

The Prophets

Lesson #53

Introduction To Zechariah

I. **Structure Of Zechariah**

- A. The book of Zechariah is the longest and most obscure of all the minor prophets and is the most difficult of any of the Old Testament books to interpret. The book may be thought of as a sequel to Haggai. The temple was begun and constructed in the midst of conflict, but it would be completed. Zechariah looks beyond the immediate temple to the Messiah and the spiritual temple of God, and to the final consummation of God's purpose in the glory of the Messiah and His rule.
- B. The fourteen chapters of Zechariah fall naturally into two major sections: chapters 1-8, the prophet's encouragement to the people to finish the work of rebuilding the temple, and chapters 9-14, Zechariah's picture of Israel's glorious future and the coming of the Messiah. He is known as the "prophet of the Messiah."
- C. In the first section, Zechariah introduces himself as God's prophet and calls the people to repent and turn from their evil ways. Part of their sin was their failure to finish the work of rebuilding the temple after returning from the captivity in Babylon. In a series of eight symbolic night visions that came to the prophet (1:7-6:8), Zechariah encourages the people to finish this important task. These visions are followed by a coronation scene (6:9-15), in which a high priest named Joshua is crowned as priest and king, symbolizing the Messiah who is to come. This is considered one of the classic Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Chapters 7 and 8 also continue another important element of the Messianic hope: the One to come will reign in justice from Zion, the city of Jerusalem (8:3, 15-16).
- D. The second major section of Zechariah's book, chapters 9-14, contains God's promises for the new age to come. Zechariah 9:9 has a remarkable description of the manner in which the ruling Messiah will enter the city of Jerusalem. These were the words used by Matthew to describe Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem about 500 years after Zechariah made this remarkable prediction (Matthew 21:5).
- E. Other promises for the future in this section of the book include the restoration of the nation of Israel (chapter 10) and Jerusalem's deliverance from her enemies (chapter 12), as well as her purification as the holy city (chapter 13). Like the book of Revelation, Zechariah closes on the theme of the universal reign of God. All nations will come to worship Him as He extends His rule throughout the world (chapter 14).

II. **Authorship And Date**

- A. Zechariah means "whom Jehovah remembers." Zechariah was a popular name among the Hebrews; there are at least 27 men bearing the name who are mentioned in the Old Testament. Zechariah identifies himself as "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo" (1:1). Most conservative scholars agree that the entire book of Zechariah was written by the prophet of that name. However, some scholars insist the second major section of the book, chapters 9-14, was written by an unknown author. These scholars believe this section was added to the book about 30 or 40 years after Zechariah the prophet wrote chapters 1-8.
- B. It is true that these two sections of the book have their own unique characteristics. In the first section Zechariah encourages the people to finish the temple, while in the second section he is more concerned about the glorious age of the future. The language and style of these two sections of Zechariah are also quite different. Furthermore, the prophecies in these two sections seem to be set in different times.
- C. Chapters 1-8, Zechariah tells us, were delivered as prophecies "in the eighth month, in the second year of Darius" (1:1), and "in the fourth year of King Darius" (7:1). These references to Darius I of Persia (521-486 B.C.) date these prophecies clearly from 520 to 518 B.C. However, chapters 9-14 contain a reference to Greece (9:13), probably indicating it was written after 480 B.C., when the balance of world power was shifting from the Persians to the Greeks. How can these major differences between these two sections of the book be explained unless we accept the theory that they were written by two different people?
- D. One possible explanation is that Zechariah was a young man when he delivered his prophecies in the first section of the book. It is at least possible that Zechariah could have encouraged the Jewish captives in Jerusalem in the early part of his ministry and could have delivered the messages about the future, contained in the second section of the book, during his final years as a prophet.
- E. However, this explanation tends to take the power away from predictive prophecy. If Zechariah wanted these sections to sound different, he certainly could have written them differently, especially under the guidance of Holy Spirit inspiration. This furthermore would have allowed him to write about events far into the future (even down to the time of the Messiah). After all the evidence is examined, there is no convincing reason to dispute the traditional view that Zechariah the prophet wrote the entire book that bears his name. He therefore had begun his prophetic ministry about two months after Haggai had begun his and about a month after work was begun on the house of God.
- F. As for the prophet himself, very little is known about him beyond the few facts he reveals in his book. He was a descendant, perhaps the

grandson of Iddo the priest who was one of the family leaders who returned from the captivity in Babylon (Nehemiah 12:16). This means that Zechariah probably was a priest as well as a prophet -- an unusual circumstance because most of the prophets of Israel spoke out against the priestly class. Since he was a young man when he began to prophesy in 520 B.C., Zechariah was probably born in Babylon while the Jewish people were in captivity. He probably returned with his family with the first wave of captives who reached Jerusalem under Zerubbabel about 536 B.C.

III. ***Historical Setting***

- A. The setting at the beginning of the book is the same as the setting of the book of Haggai. The prophet Haggai spoke directly to the issue of the rebuilding of the temple, encouraging those who returned from captivity in Babylon to finish the task. Zechariah spoke to that issue as well, according to the book of Ezra (Ezra 5:1). Zechariah wished to bring about a complete spiritual renewal through faith and hope in God. He spoke about the nature of God's law and of the hope which God promised to those who were faithful to Him.
- B. The second portion of Zechariah discusses events during the period between the times of the prophets Haggai (520 B.C.) and Malachi (450 B.C.). The Persian Empire was ruled by two great kings during these years, Darius I (522-486 B.C.) and Xerxes I (485-465 B.C.). This was a period when the Jewish people in Jerusalem were settled in their new land with a walled city and their beloved temple; yet, they were unhappy and dissatisfied. Some of the people had expected that Zerubbabel, governor of Jerusalem, might be the Messiah, but this had proven false. The people needed a new word concerning God's future for them. This message from God was given in a most dramatic fashion by the great prophet Zechariah many years before.

IV. ***Scriptural Contribution***

- A. One of the greatest contributions of the book of Zechariah is the merger of the best from the priestly and prophetic elements in Israel's history. Zechariah realized the need for both these elements in an authentic faith. He called the people to turn from their sins. He also realized that the temple and religious ritual played an important role in keeping the people close to God. Because he brought these elements together in his own ministry, Zechariah helped prepare the way for the Christian's understanding of Christ as both priest and prophet.
- B. Zechariah is also noted for his development of an apocalyptic/prophetic style -- highly symbolized and visionary language resembling the books of Daniel and Revelation. The visions of lampstands, olive

trees, horsemen, chariots, measuring lines and horns place him and these other two books in a class by themselves. Zechariah also has a great deal to say about the concept of God as a warrior. While this was a well established image among biblical writers, Zechariah ties this idea to the concept of the day of the Lord (Joel 2:1-2, 11). His description of the return of Christ to earth as the great warrior in the day of the Lord (14:1-9) is one of the most stirring prophecies of the Old Testament.

- C. On that day, according to Zechariah, Christ will place His feet on the Mount of Olives, causing violent changes throughout the land (14:3-4). The day will be changed to darkness and the darkness to light (14:5-8). The entire world will worship Him as the Lord spreads His rule as King "over all the earth" (14:9).

V. ***Special Considerations***

- A. Zechariah 12:10 is a remarkable verse that speaks of the response of the nation of Israel to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It describes a day in the future when the Jewish people (the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem) will recognize the significance of the death of Jesus. This recognition will lead to mourning, repentance and salvation (Romans 11:25-27).
- B. The most startling fact about this verse is the phrase, "... they shall look upon me whom they have pierced ...". In speaking through the prophet Zechariah, the Lord identifies Himself as the one who will be pierced (John 19:37). Along with Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, these words are a wonder of inspiration as they describe the result of Jesus' death as well as the manner in which He died to save us from our sins.