

## Lesson 10

# Zechariah 1-4: The Lord Remembers

## Introduction

Within the pages of the Old Testament, we know of twenty-seven different men named Zechariah. The Zechariah that is found in the Minor Prophets is identified as the *son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo*, 1:1. Zechariah is mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 as the *son of Iddo*. Why Berechiah is left out is a mystery. Some suggest that Berechiah died which left Iddo as the next of kin to Zechariah. Most believe Zechariah was born during the Babylonian captivity and returned with Zerubbabel and the remnant to the Jewish homeland. He would have been a young man when prophesying along with Haggai on the need to rebuild the temple in 520 B.C.

This book is easy to divide into two sections. The first section covers chapters one through eight and can be dated to the years 520-518 B.C. There is little controversy that Zechariah the son of Iddo is the author of these chapters. But the second section is more difficult and has been subjected to much controversy. More liberal commentators doubt that Zechariah is the author. Some say these chapters were written before the exile, giving credit for the writing to Jeremiah, or even further back to the time of Hosea and Isaiah. Others date these chapters as late as the third century B.C. It seems best that the timing and authorship of the second section is best left to Zechariah's lifetime. Most likely chapters nine through fourteen were written between 500 and 450 B.C.<sup>1</sup>

Zechariah may be best understood as a follow-up of Haggai's writing. It is the longest writing in the *book of twelve*. Many have labeled it as the most difficult of the Minor Prophets. In the book, there are several references to the Messiah, in fact no other prophet but Isaiah seems to look forward to Jesus as much as Zechariah.

## The political climate in Zechariah's day

The World of Zechariah			
TIME	NATION	KING	PROPHETS
550	BABYLON	NABONIDUS (556-539)	
540		CYRUS (539-530)	
530		CAMBYSES (530-522)	
520			HAGGAI (520)      ZECHARIAH (520-516)
510			
500	MEDO-PERSIAN	DARIUS (522-486)	
490			
480			
470		XERXES (485-465)	

*536: Zerubbabel leads 50 K Jews back to Palestine*

*Esther becomes Queen of Medo-Persian Empire (~478 BC)*

A remnant of fifty thousand Jews is allowed to return to the Jewish homeland led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua the prophet, Ezra 3:2. The Babylonian kingdom had been taken over by the Medo-Persian Empire with Cyrus reigning as king until 530 B.C. After his death his son Cambyses took over the kingdom. He is not mentioned in Scripture. Cambyses died enroute to Egypt in 522 B.C. under questionable circumstances. One of the generals of the

army assumed the throne. His name was Darius the Great. Darius is known for putting down at least nine major rebellions in the early part of his reign which contributed to stronger unification for the empire. Darius would reign until 486 B.C.

Following Darius, Xerxes came to power. After squashing rebellions that ensued after the death of Darius, Xerxes launched plans to invade Europe. Some believe the planning for this invasion is the reason military officers and high government officials gathered in Susa in Esther 1. Xerxes' conquests into Europe failed miserably. Later, Xerxes would take Esther as his queen, and some years after this the Jewish nation would be saved through her efforts. Xerxes was assassinated in 465 B.C.

Following Xerxes, Artaxerxes came to power and ruled until 424 B.C. In 457 B.C., he gave Ezra permission to go to Judea. Ezra served as a government affairs officer in the Judean region of the Medo-Persian Empire. Ezra would be a leader for the people until the arrival of Nehemiah around 444 B.C. Concerning Zechariah, it is safe to say he lived well into the reign of Xerxes, being around sixty years of age as Xerxes was seeking to invade Europe. Knowing this background may help with interpretation of the second half of the book.

## A call to repentance

In our previous lesson, we mentioned how many Jews who had opportunity to return to their homeland refused, preferring the comfortable life they made becoming merchants in Persia. It seems that those who returned to their homeland were more spiritual than those who stayed behind. But even in this more spiritual group of people, there were those who lacked motivation to act and quickly wilted under the opposition to rebuilding the temple. Zechariah seems to reach out to those who were not in the spiritual leadership of the remnant. On August 29, 520 B.C. (1<sup>st</sup> day of the month of Elul), Haggai received the word from God on the necessity to finish rebuilding the temple. The leaders (Zerubbabel and Jeshua) quickly respond. Construction begins three weeks later. Some two months later, Zechariah began to prophesy. This would have been in late October or early November and was during the rainy season when work would have begun to slow. Zechariah's address would have been just a few short weeks after Haggai's second address, Haggai 2:1.<sup>2</sup>

Zechariah remembered how the people's forefathers had angered the Lord through their rebellion and spiritual apathy. Their apathy and outright rebellion led to the severing of their relationship with God and their ultimate destruction. Zechariah was fearful that those in this generation could meet the same fate if they failed to act. In 1:5, Zechariah rhetorically asks, *your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?* The obvious answer to the first question was that their fathers were dead. The prophets did not live forever. But the expectations of God continued to live on for God does not change. Their fathers had died. The ruins of their civilization were all around them. They could easily see for themselves the severe consequences in rejecting God. It was time for them to act, lest the same consequences fall upon them.

## Zechariah's first vision – assurance that the temple will be rebuilt

Beginning in 1:7, Zechariah lists out a series of eight visions. According to this verse, the visions took place at night on February 24, 519 B.C. (24<sup>th</sup> day of Shebat). This would have been around three months since his first address, or about five months into the construction project on the temple. These eight visions were received on this one night. In this first vision, Zechariah sees a man riding a red horse among myrtle trees in a ravine with red, sorrel, and white horses behind him. Myrtle trees were flowering bushes that are still common in the Middle East. They were very popular because of their fragrance. What is the significance of the colored horses? Commentators are not sure. Some have suggested the colors represent war, famine, and victory. The exact hue of the color sorrel is not known, although the NIV translates the word "brown."

There was an angel that was with Zechariah during these visions, and in 1:9 Zechariah asks, *my lord, what are these?* The angel replied that he would show Zechariah. The person on the red horse said, *these are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth*, 1:10. In verse eleven, the one on the red horse is identified as the *angel of the Lord*, and the other three answer to Him. *We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth is peaceful and quiet*, 1:11. During the first two years of the rule of Darius, he had expended great effort to put down rebellion within his kingdom. He had been successful. The kingdom of Persia was now at peace. But the Jews were still down, depressed, and being harassed by their enemies. In verse twelve the angel of the Lord prays to the Lord on behalf of Israel. Could the angel of the Lord be the Old Testament manifestation of Jesus?<sup>3</sup> In his comments on the angel of the Lord, Coffman

also adds: “The very fact of this magnificent Person’s appearance to one of Israel’s prophets must have been a source of the greatest encouragement to God’s people. ‘The Angel of the Lord had not been appearing to men for a long time...now, after 200 years, he appeared again.’ He was associated with all the great victories in Israel’s glorious past, including the occasion when he appeared as “The Captain of the hosts of Jehovah” to Joshua at their entering into Canaan. His is the BIG appearance in this vision.”<sup>4</sup>

The response to this prayer is relayed to the angel that accompanied Zechariah. The answer was not given to the angel of the Lord, since as a manifestation of deity, he already knew the answer.<sup>5</sup> This was a message of great comfort and was an affirmation of God’s tremendous love for His people. The temple had been destroyed almost seventy years earlier. The end of that time was about to end. God still had compassion and mercy on His people. The term *jealous* here is meant in a good way. God greatly loved His people. God went on to say (1:15) that He was very displeased with the nations at ease (Assyria and Babylon) for they had gone too far in their oppression of God’s people. *They furthered the disaster*, 1:15. God says that He will *return to Jerusalem with compassion; My house will be built in it*, 1:16. In the next verse, God promises that Jerusalem will *again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem*. What God promised here did happen. By the time Jesus comes upon the scene, Jerusalem is a bustling city thriving with commerce and trade.

## Zechariah’s second vision – four craftsmen

In this second vision, which is detailed in 1:18, Zechariah saw four horns. During Old Testament times, horns were associated with power. “Four” is a Bible number that signifies “completeness.” In Scripture we have mention of the four corners of the earth, Isaiah 11:12; four winds, Jeremiah 49:36; four severe judgments, Ezekiel 14:21; four beasts or kings, Daniel 7:3. When Zechariah inquires as to what the four horns are in 1:19, the accompanying angel answers, *these are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem*. Next Zechariah sees four craftsmen, 1:20. The craftsman came to terrify and *throw down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against Judah in order to scatter it*. Much speculation has been made over who these four craftsmen are. Are they Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Cambyses, and Alexander the Great? Maybe, but we cannot be sure. Smith writes, “It is best not to try to identify the craftsman. They should be regarded as all saviors who arise to lead God’s people to victory over their oppressors.”<sup>6</sup>

## Zechariah’s third vision – the man with a measuring line

Next, Zechariah sees a man with a measuring line in his hand, 2:1. He was going to Jerusalem to *see how wide it is and how long it is*, 2:2. The angel that was accompanying Zechariah was *going out* and another angel approached, 2:3. As this angel approaches, Zechariah hears a conversation between them. There are now four characters on stage in this part of the chapter: Zechariah, the angel that had been accompanying him, the angel that has just entered the picture, and the “man” in 2:1. The new angel tells the accompanying angel to speak to the “young man.” Jerusalem was to be inhabited without walls *because of the multitude of men and cattle within it*, 2:4. Who was the “young man?” Was it the man with a measuring line or Zechariah? Hailey and others believe this statement was directed to the man with a measuring line. Why was Jerusalem going to be without walls? Some believe Zechariah has spiritual Jerusalem in view here. This Jerusalem could not be contained with physical walls. The spiritual Jerusalem was going to be protected by a *wall of fire... [the glory of God] will be... in her midst*, 2:5. God was going to be the protection for this new, spiritual city.

In verses six through thirteen, there is a call from the Lord for the people to flee the world and come to spiritual Jerusalem where God would dwell in their midst. The people are told to flee from the north (2:6), because Babylon had dispersed them throughout its empire. When given the opportunity, many chose to remain where they were

instead of returning to their homeland. They had adapted to Babylonian culture and had taken on the ways of the world. They are told to *escape*, 2:7. God was going to punish those who had oppressed His people, 2:9. These verses could have a dual purpose. In one way we can see the immediate application for the people of Zechariah's day, but verses ten through thirteen seem to take on a Messianic view. As you read these verses, think of the blessings of living within the spiritual kingdom with Jesus Christ. We have been called to come out from among them, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

## Zechariah's fourth vision – Joshua the priest

In this vision, Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord. Satan is standing at his right hand to accuse him, 3:1. Joshua is pictured as standing before the angel in filthy garments. The original writing here depicts garments that were soiled in excrement.<sup>7</sup> Some believe these were his priestly garments, and Satan stands ready to accuse. The filthy garments represented the sins of the nation and the personal sin of Joshua. It is noteworthy that before Satan speaks, the Lord rebukes Satan twice. God had chosen Jerusalem. Joshua represented a *brand plucked from the fire*, 3:2. God's people had been almost wiped out by the enemy and then spent seventy years in captivity. The number of those who returned to their homeland was very small. Yet in this remnant, representing God's people is Joshua who stands before the Lord in filthy garments. In verses four and five, God removes the filthy garments from Joshua and dresses him in festal robes and places a clean turban on his head. Then the angel of the LORD speaks to Joshua saying, *'If you will walk in My ways and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access among these who are standing here*, 3:7. This seems to be the reestablishment of the priestly service and access of the people to God through the high priest.

Joshua the high priest was told to listen to what he was about to hear. This message was not only for him, but for the high priests that would come after him. They were to be regarded as a sign because the Lord was going to bring in *My servant the Branch*, 3:8. The "Branch" is Jesus Christ. Isaiah (4:2; 11:1-10) and Jeremiah (23:5; 33:15) also refer to Jesus as the "Branch." What about the *stone* that is mentioned in 3:9? There are several different ideas on what this is. Hailey says that the context suggests that "the stone is the kingdom of Jehovah. At that time, it was a rough, unhewn stone, but it was to be complete with the engraving or sculpture of Jehovah."<sup>8</sup> *Seven eyes* would be symbolic for completeness of God's care over His people. The *iniquity* being removed is symbolic of the power of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. After this, all would be able to take advantage of the grace offered through Jesus Christ.

## The fifth vision – a lamp stand and two olive trees

After the first four visions, the prophet fell asleep. The angel who accompanied him returned and woke him. He asked *What do you see*, 4:2. Zechariah sees a golden lampstand and two olive trees on either side. The way in which this lampstand is described is unlike the Menorah. Smith mentions that archaeological research has "excavated some lamp stands which are remarkably similar to that which Zechariah describes."<sup>9</sup> The lampstand was made from pure gold, so it was very valuable. After seeing the lampstand and the olive trees, Zechariah inquires as to their purpose. The angel asked if Zechariah knew what these were. Zechariah replies that he did not, 4:5. Rather than directly answer Zechariah, the angel turns the discussion to Zerubbabel, the leader of the Jews. Met by years of opposition and setback, the project of the temple was still overwhelming. Zerubbabel needed encouragement, and it is given in these verses. *Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts*, 4:6. By the power of God, the extreme task of rebuilding the temple would be accomplished. The mountain of a project would become as a plain. Zerubbabel would finish the project and *bring forth the top stone with shouts of 'Grace, grace, to it'*, 4:7. Verses eight through ten go on to speak of Zerubbabel's work in finishing the temple.

Zechariah did not understand the significance of the olive trees, 4:11. Beside the olive trees were two golden pipes *which empty the golden oil from themselves*, 4:12. This oil was supplied to the lampstand for a never-ending supply of oil. Who did the trees represent? Chapter 4:14 says they represented the “appointed ones.” In Old Testament times, there were two offices that were set apart by God. One of these was the high priest. The other was the king. They represented the spiritual and the civil power. They were representatives of God to carry out His will on earth. During the time of Zechariah, this would have been Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and Joshua the high priest.

## For Discussion

1. Who was Zechariah’s father? When did Zechariah’s prophecy take place?
2. Describe the political and economic situation of Zechariah’s day.
3. Who are some contemporaries of Zechariah?
4. When did Zechariah first prophesy? What major project was going on at this time?
5. What is the lesson to be found in 1:1-6?
6. What do the colors of the horses in 1:8 represent?
7. Who is the *Angel of the Lord*?
8. What is the meaning of Zechariah’s first vision? (1:7-1:17)

9. What is the meaning of Zechariah's second vision? (1:18-1:21)
  
10. What is the meaning of Zechariah's third vision? (2:1-2:5)
  
11. What spiritual meanings do you see from 2:6-2:13?
  
12. What is the meaning of Zechariah's fourth vision? (3:1-7)
  
13. What is the meaning of Zechariah's fifth vision? (4:1-5)

## (Endnotes)

- 1 Hailey and Baldwin both have good writing that explains the controversy on the authorship and timing of the second half of Zechariah. See Baldwin, Joyce G. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. pp. 63-66, and Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 317-318.
- 2 Haggai 2:1 says the second address by Haggai took place on October 17, 520 B.C. (21<sup>st</sup> of Teshri). The call to Zechariah came during the eighth month (Zechariah 1:1.)
- 3 *A Study of Angels* by Dan Winkler has a very good study on this subject. Please consult their material for more information on the Angel of the Lord.
- 4 Coffman's Bible Commentary, Copyright © 1971-1993 by ACU Press, Abilene Christian University. All rights reserved.
- 5 Chambers, Talbot W. "The Book of Zechariah." In *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, ed. John Peter Lange. 1960, p. 10
- 6 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 523
- 7 OT:6674. tsow' (tso); from an unused root meaning to issue; soiled (as if excrementitious): Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.
- 8 Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 336.
- 9 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 539