:7). Many of the

¹ Barry Webb says: 'one well known authority lists eleven direct quotations and sixty-four allusions'. The authority referred to is, Kurt Aland, et al. (eds), *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (United Bible Societies, 1983), pp. 888, 900. See Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come* (BST Series, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 2003), pp. 48, 15.

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

visions in the Revelation have elements that correspond with those of the visions and oracles of Zechariah (e.g. the four horses in Zech. 1:7–17 and 6:1–8; compare Rev. 6:1–8; the measuring rod of Zech. 2:1–5; compare Rev. 11:1–3; and the two olive trees and the lampstand[s] of Zech. 4:1–14 and Rev. 1:12–20; 4:5; 5:6; 11:3–4). Both Zechariah and Revelation have much to say about the holy city to come, and clearly both are speaking of the same great reality (e.g. Zech. 14:6–8, 16–21; compare Rev. 21:22–22:5).

The End of the Old Covenant and the Coming of the New

The word ‘covenant’ is used only twice in the prophecy of Zechariah, but the themes traced in the book have everything to do with God’s covenant. Zechariah’s position in history and in the biblical canon marks the passing of the old covenant with Israel and the coming of the new covenant for all the nations of the earth in Jesus. As the day draws near, the manner of this new covenant is set out in clearer and more specific detail than anywhere else in the Old Testament.

The two references to ‘covenant’ are in Zechariah 11:10 where the (old) covenant is, startlingly, annulled; and in 9:11 where the promise and effects of the (new) covenant are affirmed. Our exploration of this theme, which we take to be at the heart of this prophecy, will take us back to the beginnings of the covenant with Israel, and on to the fulfilment of the everlasting covenant of God in Jesus, and in the end times.

The Return from Exile and the Rebuilding of the Temple

The prophet Zechariah in his own day lived at an important time in the history of Israel: the return of a remnant of Israel

Introduction

from exile in Babylon, and the rebuilding of the temple. While Zechariah was personally and directly involved in these events in a practical way at the time, together with his fellow prophet Haggai, the relative smallness of these events was used by God to show Zechariah their larger eternal significance in the saving purpose of God for the whole world. So we study Zechariah with interest regarding his own time, and even more for what God showed him that is of significance for us today.

ZECHARIAH AND HIS MESSAGE

As with most of the prophets, who are concerned with presenting God's message rather than themselves, we know very little about Zechariah. His name means 'remembrance of *Yahweh*' or 'one *Yahweh* remembers'.² In 1:1 and 1:7 he is called 'son of Berechiah son of Iddo', and in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 simply 'son [or descendant] of Iddo'. There was an Iddo among 'the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua' in 538 BC from Babylon to Jerusalem, who were 'leaders of the priests and of their associates in the days of Jeshua' (see Neh. 12:1-7, 17), who may well have been Zechariah's grandfather. Zerubbabel became the governor of the province, still under the rule of the Persian empire, and Jeshua (also known as Joshua) became the high priest (see Hag. 1:12-2:9). They began rebuilding the temple in 536 BC (see Ezra 3), but succumbed to local opposition which put a stop to the work until 520 BC (see Ezra 4:1-5, 24). This was when the call of God came to the prophets Haggai and Zechariah:

² See Thomas V. Moore, *A Commentary on Zechariah* [1856], The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1958, p. 36.

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them (Ezra 5:1–2).

This time, the opposition was defused (see Ezra 5:3–6:12), and the work was brought to a completion:

Then, according to the word sent by King Darius, Tattenai, the governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates did with all diligence what King Darius had ordered. So the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of the prophet Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia; and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. The people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy (Ezra 6:13–16).

These were the significant events in which Zechariah played a vital role. We see something of this activity in 4:6–10:

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 of hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of “Grace, grace to it!”’

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.’

Significant and remarkable as these events were, it was clear that they were not the final arrival of the kingdom of God. It was still ‘the day of small things’. When the foundation of the temple

Introduction

was laid, the celebrations were tempered by the memory of the glories of the former temple that had been completely destroyed in 587 BC (see Ezra 3:10–13). Part of Zechariah’s message was to encourage faithfulness and diligence in these ‘small things’, in the light of the outworking of God’s overall purpose among the nations, of which these actions were a vital part. As with the first temple built by Solomon, so with this temple:

Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! (1 Kings 8:27).

When David had first conceived building a temple for God, God countered with a promise of much vaster dimensions: a ‘house’ or family of rulers, and an offspring who would rule forever in an everlasting kingdom—for which he would need to have dealt with the curse of death and the sin that caused it (see 2 Sam. 7). Zerubbabel was indeed of the family of David (see 1 Chron. 3:1–19), and so the promise was still in place—amazingly, considering all that Israel had just been taken through. But it was clear that the final kingdom had not yet arrived. The Persians were still very much in power (as were the Greeks and the Romans after them). And the embattled little community was still beset with sins virtually as gross as those that had brought about the judgement of the exile (see Ezra 9 and Neh. 9, reflected in Zech. 11). This was the situation addressed so tellingly and tenderly by God through Zechariah, bringing assurance of the kingdom still to come, the terrible cost and depths that God would go to in order to bring it about (reflected in Zech. 12–13), and the vital importance of being with God in His kingdom-action here and now.

There is reference in the New Testament to the death of a ‘Zechariah son of Barachiah’, when Jesus is speaking of messengers whom he would send:

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation (Matt. 23:34–36).

We have no record in the Old Testament of the death of Zechariah son of Berechiah.³ There is another ‘Zechariah son of the priest Jehoiada’ who was stoned to death ‘in the court of the house of the LORD’ at the command of King Joash about 800 BC, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:20–22. The account of this would have come near the end of the Hebrew compilation of the Scriptures, so some say this is who Jesus was referring to. This is not to say, however, that Zechariah the son of Berechiah could not have suffered a similar fate, since there were none of the prophets that the Israelites did not persecute (see Matt. 23:29–32; Acts 7:52). The point that is being made in Matthew 23:36 is that all of this opposition and bloodshed is about to come to a head in the crucifixion of Jesus, and in what will follow from that.

³ ‘Barachiah’ and ‘Berechiah’ are alternative spellings in Zechariah and Matthew.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

We can set out the structure of the book as follows:

- 1:1–6** God's action in the exile acknowledged
- 1:7–6:8** Eight visions:
 - 1:8–17 Man and horses among the trees
 - 1:18–21 Four horns and four workmen
 - 2:1–13 Man with a measuring line
 - 3:1–10 Cleansing of Joshua the high priest
 - 4:1–14 Gold lampstand and two olive trees
 - 5:1–4 Flying scroll
 - 5:5–11 Woman in a basket
 - 6:1–8 Four chariots
- 6:9–15** Crowning of Joshua
- 7:1–14** True fasting
- 8:1–23** True celebration
- 9:1–14:21** Two oracles:
 - 9:1–11:17 God's rule and human rulers
 - 12:1–14:21 On that day

We need to be aware that many recent commentators have questioned the unity and single authorship of the book of Zechariah. In particular, chapters 1–8 and 9–14 have been ascribed to different writers and different historical periods. For the purposes of this study, we will take the book as a whole to be the work of the one prophet Zechariah. Cogent arguments for this can be found in commentaries that maintain this position.⁴

⁴ Such as Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, pp. 43–6, and H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Zechariah* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1974), pp. 6–13 (drawing on Orelli).

THE COVENANT OF GOD

Our exposition of Zechariah, which sees the covenant of God as central to it, requires that we look at this covenant more closely.

God and the Covenant of Creation

Since the coming of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit from the God and Father of us all, we now know God in triune being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and know that relationship—love—is the essence of God's being: 'God is love' (1 John 4:8, 16). We are not surprised, then, to find that God has made everything in and for love, and is in determined relationship with all that He has made. The biblical word for this relationship is 'covenant'. God speaks of 'my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night' and 'my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth' (Jer. 33:20, 25), and indicates that this covenant relationship is what holds all things together and enables them to be what they are and to operate as such. When human beings renounced their true relationship with God and in their evil and violence corrupted God's good creation, it was by the establishment of this covenant with humanity and all creatures that God ensured its continued existence and functioning (see Gen. 6:5, 11; 8:21–22; 9:8–17).

The Covenant with Abraham and Israel

To bring the human race and the whole creation to that goal of relationship with Himself that God ever intended for us, God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (see Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–22), later applied specifically in

Introduction

the covenant with Israel made through Moses at Sinai (see Exod. 24:3–8). The nature and sureness of the covenant of God comes out of God’s own moral–relational being and action as revealed to Moses:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation (Exod. 34:6–7).

In Exodus 20:5–6, this is ‘the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me’, and it is made clear that at any point people can turn and become ‘those who love me and keep my commandments’ and so be in God’s ‘steadfast love to the thousandth generation’.⁵

From the Old to the New Covenant

In the prophecy of Zechariah we see this covenant through Moses, now called the ‘old’ covenant (as in 2 Cor. 3:14), coming to an end, in anticipation of what was to replace it, called the ‘new’ covenant (in Jer. 31:31; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 9:15). This is what was promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they

⁵ For fuller exposition of the covenant of God, see W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1984); Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Love’s Most Glorious Covenant: Studies in Covenant Theology* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1997), and *Comprehending the Covenant* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1999).

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

The final breaking of this old covenant, and the making of the new covenant, is graphically depicted in a prophetic way through Zechariah. To understand what he says from where he stands, we need to go into more detail, especially from the spelling out of the covenant through Moses in Deuteronomy.

The Blessings and the Curses

The terms of God's covenant with Israel are given in Deuteronomy 28. Verses 1–14 tell of the blessings that will come if Israel will 'obey the LORD your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today' (Deut. 28:1). Verses 15–68 speak of the curses that will come on Israel 'if you will not obey the LORD your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today' (Deut. 28:15). There are many more verses given to the curses than there are to the blessings. Doubtless this is because, compared with the straightforward way of obedience to God, the ways of human wickedness are so devious, tortuous and labyrinthine that it takes more trouble on God's part to pursue our evil to its lair and deal with it and destroy it. In particular, Moses says to Israel:

And just as the LORD took delight in making you prosperous and numerous, so the LORD will take delight in bringing you to ruin and destruction; you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to possess. The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of

Introduction

the earth to the other; and there you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known. Among those nations you shall find no ease, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and a languishing spirit (Deut. 28:63–65).

Moses then predicts that this is exactly what will happen to Israel:

All the curses written in this book will descend on them, and the LORD will blot out their names from under heaven. The LORD will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the law. The next generation, your children who rise up after you, as well as the foreigner who comes from a distant country, will see the devastation of that land and the afflictions with which the LORD has afflicted it . . . they and indeed all the nations will wonder, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What caused this great display of anger?’ They will conclude, ‘It is because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. They turned and served other gods, worshiping them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them; so the anger of the LORD was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in this book. The LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is now the case’ (Deut. 29:20–22, 24–28).

Under the terms of this covenant, it would appear that this is the end. All the blessings, and all the curses, have been fully worked through, and that is that. There is nowhere else to go after reaching that end point.

This is where things had already come to in the life of Israel before the time of Zechariah:

The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD against his people became so great that there was no remedy. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their youths with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or young woman, the aged or the feeble; he gave them all into his hand. All the vessels of the house of God, large and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all these he brought to Babylon. They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years (2 Chron. 36:15–21).

What hope was there for Israel after that? How come there was even anyone coming back to Jerusalem from Babylon? There was nothing in the Israelites themselves to commend them, or to give them another chance.

But the truth is, there had been nothing to commend Israel in the first place—it had all been by God choosing to set His love upon them, according to His own nature and purpose and will (see Deut. 7:7–10). And God in His holy steadfast love had not changed.

When All These Things Have Happened

The amazing thing is that immediately following Deuteronomy 28 and 29, comes Deuteronomy 30:

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then

Introduction

the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you. Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back (Deut. 30:1–4).

This would be when God would do something in them, that they had been commanded to do themselves (see Deut. 10:16), but had rendered themselves incapable of doing:

Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live (Deut. 30:6).

The coming back had begun in Zechariah's lifetime, but the inner transformation was still to happen, as evidenced by the unchanged state of the returned exiles. Nevertheless, the promise was there, and Zechariah was very conscious that he and his fellow returned exiles now stood on the cusp of it—hence Zechariah's strong message of hope.

The Servant King

Alongside the promise of the new covenant, and related to it, was the covenant made with David (see Ps. 89:1–4) regarding his offspring who would 'build a house' for God's name, and rule forever on God's throne (see 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 45:6–7; compare Heb. 1:8–9). This promise, together with its manifestation in the person of the suffering servant of Isaiah 52:13–53:12, looms large in Zechariah's prophetic landscape.

This now equips us to consider the opening words of Zechariah's prophecy.

Commentary

1:1–6 GOD’S ACTION IN THE EXILE ACKNOWLEDGED

1:1 ‘the eighth month, in the second year of Darius’: 520 BC, around our October–November. Cyrus the Great, who reigned in Persia (modern Iran) from 549–530 BC, conquered Babylon (in modern Iraq) in 539 BC, and authorised the return of the Judean exiles to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple (see Ezra 1:1–4). The exiles returned with Zerubbabel and Jeshua to Jerusalem in 538 BC, rebuilt the altar and used it in worship, and made preparations for the rebuilding of the temple (see Ezra 1:5–3:7). The foundation of the temple was laid in 536 BC (see Ezra 3:8–13), but local opposition prevented further work for the rest of the reign of Cyrus (to 530 BC) and throughout the reign of his son Cambyses (530–522 BC).¹ Cambyses was succeeded by a relative Darius I in 522 BC. He took two years to deal with rival claimants to the throne and secure his vast

¹ The references to Ahasuerus/Xerxes (486–465 BC: the time of Esther) and Artaxerxes I (465–424 BC: the time of Ezra and Nehemiah) are inserted in Ezra 4:6–23 as a catalogue of similar opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem in later times. The story picks up again in Ezra 4:24.

Commentary

empire (from India to Greece and from Armenia to Egypt). Things were beginning to settle down then by 520 BC (reflected in Zech. 1:11). This was the year that ‘the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them’ (Ezra 5:1–2). The ‘word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai’ in the same year, in the sixth, seventh, and ninth months (see Hag. 1:1; 2:1, 10, 20).

‘the word of the LORD came’: This was not something Zechariah dreamed up or worked out for himself. It is a direct communication from the God of all.

1:2 ‘very angry’: See 2 Kings 21:10–15 and 2 Chronicles 36:15–21. See also Psalm 7:11–17 and Hebrews 12:29.²

1:3 ‘the LORD of hosts’: The name ‘YAHWEH’ revealed to Moses in connection with the deliverance from slavery in Egypt (see Exod. 3:13–14), and called upon from earliest times (see Gen. 4:26), commanding and accompanied by the ‘hosts’ or armies of heaven (as in Deut. 33:2).

‘Return to me . . . and I will return to you’: This is not just an affirmation of a general principle. God here is announcing the time of the promise of Deuteronomy 30:1–6 (see above), with a view to what

² Further expounded in Martin Bleby, ‘Wrath—the Pressure of God’s Holy Love’, in *God’s Holy Love: for Newcomers to Christian Faith* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2001), pp. 46–51. See also Geoffrey Bingham, *The Wrath of His Love: Studies in the Wrath of God and of Man* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2003).

He is going to do in Christ. This is what makes it possible for, and incumbent upon, 'all people everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30). The returned exiles in Zechariah's day, at the time of the rebuilding of the temple and all that this signifies, are admitted to this astounding opportunity in anticipation of this saving work of God. The very fact that they still need to be told to do this indicates that their hearts are little changed from those of their ancestors, and highlights the grace of this invitation.

- 1:4–5** A solemn warning; compare 1 Corinthians 10:11–12.
1:6 'they repented': See Lamentations 1:12–14, 18 and 3:37–42. This is always in the light of God's promise and the experience of grace: Lamentations 3:19–26, 55–58. See also Daniel 9. A great encouragement for the returned exiles to do the same, as in Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9. No less for us also, 'on whom the ends of the ages have come' (1 Cor. 10:11–12).

1:7–6:8 EIGHT VISIONS

- 1:7** This second 'word', that came to Zechariah three months later, consisted of the eight visions in 1:8–6:8. See Numbers 12:6 for visions as a medium of prophetic revelation, and 1 Samuel 3:1, 21 for the connection between visions and 'the word of the LORD'. Visions communicate what cannot be communicated in any other way—their impact as visions needs to be received directly, before we attempt to give them any rational explanation. The visions were not given for the prophet to keep to himself, so Zechariah spoke them out.

1:8–17 Man and Horses among the Trees

- 1:8–11** There is a ‘man’ who is also called an ‘angel’ and ‘the angel of the LORD’ (assuming all three are the one personage). Sometimes identified with God, as with Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:1–6), and sometimes distinct from God, as here in verses 12–17, the ‘angel of the LORD’ is ‘a heavenly being sent by God to deal with men as his personal agent and spokesman’.³ He is riding a red horse, standing among a clump of trees in a valley. Other horses, of different colours, presumably also with riders, are behind him. Such horses were used to patrol the Persian empire, essential for control and communications. They were also used in warfare (see 6:1–8). These, however, are horsemen of God. The vision sets forth God’s control of and attention to the state of the nations.
- 1:11** ‘the whole earth remains at peace’: We may consider this a desirable state of affairs; but for God it is not, as long as injustice and oppression remain, and particularly as long as Jerusalem and God’s people remain subjugated and laid waste.
- 1:12** So the angel makes an appeal to God for mercy on Jerusalem and Judah. The ‘seventy years’ recalls the promise made in Jeremiah 25:11–12 (compare Dan. 9:2; 2 Chron. 36:21).
- 1:13–17** So now is the time, as promised in Jeremiah 25:12–16 (compare Hab. 1:5–11; 2:15–17; Obad. 8–21, and, in an earlier age, Isa. 10:5–27; Nahum 3:1–7), when the godless nations that God has brought in

³ J. B. Taylor, ‘Angel of the Lord’, in J. D. Douglas, N. Hillyer, et al. (eds), *New Bible Dictionary—Second Edition* (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1982), p. 38.

judgement against Israel will, in their turn, come under judgement for their excessive violence against Israel and their arrogant refusal to acknowledge God (as in v. 15). This has been foreshadowed in Haggai's prophecy (Hag. 2:5–9). While each of these prophecies have application to their own times, they also look beyond to view the ultimate fulfilment of the kingdom or rule of God, finally set forth in Revelation chapters 7, 17–18, and 21–22.

1:16 The rebuilding of the temple and the reconstruction of Jerusalem in the present, against all opposition of those round about (see Ezra 5:1–6:15), is the immediate sign of God's love in action among them. The 'gracious and comforting words' of verse 13 are no empty reassurances.

1:18–21 Four Horns and Four Workmen

1:18–19 The 'four horns', fearful as they are, represent the terrorising actions of the nations that have 'scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem' over their sorry history of subjugation and devastation. Compare the horned 'beasts' in Daniel 7 and Revelation 17.

1:20–21 The 'four blacksmiths' (NRSV) may suggest that these 'horns' are being met by equivalent force and strength to batter them down. But there is no mention of hammers and anvils. A better translation is simply 'workers' or 'tradespersons'—a humbler designation.⁴ What are these 'workers' working on? They are rebuilding the temple, where the God of all the earth is worshipped (see 1:16)! This, rather than

⁴ Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, pp. 76–77.

Commentary

any head-to-head confrontation, will ensure the doom of the godless nations, and the establishment of God's people. This is the encouragement Zechariah is giving to those engaged in the rebuilding of the temple. Even so, our carpenter-Lord was 'crucified in weakness' (2 Cor. 13:4) to raise up the true temple of God, the 'house of prayer for all nations' (as in John 2:17-22; Mark 11:17). And so, no less, are our actions and words that build up God's household the church (as in 1 Cor. 3:9-17; 12:5, 12, 26; 1 Tim. 3:4-5).

2:1-13 Man with a Measuring Line

- 2:1-5** Just as the vision in 1:18-21 showed the fulfilment of the promise in 1:16 that 'my house shall be built', so this vision shows the fulfilment of the promise in the same verse that 'the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem'. Once again, however, the prophetic vision extends much further than the reconstruction overseen by Nehemiah and others, to the ultimate city of God, measureless in its capacity and replete with the fiery protection and glorious presence of God.
- 2:6-9** Exile in 'Babylon and the land of the north'—the place of the enemies—is not to be the final abode of God's people (compare Jer. 29:1-14). Listeners are urged to make this reality of the new Jerusalem their home (compare Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16), and to know themselves to be as precious a possession and as important to God as His own very being, in the face of those who would seek to do them harm (such as those trying to stop the building of the temple in Ezra

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

- 5:3–6:15). This is the God who would not withhold His own Son, but give him up for all of us, that no charge might be brought against us, and that nothing might separate us from His love (see Rom. 8:31–39).
- 2:8** ‘after his glory sent me’: the prophet is ever conscious of the One who has spoken to him and commissioned him.
- 2:9** The plundering of the nations that plundered Jerusalem. The fulfilment of this prophecy in their own day will validate Zechariah’s ministry (as in Deut. 18:21–22), and affirm the truth of what he goes on to say about the long term.
- 2:10–12** This dwelling place of God is to be no nationalistic haven for Israel alone. ‘Many nations’ will become part of God’s people, perhaps even including some who have done despite to Israel (see e.g. Jer. 46:26; 48:47; 49:6, 39; see also Isa. 19:18–24; 66:18–23).
- 2:13** Israel, and all the nations, are to be silent before this awesome movement of God to act for His glory.

3:1–10 Cleansing of Joshua the High Priest

- 3:1–3** Joshua stands ‘dressed with filthy clothes’, denoting his own unfitness for the office of coming into the presence of the most holy God on behalf of the people (see Exod. 28; Lev. 16:1–19), and the uncleanness of the people—his guilt (v. 4) and theirs (v. 9; compare Isa. 6:5). ‘Satan’—this Hebrew word means ‘opponent’ or ‘accuser’, as in a court setting (compare Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7; Rev. 12:10)—would appear to have every right to bring accusation against Joshua, whatever his reason for doing so. Satan, however, is rebuked by God (compare Jude 9) who, it is said, ‘has chosen

Commentary

Jerusalem' (compare 1:17; 2:8, 12), and who insists that this man patently has been rescued from the fires of judgement (compare Jude 23). Since God is a God of justice (as in Deut. 32:4; Rev. 15:3; 16:7), on what grounds can God claim this, if it is not to be arbitrary favouritism?

- 3:4** God has done something, on the basis of which it can be said: 'I have taken your guilt away from you' (compare Isa. 6:6–7). With this comes a reclothing in purity and rejoicing (compare Isa. 61:3, 10; Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:5–15; and Rom. 4:6–8, quoting Ps. 32:1–2).
- 3:5** Zechariah, in his eagerness at what he sees, is himself caught into the vision, and participates in it with a strong and true prophetic word (compare Ezek. 37:4–10).
- 3:6–7** Joshua is informed and assured of his new status, and of the walking in God's ways and the keeping of God's requirements that goes with it. His 'right of access among those who are standing here' may not be just to the sanctuary of the rebuilt temple but, since those standing there are angelic beings, it may be to the heavenly courts themselves, in the very presence of God (compare Heb. 9:11–12; 12:22–24; Eph. 2:18)!
- 3:8** How can these things be? They are 'an omen of things to come'. They point to one called 'the Branch' (compare Isa. 6:13; 11:1; Jer. 23:5–8).
- 3:9** 'I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day': In a staggering promise, the effecting of the new covenant (as in Jer. 31:31–34; compare Matt. 26:28) is specified in new and sharp detail (compare Zech. 13:1). Joshua is given a perfectly shaped gemstone with this engraved on it, presumably to fix onto the

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

front of his turban, where there was the inscription 'Holy to the LORD' (see Exod. 28:36–38).

3:10 This will be the arrival of the kingdom-rule of God (as in Micah 4:1–4; compare 1 Kings 4:25).

4:1–14 Gold lampstand and two olive trees

4:1 'as one is wakened from sleep': The 'word' of these eight visions came to Zechariah 'in the night' (1:7–8). So there may have been a period of sleep between this vision and the last. There may have been something about the last vision which settled him. But there is more, and it could be that he needs special wakefulness to receive it. We are reminded that these are real visions, happening to an actual person, at a particular time in his life.

4:2 'a lampstand . . . seven lamps': There was to be a gold lampstand in the tabernacle (see Exod. 25:31–40; 37:17–24; 40:24–25; Lev. 24:1–4; compare 1 Sam. 3:3). There were ten lampstands in Solomon's temple (see 1 Kings 7:49; 1 Chron. 28:15), but probably only one again in the rebuilt temple. This is different, as is often the case with visions and dreams, and it has vision significance. The explanation is given: 'These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth' (v. 10b).

This leads us to trace the significance of the lampstand as it appears in later visions. In Revelation 1:12–2:1 there are 'seven lampstands' and 'one like the Son of Man' walking among them—they are 'the seven churches', or the complete sevenfold church. He also has in his hand 'seven stars', which are 'the angels of the seven churches'—later he is referred to

Commentary

as the one who has ‘the seven spirits of God and the seven stars’ (Rev. 3:1). In Revelation 4:5 there are ‘seven flaming torches’ burning before the throne of God, ‘which are the seven spirits of God’, or God’s whole sevenfold Spirit. When the Lamb appears in Revelation 5:6, he has ‘seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth’. There are clear crossovers here with Zechariah’s vision, and between the people of God (church), the Son–Lamb, and the Spirit. The ultimate manifestation is in Revelation 21:23 and 22:5: ‘And the city [which is the ‘bride’, the people of God (Rev. 21:2; compare 19:6–8; Eph. 5:25)] has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb . . . And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever’. This corresponds to Zechariah 14:7.

All of this may be present in principle in the vision given to Zechariah. Commentators identify the lampstand as the people of God: ‘the lampstand represents the community—the people who are involved with Zerubbabel in the work of rebuilding the temple’;⁵ ‘The lampstand represents not the Lord but the witness of the Temple and the Jewish community to Him’;⁶ ‘the Theocracy, the Church of God, an image of great beauty, showing her mission to be a light-bearer in a dark world’.⁷ This would fit with Matthew 5:14–16,

⁵ Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, p. 92.

⁶ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1972, p. 124.

⁷ Thomas V. Moore, *A Commentary on Zechariah*, Banner of Truth Trust, London, (1856) 1958, p. 72.

Luke 12:35, and Philippians 2:15; remembering also that Christ himself is 'the light of the world' (John 8:12; 9:5; see also 1:4–5; 11:9–10).

4:3 'two olive trees': These stand on either side of the lampstand, pouring a constant supply of golden olive oil through two golden pipes to the bowl on top of the lampstand. They are said to be 'the two anointed ones [literally 'sons of oil'] who stand by the Lord of the whole earth' (v. 14). These are generally taken to represent Zerubbabel, descended from the anointed king David, and Joshua the high priest, anointed with holy oil (as in Exod. 30:22–33).⁸ They are the divinely appointed and empowered agents with whom and through whom the whole community is richly supplied for its tasks (compare Eph. 4:11–13). We note also that 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power' (Acts 10:38), and that John says to believers in Christ: 'you have been anointed by the Holy One' (1 John 2:20; compare 2:27). In Revelation 11:1–13, 'the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth' are two prophetic witnesses, sometimes identified with the two faithful churches in Revelation 2:8–11 and 3:7–13, who testify powerfully, are subjected to death, and are raised up and vindicated before all. So no less are the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah 'moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:21) to encourage, sustain and help the community in this work of God (see Ezra 5:1–2; 6:14–15).

⁸ See Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, p. 93; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 124; and Leupold, *Exposition of Zechariah*, pp. 95f.

Commentary

- 4:4–5** Zechariah is keen to know what these all are (compare vv. 11–13).
- 4:6–10a** Before the explanation is given, the practical encouragement arising from the heart of the vision is spelled out in two messages for Zerubbabel.
- 4:6–7** By no human agency, but by the Spirit richly supplied by God (compare Hag. 2:1–5), all opposition (as in Ezra 5:3–6:13) will be reduced to nothing and, out of the pile of rubble that remains, Zerubbabel will complete the building of the temple, amid great rejoicing at the blessing of God (as in Ezra 6:14–22).
- 4:8–10a** Just as Zerubbabel had laid the foundation of the temple back in 536 BC (see Ezra 3), but had succumbed to local opposition, which had put a stop to the work for the next sixteen years (see Ezra 4:1–5, 24), so now in 520 BC this same Zerubbabel will complete the rebuilding. Those who were disappointed at the beginning (as in Ezra 3:12–13) will see the ‘plummet’ or builder’s plumbline in Zerubbabel’s hand as he squares off the building (or this could be another reference to the placing of the ‘top stone’ in v. 7). The actual fulfilment of this prophecy in their own time, thereby vindicating Zechariah as a true prophet of ‘the LORD of hosts’, would give encouragement to hearers that the longer-term promises of the coming kingdom-rule of God (as in e.g. 3:9–10) will be no less fulfilled.

5:1–4 Flying scroll

- 5:1–2** ‘a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits’: This is an unusually large scroll,

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

nine by four and a half metres, or thirty by fifteen feet (a cubit was the distance from the elbow to the end of the fingers), an indication of its power and significance. The fact that it is written on both sides indicates the fullness and completeness of what is there.

5:3–4 ‘the curse’: This is covenant language (see above, under ‘The Covenant of God’). We are reminded of the curses of Deuteronomy 28, that had now overtaken Israel (see 1:1–6). Two of the ten commandments that constituted the Sinai covenant are singled out for special mention: stealing and bearing false witness. These were some of the very sins for which the Israelites were sent into exile. Jeremiah berated the people of Judah for trusting the mere fact of having the temple in their midst:

Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you *steal*, murder, commit adultery, *swear falsely*, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are safe!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? [compare Mark 11:17] . . . therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim (Jer. 7:8–11, 14–15).

Now the temple was being rebuilt in Jerusalem, and some of the very same sins are being manifested in the community. God sends his prophet to let the people know that the curse of the old covenant still stands for all who will not repent (as in 1:3) under

Commentary

the gracious terms of the new covenant that is coming (so wonderfully set out in 3:1–10). These sins will be eradicated and those who perpetrate them will have no place among God’s people (compare 1 Cor. 6:9–11). The grace of the new covenant does not give us licence to go on sinning with impunity (see Heb. 2:1–3); rather, it sets us up to fit with the righteousness of the new heavens and new earth (see 2 Pet. 3:13), where there is nothing unclean or accursed (see Rev. 21:27; 22:3).

5:5–11 Woman in a basket

5:5–8 ‘basket’: Literally, an *ephah*, a measurement of volume, about thirty-six and a half litres (about the size of a car’s fuel tank). This would scarcely fit a ‘woman’, and she has to be pressed down into it and kept there with a heavy lid. The whole grotesque phenomenon is designated as ‘Wickedness’—the ‘iniquity’ of the people ‘in all the land’. This clearly has no place amongst God’s renewed people.

The use of the word *ephah*, used to measure grain for sale, relates this iniquity to greed and corrupt practice in commerce and the marketplace. Before the judgement came on the northern kingdom of Israel the prophet Amos, around 750 BC had warned:

Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
saying, ‘When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

and practice deceit with false balances,
buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat'
(Amos 8:4–6).

To 'make the ephah small and the shekel great' is to sell reduced amounts at inflated prices, and so exploit the poor. That Nehemiah (after 432 BC) later had to deal with such exploitation (see Neh. 5) and commercial greed and disregard of God (Neh. 13:15–22), denounced at about the same time by the prophet Malachi (see Mal. 3:5–8), shows that such iniquity was present also after the return from exile, and needed to be rebuked and dealt with by God.

5:9–11 Angelic beings remove this manifestation of wickedness 'to the land of Shinar' (Babylon). Though Babylon has already been conquered by Cyrus, the use of this name 'Shinar' harks back to the tower of Babel (see Gen. 11:1–9) to represent 'Babylon' now as the archetypal symbol of the world's concerted opposition to God (as in 2:7; see further Rev. 17–18: 'a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit'). Here wickedness is not just dumped, but is honoured by the building of a 'house' for it (compare Rom. 1:32)—the evil counterpart of the 'house' that is being built for God in Jerusalem (corresponding to the reality of the heavenly Jerusalem in Zech. 14; Rev. 21–22).

6:1–8 Four chariots

6:1–3 In this last of the eight visions, the four lots of different coloured horses correspond, though not exactly, with those in the first vision. This time the

Commentary

horses are drawing four chariots. They come out from between ‘two mountains of bronze’—what are these? Solomon’s temple had two massive pillars on either side of the entrance to the holy place called ‘Jakin’, probably meaning ‘he establishes’, and ‘Boaz’, probably meaning ‘in him is strength’⁹ (see 1 Kings 7:15–22; 2 Chron. 3:15–17)—it could be that these ‘two mountains of bronze’ are the vision version of the heavenly reality that the pillars signified. If so, then the chariots are coming out from the very presence of God.

6:4–5 This is borne out by what they are called: ‘the four winds of heaven’ (compare 2:6; also Ps. 104:4), which could also be translated ‘the four spirits of heaven’, and they go out after ‘presenting themselves before the LORD of all the earth’ (compare 4:14). Thus God’s sovereign rule over all is clearly enunciated, and these chariots are His direct agents.

6:6 According to what we have in the Hebrew, the chariot with the black horses, followed by the chariot with the white horses, goes towards ‘the north country’, and the dappled ones head south (in the land of the Israelites, access to the west was prevented by the sea, and to the east by the desert). No further mention is made of the chariot drawn by the red horses (in the first vision ‘the angel of the LORD’, if that is who the ‘man’ was, was on the red horse). Some speculate that some of the original text has gone missing,¹⁰ but dreams and visions are

⁹ See 1 Kings 7:21, NIV footnote.

¹⁰ Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, p. 104; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 131.

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

not always necessarily as tidy as we might like to make them. Since most invading armies approached Israel's land from the north, 'the north country' could stand for the place of the enemies.

6:7 As in the first vision, the horses 'patrol the earth'. This time, it is more than just an intelligence gathering exercise—chariots are instruments of war and conquest.

6:8 The announcement comes: 'those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country'. In other words, the enemies have now been subdued. 'Rest' comes when work is finished (as in Gen. 1:31–2:3; compare Matt. 11:28; John 19:30; Heb. 4:9–11). Thus in this final vision is the promise to the small embattled community of the returned exiles, and to those to whom the Spirit speaks today, of the final coming of the kingdom-rule of God—the earth 'filled with the glory of the LORD' (Num. 14:21), 'as the waters cover the sea' (Hab. 2:14).

Assignment Question:

What is the overall message of the eight visions in Zechariah 1:7–6:8? How do they relate to events of that time, and to the rebuilding of the temple? How do they relate to the coming of Christ and the new covenant? How do they relate to the ultimate coming of God's kingdom-rule? How can they speak to us today?

6:9–15 CROWNING OF JOSHUA

- 6:9** Another occasion, as in 1:1 and 1:7 (4:6 and 8 occur in the midst of a vision).
- 6:10** This time Zechariah is not given a vision, but is told to do something, as a prophetic action (compare e.g. Isa. 20; Jer. 32; Ezek. 4; part of the fresh variety of ways in which God communicates with us). The ‘silver and gold’ of the returned exiles may well be like the ‘freewill offerings for the house of God’ given in Ezra 2:68. ‘Josiah son of Zephaniah’ is presumably a metalworker.
- 6:11** ‘make a crown’: The word ‘crown’ each time (in vv. 11, 14) is plural—‘crowns’—yet is spoken of in the singular as one crown. This whole passage speaks of a two-fold office—king and priest—in one person (see v. 13). While we would expect a crown to be placed on the head of a ‘king’—in this case Zerubbabel the descendant of David—it is, surprisingly, placed symbolically on the head of Joshua the high priest. Had it been placed on the governor Zerubbabel’s head, it might have been construed as the setting up of a rival kingship to the Persian emperor. But that is not the point. In 4:6–10, Zerubbabel was encouraged as the builder of the temple; here it is Joshua (vv. 12, 13). ‘Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak’ are spoken of together in Ezra 5:2 as those who ‘set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem’, and they may be represented as such together as the ‘two olive trees’ in Zechariah 4. Nevertheless, the function of the temple is for the worship of God, and in this Joshua as high priest will play the primary role.

6:12–13 But this prophecy is not primarily concerned with the physical temple being built in Jerusalem. Once again, as in 3:8, it is ‘an omen of things to come’. And once again ‘my servant the Branch’ is spoken of (as in Isa. 6:13; 11:1; Jer. 23:5–8; see comment on Zech. 3:8): ‘Here is a man whose name is Branch’. Messiah is being referred to—who will be Joshua’s namesake Jesus. Twice it is emphasised: he is the one who will ‘build the temple of the LORD’.

We recall that the great promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7, of an offspring who would rule on David’s throne forever, arose from David’s desire to build a house for God. God says, in effect, that the offspring himself will be the house made by God (2 Sam. 7:11), and that ‘He shall build a house for my name’ (2 Sam. 7:13). This promise was not exhausted by Solomon’s building of the temple in Jerusalem, nor by the reign of any of his successors—none of them reigned for ever. When Jesus came, ‘he spoke of the temple of his body’¹¹ in connection with his death and resurrection (John 2:21–22). And the ‘temple’ he built is made up of ‘living stones’—those who belong to Christ as a ‘royal priesthood’ (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; compare Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Cor. 3:16–17). This is the ‘temple’ that God ultimately has in his sights in this prophecy of Zechariah.

In the promised offspring of David, who rules on the throne and builds the temple, the functions of both king and priest coalesce. These elements were present in the original humanity in Adam: he with Eve was to ‘have dominion . . . over all the earth’ (Gen. 1:26; Heb. original), and he was put in the

¹¹ *Revised Standard Version.*

Commentary

garden of Eden ‘to till it and keep it’—the same words used of the priests to ‘serve’ and ‘guard’ in relation to the temple.¹² Humanity’s mandate to ‘fill the earth’ and ‘have dominion’ (Gen. 1:28) meant in effect to establish the relational, practical, living worship of God in every place. This is what is fulfilled in the man Christ and his people, and in the new heavens and new earth that is to come.

This reality is anticipated in the coming together of kingship and priesthood in various figures in the Old Testament. Melchizedek was both ‘king of Salem’ and ‘priest of God Most High’ (Gen. 14:18; see also Heb. 7:1–3, 13–22). After receiving the promise of 2 Samuel 7, David wrote of this offspring as ‘Lord’ and ruler from Zion and ‘priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ (Ps. 110:1–2, 4; compare Mark 12:35–37). Perhaps because he was the recipient of this promise, David himself, and those with him, participated to some extent in the functions of priesthood as well as kingship, as when he and his men ate ‘the bread of the Presence’ (1 Sam. 21:1–6; compare Matt. 12:1–4). And ‘David’s sons were priests’ (2 Sam. 8:18), even though they were of the tribe of Judah, not Levi.

So here, in the person of the ‘Branch’, kingship and priesthood come together. He ‘shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne’. Also: ‘There shall be a priest by his throne’ (NRSV). *Today’s New*

¹² See Hector Morrison, ‘Adam—Priest in the Sanctuary of Eden’, and Siew Kiong Tham, ‘The Battle for Worship’, in *Christ’s Priestly Community: Worship, Priesthood, Temple and Church* (Ministry School 2006, NCPI, Blackwood, 2006), pp. 21–22, 28–29.

International Version (TNIV) translates this: 'he will be a priest on his throne'. This may make more sense, especially as the personage of Joshua the high priest is being used here to prefigure the 'Branch'. But then it goes on to say that there will be 'peaceful understanding between the two of them'—presumably between the king and the priest, or at least between kingship and priesthood. Mostly in the Old Testament the roles of priesthood and kingship are separately demarcated (see esp. 1 Sam. 13:8–15; 2 Chron. 26:16–21). No one institution or stream of tradition could encapsulate in itself alone the great unitary person and work of the coming Messiah. It would take all of the precursors, and then some, to point to the fullness of him. Even here, in the togetherness of kingship and priesthood, there are still vestiges of separateness (even to the textual puzzle of the 'crowns' that are one crown). But the one reality is witnessed to (as in 1 Pet. 1:10–12).

6:14 After the symbolic crowning of Joshua, the 'crown[s]' is put away 'as a memorial [reminder] in the temple of the LORD'. This made the point that Joshua himself is not the one, but is a witness in himself to the one who was to come—as was the 'crown[s]' stowed away in the temple.

6:15 'Those who are far off': May not be just the dispersed exiles, but people of the 'Many nations' of 2:11 (compare Isa. 66:18–23).

'if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God': We may take that to mean keeping the commandments. While this is not excluded, it may more simply mean obeying by believing the promise that this 'voice' has just given of the 'Branch' to come.

7:1–14 TRUE FASTING

7:1 ‘In the fourth year of King Darius’: Two years later in 518 BC. This is halfway between when the temple building recommenced in 520 BC, ‘the second year of Darius’ (1:1; Ezra 4:24), and when it was completed in 516 BC, ‘the sixth year of the reign of King Darius’ (Ezra 6:15). So the building was well under way, but issues in the life of the people with regard to it still needed to be addressed.

This time lapse, together with wording similar to 1:1, and the warning about the ancestors refusing to hear the words of the ‘former prophets’ (7:8–14; compare 1:4–6), leads Barry Webb to conclude that this is the introduction to part 2 of Zechariah’s prophecy (over against those who make a distinction between chapters 1–8 and 9–14).¹³

7:2–3 It was in ‘the fifth month’ of the year 586 BC that the temple was burned down and the city destroyed (see 2 Kings 25:8–11), and this had been an annual time of mourning and fasting ever since, along with, it seems, the fourth, seventh and tenth months, when other tragic events took place in the same year (see 7:5; 8:19; 2 Kings 25:1, 3, 25). Now that the temple was being rebuilt, the people of Bethel wonder if they should still continue this practice.

7:4–5 The request would appear to be an innocent one, regarding the practice of a religious observance. But with every religious observance there is the temptation, despite all outward appearances, that it might be reduced to an occasion for mere self-indulgence

¹³ Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, pp. 30–31, 115–16.

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

and self-righteousness (compare Col. 2:20–23); especially since all these Old Testament practices point towards Christ and what he will bring (as in 8:1–23; compare Col. 2:16–19; Heb. 9:1–15). So before he gives a direct answer to their enquiry (in 8:18–19), Zechariah must address these issues.

- 7:7–14** Once again, as in 1:1–6—this time in more graphic detail—the warning of how their forebears conducted themselves, and what happened to them at the time of the exile, is reiterated for those who have returned from exile. This must mean that the same kinds of sins are extant after the exile as there were then, and those who have returned need no less to repent and turn to God.
- 7:8–10** ‘Render true judgments’: Fasting is abstaining from food and drink for a period, to be more closely dependent on God for a time of prayer and devotion. We are encouraged to do this by Jesus himself, who said: ‘When you fast . . .’—not ‘If . . .’ (Matt. 6:16–17). But this practice has no virtue in itself, especially when it is used to somehow expiate guilt, cover up sin, bolster self-righteousness, or as a substitute for true righteous action. True ‘fasting’ before God is to abstain from evil and do good (see Isa. 58).
- 7:13–14** ‘when they called, I would not hear’: Not every prayer is acceptable to God (compare Prov. 1:24–33).¹⁴ This experience of terrible abandonment is what Christ endured fully on the cross, when he was one with us in our sin, that we in our faith-union with him might have the way out.

¹⁴ See Martin Bleby, *God and Prayer: Our Participation in God's Great Enterprise* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2004), pp. 19–46.

8:1–23 TRUE CELEBRATION

- 8:1–8** The rebuke in 7:4–5 was that the people fixed on religious observances as things in themselves, rather than the promised reality that they pointed to. Having imparted that rebuke with due warning, Zechariah is now given to draw their attention and their faith towards that coming reality. He does so in very concrete terms (as he does in the further expansion of this in chapter 14). Its ultimate reference is to ‘the holy city, the new Jerusalem’ in Revelation 21–22.
- 8:6** Again, people are encouraged not to limit their vision to ‘the day of small things’ (4:10), nor to underestimate the blessing of God.
- 8:9** The immediate application of this is to encourage the people not to grow slack, through weakness or fear, in carrying through the task they are currently engaged in: rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, now after two years at its halfway point.
- 8:10–12** Their earlier tardiness in rebuilding, during the sixteen years 536–520 BC when they had succumbed to the local opposition, had left them vulnerable to the ravages of their enemies, and of economic inflation and unemployment (compare Hag. 1:1–12; 2:15–19). Now that their priorities had been rightly ordered, and their energies rightly directed, things would be better.
- 8:13** This is covenant language again: the full extent of the curse has been worked through, which we might expect would be the end, and now the promised blessing in the new covenant of unexpected grace is at hand—not just for the remnant of Israel and Judah gathered in Jerusalem, but so that they will ‘be a

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

blessing'—to all the families of the earth (compare Gen. 12:1–3). This is what will encourage them for the work in hand: rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem (as in v. 9).

8:14–15 Just as God has been faithful and consistent to the end in implementing the terms of the old covenant with Israel by bringing disaster upon them, so 'in these days' that are now to come (compare 2:11; 3:10) God assures Israel of His steadfast intention 'to do good' to them (compare Jer. 29:10–14; 31:31–34). This is not an arbitrary change or softening on God's part. It has ever been the centrepiece of God's purpose (from 'before the foundation of the world': 1 Pet. 1:18–21; Eph. 1:4–8) to make this possible through His action in 'my servant the Branch' in which He would 'remove the guilt of this land in a single day' in order to clothe us 'with festal apparel' (3:8–9, 4). Now 'these days' are approaching.

8:16–17 Since this involves the receiving of a new, cleansed, warm and throbbing heart (as in Ezek. 36:25–27) with which to 'love the LORD your God' (Deut. 30:6), by which God will put His law 'within them' and 'write it on their hearts' (Jer. 31:33), so that they can 'walk in my ways and keep my requirements' (Zech. 3:7), as they 'diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God' (6:15), then what follows from this is practical righteousness and the eschewing of evil.

8:18–19 In the light of all this, whatever fast days have been kept in mourning for the demise of Jerusalem will be turned to 'seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festival'. Within its necessary context of 7:4–8:17, this is the answer to the enquiry of 7:3. How is this to be celebrated? Consistent with all

Commentary

that has been said, the answer is given: ‘love truth and peace’.

8:20–23 It will not stop there: ‘Many peoples and strong nations’ will be gathered to be part of God’s people in Jerusalem ‘to entreat the favor of the LORD’ (just as the small delegation from Bethel did in 7:2; compare John 12:20–24) because they have heard that ‘God is with you’ (compare 2:11; Gen. 12:1–3; Isa. 2:2–5; Mic. 4:1–5; 1 Cor. 14:24–25).

9:1–14:21 TWO ORACLES

9:1–11:17 God’s rule and human rulers

9:1 ‘An Oracle’: The beginning of the first of two ‘oracles’ that make up the rest of the book. These are couched in ‘apocalyptic’ (revelatory) language—picture language that draws on the past and the present to speak of the (‘eschatological’) end times, designed to give impressions rather than a sequential narrative of events. This means that their use to attempt to make accurate predictions of historical events regarding actual nations or dating of the end times is ill-placed (apart from being outside our purview; see Mark 13:32).

9:1–7 The cities and nations listed here have all been Israel’s small-time aggravating neighbours in the past. They stand for whatever will seek to hinder or prevent the progress of God’s kingly reign and purpose. All of them had been subjects of prophecies pronouncing their judgement (consistent with God’s undertaking to Abraham in Gen. 12:3): Aram (Syria)

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

and Damascus (Isa. 7:5–7) and Hamath (Jer. 49:23–27) to the north; the rich self-glorifying Phoenician trading ports of Tyre and Sidon to the northwest (Ezek. 27–28; compare esp. 28:24); the Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod to the west (Isa. 14:28–32). By Zechariah's time, most of these had pretty well met their demise. God is saying here that 'The house of Israel shall no longer find a pricking brier or a piercing thorn among all their neighbors who have treated them with contempt' (Ezek. 28:24)—they will have become like these nations.

9:7 Even so, there is a suggestion that some of those among these former enemies will be incorporated into God's people (compare Ps. 87; see also Matt. 11:20–22).

9:8 This is because God Himself is present to aid and protect His people, and will have done something decisive to ensure that the evil that dogs our every effort is defused and removed.

'now I have seen with my own eyes': 'now I am keeping watch' (TNIV).

9:9–10 Where we would expect the arrival of God Himself (as in Isa. 52:8; Zeph. 3:14–20), God announces his king who, unlike the kings that 'perish' (9:5), rules over all. The unusual aspect is his riding on a donkey; but this, rather than riding on a war-horse, is consistent with his cutting off the weapons of war and his commanding of 'peace to the nations'. Jesus demonstrated explicit fulfilment of this prophecy (see Matt. 21:1–11; John 12:12–19).

9:11 With the coming of this king comes also 'the blood of my covenant' by which the imprisoned are actually

Commentary

freed (compare Isa. 61:1–4; Luke 4:16–21). This too finds its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus (Matt. 26:28).

9:12 This makes the imprisoned ‘prisoners of hope’. The restoration is double what was taken away (as also in Isa. 40:1–2).

9:13 These now become God’s weapons for subduing the pagan world, here represented by Greece, at this time the most significant threat at Persia’s borders, destined to become its conqueror (under Alexander the Great in 333 BC). Paul the apostle was the spearhead of God’s kingdom-gospel into literal Greece (see Acts 16:9–13).

9:14–15 God’s engagement, protection and victory are spoken of in battle pictures, but the humble nature of the king who brings peace (9:9–10) may lead us to interpret these elements as Paul does in 2 Corinthians 6:6–7; 10:3–5; Ephesians 6:10–20; compare Isaiah 11:4; Revelation 2:26–28; 19:15; Hebrews 4:12.

‘the corners of the altar’: Sacrificial language is also used in the New Testament to speak of the work and the effects of the gospel (as in Rom. 15:16; Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6).

9:16–17 God takes His people to Himself as His own glory (compare Isa. 62:1–5; Rev. 21:11, 18–21; also Ps. 144:12–15).

10:1–2 We have just seen the promise of the new age of prosperity and fulfilment that will be ushered in by the coming of ‘your king’ who ‘shall command peace’ (9:9–10)—symbolised particularly by the abundance of ‘grain’ and ‘new wine’ (9:17). These things need rain to grow, just as the harvest of the new age will need the ‘rain’ of God’s blessings (compare Joel 2:23–32).

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

‘Ask rain from the LORD’: Agricultural societies, knowing their dependence, ask for rain anyway. The point here is whom they are to ask it from. In earlier days there had been a constant tendency for Israel to look to the local Canaanite gods for good harvests (as in Hosea 2:8–9); whereas it is ‘the LORD’, who created all things, who controls the weather.¹⁵

‘teraphim’: Household gods or idols. It was the dependence on these through the false prophets and unfaithful leaders that had led the people into leaderless exile (compare 13:2–6; Isa. 3:1–8). Though such physical idols were no longer in evidence among those who had returned from exile, nevertheless the mindset that goes with them, that looks to anyone and anything but God, could still be present. This oracle draws on what has been to illustrate what is still to come: the faithless irresponsibility of successive leaders of God’s people. As early as the time of the good leaders Ezra and Nehemiah, in the decades that followed Zechariah’s time (around 458, 432 BC), these issues needed to be dealt with (as in Ezra 9–10; Neh. 5, 13; see also Malachi around 440–430 BC). These issues of leadership were still extant in Jesus’ day (see Matt. 15:12–14; 23:1–39; John 10:7–16)—as they are in our own.

10:3–5 So God will bring judgement on the false ‘shepherds’, who are the ‘leaders’. From at least the time of the shepherd-king David around 1,000 BC (see

¹⁵ Hear David Stephens, ‘Global Warming and the Kingdom of God’, NCTM Ministry School, July 2007:
<www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=82007216190> as at 26 Nov. 2007.

Commentary

e.g. Ps. 78:70–71), leaders were spoken of in this way (see Ezek. 34).¹⁶

‘cornerstone’, ‘tent peg’, ‘battle bow’,¹⁷ are images of strong and reliable leaders or ‘commanders’ (see Isa. 19:13; contrast Ps. 118:22; compare Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–8. Also Isa. 22:23).

‘they shall fight’: How does this sit with the donkey-riding shepherd–king in 9:9, who ‘commands peace’? Note how he does that in 9:10 by cutting off the chariot, war horse and battle bow. Just as David needed to fight with bears and lions to protect his sheep, no less was he called upon to fight Goliath to save the flock of Israel (see 1 Sam. 17:34–36), and was the means used by God in this instance. See also on 9:14–15, where references are given which speak of the apostolic leadership in military terms, although the ‘weapons of our warfare’—things like ‘purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left’ (2 Cor. 6:6–7)—‘are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds’ (2 Cor. 10:4).

10:6–12 In the exercise of true leadership raised up by God, the people are strengthened, saved, brought back, gladdened, gathered, redeemed and, again, made strong, by the action of God. These are all

¹⁶ In John 10:24–25, when Jesus is asked, ‘If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly’, Jesus replies: ‘I have told you’. When was that? When he said, ‘I am the good shepherd’ (John 10:11).

¹⁷ These days we would say ‘the big guns’!

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

words and images that pertain to the era of the new covenant—the full mercy following the great judgement—when, after the LORD has ‘scattered’ them and then has brought them to ‘return’ (compare Deut. 28:64; 30:2), ‘they shall be as though I had not rejected them’ and ‘they shall be as numerous as they were before . . . until there is no room for them’. Alongside ‘the house of Judah’ will be ‘the house of Joseph . . . the people of Ephraim’—the northern kingdom conquered and dispersed by the Assyrians two hundred years earlier in 721 BC (compare Ezek. 37:15–28)—a remarkable picture of reconciliation, reconstitution and unity. The traditional enemies, the imperial powers of Egypt and Assyria, as they are evacuated and laid low, represent all opposed to the actions of God and His people. The people who ‘see it and rejoice’, whose hearts ‘exult in the LORD’, who have been brought through ‘the sea of distress’, are now those whom God has made ‘strong in the LORD’, rather than in any of the so-called alternative sources of supply and strength.

- 11:1–3** The funeral-like wailing of the deposed ‘shepherds’ or leaders—like a wildfire (compare Isa. 10:16–19; Ezek. 20:45–48), like clear-felled trees (compare Isa. 10:33–34), or like land returned to wilderness, where no feed will grow, and there is nowhere to hide. This is God’s judgement on all that is prideful (see Isa. 2:5–22).
- 11:4–17** There follow two prophetic actions or enacted parables (see above on 6:10), which bring the issues of true and false leadership into stark relief. On two occasions, Zechariah is called upon to act out the role of a ‘shepherd’ or ruler of God’s people.

Commentary

- 11:4–5** ‘Be a shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter’: Not a very attractive job description! The reference here is, firstly, to the way the rulers exploit those over whom they rule, to their own advantage.
- 11:6** The flock is doomed also, it appears, on its own account: it is not just a matter of people being oppressed by a king, but also of people oppressing each other. The prophet is being called to act out the role of shepherd in a situation in which God comes to the end of His patience with the people, and gives them over to the way they are, without restraint (compare Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). In keeping with the reference to the preceding times in 1:1–7, it appears that Zechariah is now to act out, in a graphic way, the things that have brought the remnant of Israel to the situation it now occupies. In the disruption of the nations among ‘the inhabitants of the earth’ that has brought them to their present malaise, which is not over yet, they are to know exactly where they now stand with regard to God’s purposes.
- 11:7, 11** ‘sheep merchants’ (NRSV): This is a translation of the Septuagint (LXX Greek translation of the Old Testament). A number of other translations stay with the Hebrew: ‘the poor [or afflicted or oppressed] of the flock’. While, as we have seen, there are those ‘sheep traders’ who are in it for their own advantage, it makes better sense to see the reference as being to the victims of the oppression, whose part the shepherd takes up. The prophet, acting and speaking for God, here takes up God’s role as shepherd or ruler of His people (as in Ps. 23:1).
- 11:7** ‘Favor’: The same word used in Psalm 27:4: ‘to behold the beauty of the LORD’, and in Psalm

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

90:17: 'Let the favor of the LORD our God be upon us'. It is the grace of God's own being, which Israel had been brought into by God's covenant with them.

'Unity': That which binds people and things together, such as happened for a period in Israel during the reigns of David and Solomon. The unity that people know with each other when they are in God's covenant grace and favour (compare Luke 2:14).

These are the wonderful implements by which God cares for His people.

11:8 'I disposed of the three shepherds': Zechariah acts out the sacking of three rulers in fairly quick succession—presumably those who, as in 10:3, and 11:3, 5, had no pity on the people, but exploited them for their own advantage. There have been forty or more different guesses as to who these three might have been¹⁸—if indeed they are meant to represent actual historical figures at all. If Zechariah is rehearsing the immediate past history of his people, they could well represent the last three kings of Judah—Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—each of whom 'did what was evil in the sight of the LORD' (2 Kings 23:36–37; 24:8–9, 18–19).

11:9 The point comes when God gives them over to what is in their hearts, and to the destruction that is due. Even to the devouring of each other's flesh—this actually happened when things reached starvation pitch during the siege of Jerusalem in 586 BC (see Ezek. 5:10; Lam. 2:20).

¹⁸ Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, p. 149.

Commentary

11:10–11 The shock of this annulling by God of the covenant of grace, to Zechariah's hearers and to us, is not to be underestimated.

'all the peoples': God does deal with all the nations, and this phrase is mostly used in this way, but the reference here is more likely to be to the tribes and people groups that made up Israel, wherever they may have been at that time (compare Gen. 28:3; 48:4; Acts 4:27). In this case the reference would be to the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai—'a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD' (Jer. 31:32). Here the decisive breaking of the covenant is acted out from God's side, as in practice, in accord with the curses in Deuteronomy 28, God had brought Israel to its terminal point in the exile. There is nothing residual about that covenant that the returned exiles can presume upon—their entire trust can be only in the gracious promises of a new covenant (as in Deut. 30:1–6; Jer. 31:31–34; 33:14–16).

11:12 'thirty shekels of silver': No mean sum—the value of a human slave in Exodus 21:32. This is severance pay. The fact that the people see fit to pay the 'shepherd' off, in their detestation of him, rather than heed his word, is the offence here. This is the significance of the connection of this with the betrayal of Jesus by Judas in Matthew 27:9–10.

11:13 'Throw it into the treasury' (NRSV): The Hebrew has 'to the potter', which is one letter different. There may have been potters working at their messy trade in the temple, and this could have been a way of making the point about the despicable nature of this payment.

11:14 The breakdown of unity in Israel was also part of the process of God's judgement, from the initial break in 1 Kings 12 (note v. 24) in 930 BC, through to the terminating of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BC (2 Kings 17) and of the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BC (2 Kings 25). A break in relationship with God means that relationships with each other are ultimately not sustainable.

11:15–16 In the first acted prophetic sign, the prophet Zechariah has been acting out God's role as the true shepherd or ruler of His people. In this second sign, he is called upon to act out the part of a false shepherd of God's people, who in direct contrast to God Himself (as in Ezek. 34:15–16) declines to care for the sheep, but rather exploits and devours them (as in Ezek. 34:1–10, 17–22). This 'worthless shepherd' is no less raised up by God—as a just judgement on His people who have refused Him as their shepherd. The 'worthless shepherd' stands for all the bad rulers that God has inflicted on His people, both in the past (such as Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; see e.g. Ezek. 21:18–27; 2 Chron. 36:15–21), and those who are yet to come.

Why the prophet, in his faithfulness to God, should come to represent such a worthless shepherd is not made clear. It does, however, prepare the ground for the strange pronouncement against 'my shepherd . . . who is my associate' in 13:7.

11:17 Even if the people deserve leadership that is no better than this, we are left in no doubt as to the disabling judgement that is due to such a 'worthless shepherd'.

In John 10:11–15, Jesus contrasts himself as the 'good shepherd' with the 'hired hand' who 'does

Commentary

not care for the sheep'. It is a pointed reference to the Pharisees who in John 9 excommunicated the man born blind, whom Jesus had healed (see John 9:39–41). These ended up being party to the wrongful execution of Jesus. Yet they are the very ones to whom God gave the offer and command to repent and come into forgiveness (see Acts 3:17–26; 5:30–31). How is this possible? Could it be that Jesus in the judgement that came upon him, in his faithfulness to God and in God's saving love for the lost, took the part even of these false shepherds? There are parts of this prophecy of Zechariah that make little sense unless we see their fulfilment in Jesus Christ—as Jesus himself and his apostles did.

12:1–14:21 On that day

This second of the two final oracles of Zechariah depicts what will happen 'on that day' (12:3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4; 14:[1], 4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 20, 21. Sixteen occurrences in all). This is called in other prophecies 'the day of the LORD' (compare 14:1): a time when God calls all people to account, deals with His enemies who have refused to acknowledge Him, and brings His creation to its intended goal by establishing His eternal kingdom and bringing His people home to Himself. Israelites looked forward to this as that which would vindicate them as God's people, but they were warned that they, no less than all the other nations, would be called to account (see Amos 5:18–20; Zeph. 1:14–18). Yet, amazingly, there will be 'those who have been saved' (Obad. 21; Amos 9:9–15; Hosea 14:4–7).

12:1 This word has to do with 'Israel', now focussed down to the little group of returned exiles in Judah

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

and Jerusalem. But it is in the context of God's creation of the universe, and the formation of the human spirit, and has to do with nothing less than the renewal of the whole creation.

- 12:2–9** Jerusalem will be a provocation to all the other nations, who will gather against it, and meet their doom there, and Jerusalem will be delivered and made glorious.
- 12:2** 'a cup of reeling': The cup of God's wrath; compare Psalm 75:8; Jeremiah 25:15–29. Is this the 'cup' that was proffered to Christ in the garden of Gethsemane (see Mark 14:36)?
- 12:3** 'a heavy stone': Compare Isaiah 8:13–15 and 1 Peter 2:4–8.
- 12:4** 'panic . . . madness . . . blindness': Compare Exodus 14:23–25, Deuteronomy 7:17–23, and 2 Kings 6:8–23. Zechariah's prophetic word is drawing upon what has happened in the past to give pictures of what will happen in that day. This is all in keeping with God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. In particular, the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army during Hezekiah's reign in 701 BC (2 Kings 18:17–19:37) became the paradigm for the ultimate deliverance of God's people (compare Rev. 20:7–10).
- 12:5** God, rather than the idols of 10:2, is now their strength (as in Ps. 46; 27:1).
- 12:6** Just as God's word is spoken of as 'fire' in Jeremiah 5:14; 23:29.
- 12:7–9** True leadership is asserted, and is effective.
- 12:10–14** In the midst of this battle comes a great grief on the part of God's people, when realisation comes that God their commander (the Hebrew of v. 10 is: 'when

Commentary

they look on me whom they have pierced') has been 'pierced' or stabbed with a deathblow to the heart. It will be like the mourning of the firstborn in Egypt (see Exod. 11:5–6; 12:29–30), and the grief over the death in battle of their good king Josiah at Megiddo (see 2 Chron. 35:20–25). Only this time it will be the people themselves who have perpetrated this foul deed (as they had rejected the 'shepherd' in 11:4–14). The mourning will be on the part of the whole people, including kings, prophets and priests, each in their own places, without any passing on of blame to others. That this 'compassion' is poured out on the perpetrators themselves by a gift of the Spirit from God is a great mercy, and an assurance that its accompanying gift of 'supplication' will be heard and answered.

Much is made of this prophecy in John 19:31–37, and in Revelation 1:7, where what is spoken here of God is applied directly to Jesus, in connection with both his crucifixion and his coming again.

13:1 The fountain of tears (compare Jer. 9:1) is met by the fountain of cleansing 'from sin and impurity' (compare Zech. 3:9; see also Titus 3:3–7). Both are the gift from God (as in John 3:3, 5).

13:2–6 The false 'prophets' are indicated here, who go with the 'idols' (compare 10:2), who have an 'unclean spirit' (compare 1 Kings 22:19–23), who 'speak lies in the name of the LORD', and dress up as prophets to 'deceive', and flagellate or harm themselves in their frenzy (as did the false prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:28). The doom inflicted on them at their parents' hands is consistent with the commandment in Deuteronomy 13:6–11 (whether this was ever

carried out or not, it underscores the serious harm done to God's people by false prophecy; compare Rev. 2:14–16, 20–23). Such that no one will be willing to become a prophet at all—at least not of the 'professional' kind (compare Amos 7:14–15). Note here the same word 'pierced' is used of the false prophet as it is of God in 12:10—possibly another link on the way towards 13:7 (see note on 11:17).

13:7–9 This is the central and final judgement of God on His wayward people. As undertaken in the judgement of Deuteronomy 28:64 (compare Ezek. 5:1–4), the 'sheep' are scattered, reduced, and refined. And as promised through great grace in Deuteronomy 30:1–6, there are those who come to love and belong to God. Yet all of this happens in connection with the awesome striking by God of 'my shepherd . . . the man who is my associate', for which 11:15–17, 12:10–14 and 13:1–6 have prepared us. The 'shepherd', after God's own heart (as in 1 Sam. 13:14), so identifies with 'the flock of his people' (9:16), even in their unfaithful waywardness (as in 10:2; compare Mark 6:34; leading to Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18), as he embraces them in love and suffering, even at God's bidding taking the part of those who have led them astray (as in 11:15–17), such that he stands with them when the final 'judgment of this world' falls (see John 12:31–33), that the blow might be deflected onto himself, in a way that liberates and saves the people for God.

Jesus saw this as the crucial reality of his own death, and directed his disciples to this prophecy as he left the upper room to go to the garden of

Commentary

Gethsemane: they would be scattered as he is struck by God, and he would be raised up, and would meet them again in Galilee, where the gathering of the flock, as promised in Deuteronomy 30:3—now to include all nations (see Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:47)—could begin.¹⁹

- 14:1–5** A reiteration of the great battle of 12:1–9, depicted in apocalyptic terms. Some of it is reminiscent of King David’s leaving Jerusalem under threat of siege and returning in victory (2 Sam. 15–19), but it goes way beyond that, with the mountains themselves behaving like the waters of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:21–25, as in a great earthquake they part to make way for the people to flee to safety, and then for God and His people to come home.
- 14:6–7** We are now in an unworldly reality (compare Rev. 7:16–17; 21:23–25; 22:5).
- 14:8** Compare Genesis 2:10–14, Psalm 46:4, Ezekiel 47:1–12, and Revelation 22:1–2. That the river will continue to flow the whole year through is a welcome surprise for those who live in dry places.
- 14:9** God in His kingly reign will be finally uncontested; compare 1 Corinthians 15:28.
- 14:10–11** Jerusalem as the pre-eminent habitation; compare Isaiah 4:2 and Ezekiel 40:2.

¹⁹ For some time I taught that the scattering here was a great mercy of God, to spare the sheep from being in the place where the sword of judgement would fall, so that Jesus could be there alone for them. Be that as it may, I am grateful to Amy Bettany (now Schwarz) who, as one of our Christian Workers’ Course students in 2003, pointed out to me, in connection with Zechariah 13:7, that the scattering is actually a judgement. For further explication see ‘Life Beyond the Broken Covenant’ in the series *Alive to God: Crucified with Christ* at:

<<http://www.newcreation.org.au/studies/pdf/2006-12min.pdf>>

Zechariah: God's Covenant—from the Old to the New

- 14:12–15** The judgement that comes on those who persist in warring against ‘Jerusalem’; compare 1 Corinthians 3:16–17.
- 14:16–19** The ultimate full reality will be joyous worship: the ‘festival of booths’ was the celebration of the gathered harvest, remembering back to when God saved His people from slavery and kept them going through the wilderness, where they had no permanent abode (see Lev. 23:33–43; Deut. 16:13–17; Neh. 8:13–18). All nations are to be a part of this, and are answerable if they are not.
- 14:20–21** Holiness, no longer fragile (as in Hag. 2:10–14), will now be sturdily contagious (as in Mark 5:21–34! See also Heb. 10:10). Idolatry and greedy money-making considerations thankfully will no longer have any place in the worship of God (compare John 2:13–22).

Assignment Questions:

Trace the matter of covenant in the prophecy of Zechariah. How does the prophecy of Zechariah mark the transition between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ covenants?

Trace the figure of the Messiah in the prophecy of Zechariah, as the ‘Branch’, the ‘king’, and the ‘shepherd’. What links are identified in the New Testament between this prophecy and Jesus?