

# Reading Guide for Zechariah

Zechariah's dated prophecies (chs 1-8) range from 520 to 518 B.C. During these years, both Zechariah and Haggai sought to encourage and challenge the community in Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. However, Zechariah's scope goes considerably beyond, speaking of the future restoration of all of God's people in the New Jerusalem.

Two sections in the book of Zechariah (1:1-6 and 7:1-8:23) challenge the community to move away from the empty religion of their fathers to live a life that carries out true obedience and justice. These two sections serve as bookends to a series of visions (1:7-6:8) that reveal God's plans to bring judgment on the nations and thus open the way of peace and prosperity for His people.

Chapters 9-14 are undated, but fall into two distinct sections, each beginning with the heading "an oracle" (9:1, 12:1). The prophet envisions a future where the Lord will sift His people from the wicked nations and deliver them from their tribulation. This deliverance comes through the Lord's Messiah, Jesus Christ, depicted in Zechariah as the coming King and Shepherd who will ultimately fulfill all of God's promises.

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## Call to Repentance (1:1-6)

Zechariah's first recorded oracle comes in the second year of Darius' reign, during the 8th month (October/November 520 B.C.). Construction on the temple had begun about two months earlier (cf. Hag 1:15). However, even though the work was progressing, both Zechariah and Haggai's prophetic ministry reveals that the postexilic community in Jerusalem was in a state of serious spiritual decline. Therefore, Zechariah's first oracle could not be one that speaks of restoration or blessing as long as the community was content to live apart from God and in disobedience to His words.

Because the community was in the same danger as the previous generations, so Zechariah reminds them of the message of the former prophets, which remained just as applicable as when it was first given. The prophets that had come before called a stubborn people to repentance, and Zechariah now calls his audience to the same response. The call to repentance remains just as relevant, as do the consequences for the failure to respond in faith. Thus the community must respond differently than their stubborn ancestors before it's too late.

Message-reception Formula (with Date) (1:1)

The Lord was Angry with the Previous Generations (1:2)

An Oracle from Zechariah: The Lord's Call to Repent (1:3)

Introduction: Command to Zechariah to Speak to the People (v. 3a)

Quotation Formula (v. 3b)

Call to Repent so that the Lord May Return to Them (v. 3c)

Quotation Formula (v. 3d)

An Oracle from the Former Prophets: The Lord's Call to Repent (1:4)

Introduction: The Former Prophet's Warning (v. 4a)

Quotation Formula (v. 4b)

A Call to Repent from Their Evil Ways and Deeds (v. 4c)

The Previous Generation's Negative Response (v. 4d)

A Call to Evaluate the Past (1:5-6a)

The People's Positive Response (1:6b)

## **Eight Night Visions (1:7-6:8)**

The next unit in the book of Zechariah is dated to the 24th day of the 11th month (February 519 B.C.). Verse 7 serves as the heading for all the visions in this unit, and thus presumably they were all received in a single night.

### **Message-reception Formula (with Date) (1:7)**

#### **First Vision (1:8-17)**

In Zechariah's first vision, he sees a man riding on a red horse (later revealed to be the angel of the Lord) surrounded by groups of horses separated by color. The prophet requests an explanation of the vision, and it is revealed that the groups of horses and their riders have patrolled the earth and discovered it at rest. This prompts a sudden appeal from the angel to the Lord, questioning how long before His wrath is removed from Judah and He shows them mercy once again. The Lord responds with words of comfort, which are reinforced in two subsequent oracles (vv. 14-16, 17) which reassure the people of God's renewed favor to His people. Additionally, the Lord promises the return of His presence, a further statement on the importance of completing the temple. These words of comfort from the Lord should remove any doubt and discouragement felt by the community.

##### **The Vision and Its Interpretation (vv. 8-13)**

Vision Report: Horses and Their Riders (v. 8)

Question from the Prophet (v. 9a)

The Angel's Reply (v. 9b)

The Angel of the Lord's Explanation of the Horsemen (v. 10)

The Horsemen's Report (v. 11)

The Angel's Lament in Response to the Report (v. 12)

The Lord's Reply of Comfort to the Angel (v. 13)

##### **The Lord's Anger with the Nations and His Compassion on Jerusalem (vv. 14-16)**

Command to the Prophet to Proclaim the Message (v. 14a)

Message Formula (v. 14b)

Oracle: The Lord's Anger with the Nations (vv. 14c-15)

Message Formula (v. 16a)

Oracle: The Lord's Presence Returns to His People (v. 16b)

##### **The Lord's Promise of Blessing and Comfort on Jerusalem (v. 17)**

Command to the Prophet to Proclaim the Message (v. 17a)

Message Formula (v. 17b)

Oracle: The Promise of Future Blessing (vv. 17c)

#### **Second Vision (1:18-21)**

Zechariah now sees a vision of four horns, which is revealed to represent the power of the nations that attacked and scattered the people of Judah (i.e. Babylon). Although these nations were instruments of God's wrath upon Judah, they too incurred wrath upon themselves for their rebellion. As a result, the prophet sees four craftsmen who serve to cast down the horns and render them powerless.

##### **The Vision and Its Interpretation (vv. 18-21)**

Vision Report: Four Horns (v. 18)

Question from the Prophet (v. 19a)

The Angel's Explanation of the Vision (v. 19b)

Vision Report: Four Craftsmen (v. 20)

Question from the Prophet (v. 21)

The Lord's Explanation of the Vision (v. 21b)

### **Third Vision (2:1-5)**

The third vision is concerned with the state of Jerusalem, specifically the fact that its walls are still broken down. Therefore, when a man is seen going to measure Jerusalem in order for its boundaries to be set, it seems odd that he is stopped from doing so. But rather than seeing the lack of city walls as a reason to feel vulnerable to the hostile peoples around them, the community should see that it allows the city's population to explode beyond limits. A divine oracle follows (v. 5) where the Lord addresses the apparent need for walls around the city to provide protection; He Himself will be a fire around the city, thus protecting it from danger.

#### **The Vision (vv. 1-4)**

Vision Report: A Man with a Measuring Line (v. 1)

Question from the Prophet (v. 2a)

The Man's Reply (v. 2b)

The Angel's Proclamation that Jerusalem will be as Open Country (vv. 3-4)

#### **The Lord will Protect Jerusalem (v. 5)**

The Lord will be a Wall of Fire Around Jerusalem (v. 5a)

The Lord will be the Glory in Jerusalem (v. 5b)

### **A Call to Flee Babylon and Return into the Lord's Presence (2:6-13)**

The Lord's promises given in the previous oracles included judgment on the nations (1:14-15, 21) and a renewed blessing on Jerusalem. In light of this, a call goes out to those remaining in Babylon to flee a land destined for judgment and return to the presence of God (2:6-7).

This call to the exiles to return is reinforced by two further oracles: the first promising judgment on the nation that plundered Judah, i.e., Babylon (vv. 8-9), and the second pronouncing the return of the Lord's glory (vv. 10-11). Finally, we see a call to silence as the Lord is prepared to act upon His promises (vv. 12-13).

#### **The Call to Flee Babylon (vv. 6-7)**

First Call to Flee (v. 6a)

The Lord Himself Scattered the People (v. 6b)

Second Call to Flee (v. 7)

#### **Pronouncement of Judgment on the Nations (v. 8-9)**

The Lord has Sent Zechariah to Pronounce Judgment on the Nations (v. 8)

Divine Pronouncement of Judgement from the Lord (v. 9a)

Judgment will Prove Zechariah is a True Prophet (v. 9b)

#### **Promise of the Lord's Presence Among Them (v. 10-11)**

Call to Rejoice (v. 10a)

Reason for Rejoicing: The Lord will Dwell in Their Midst (v. 10b)

The Nations Join Themselves to the Lord (v. 11a)

The Lord will Dwell Among Them (v. 11b)

The Lord's Presence will Prove Zechariah is a True Prophet (v. 11c)

#### **The Lord is Prepared to Fulfill His Purposes (vv. 12-13)**

The Promise of a Renewed Covenant Relationship (v. 12)

Call to Silence (v. 13a)

Reason for Silence: The Lord is About to Act (v. 13b)

## **Fourth Vision (3:1-10)**

### **The Vision and Its Interpretation (vv. 1-5a)**

The fourth vision centers around Joshua who is the high priest serving as the post-exilic community's representative before God. Zechariah sees Joshua in the heavenly council being accused by Satan (the adversary). Although Satan's accusation against Joshua is not stated explicitly, one can infer that it involves the impurity of the priesthood brought on through generations of past sin and unfaithfulness.

Regardless of what has occurred in the past, the Lord is intent on bringing purification, both to the high priestly office that Joshua represents, as well as the entire community. He therefore rebukes Satan and orders that Joshua's impure vestments be removed and replaced with pure ones, symbolizing the purification of the priesthood in anticipation of the temple's reconstruction. Finally, the prophet Zechariah himself asks that a clean turban be placed on his head, completing the priestly attire.

The Lord has once again chosen the Zadokite priestly line (of which Joshua is a part) to serve before Him, just as he has chosen Jerusalem (1:17; 2:12). The community need no longer be weighed down by the guilt and impurity of their past sins, but rather live in the light of God's mercy and forgiveness. They can be confident that they are once again the object of God's favor.

Vision Report: Joshua the High Priest (v. 1)

The Lord Rebukes Satan (v. 2)

The Purification of the High Priest (vv. 3-4)

The Prophet's Request for a Clean Turban (v. 5a)

### **The Angel of the Lord's Charge to Joshua (vv. 5b-7)**

The Lord's forgiveness and purification of the priesthood symbolized in Zechariah's vision is only part of the scene. Now that Joshua has been purified, he and the priests are reminded that they must now walk in obedience and fulfill their duties before God and the people. Joshua's charge from the Angel of the Lord involves four conditions (v. 7). If he carries out these duties faithfully, he can come before God's presence in His temple on behalf of the people.

The Presence of the Angel of the Lord (v. 5b)

The Angel of the Lord's Charge (v. 6)

Message Formula (v. 7a)

The Promise for Carrying Out the Priestly Duties (v. 7b)

### **The Oracle Concerning the Branch (v. 8-10)**

Finally, Joshua and the priests around him are told they are part of a greater sign, where the reestablishment of the priesthood is foreshadowing the coming of David's royal descendent—the Branch (cf. Jer 23:5-6, 33:15-16; Isa 4: 2-6).

The purification that had been symbolized in the vision is now linked specifically to the King who will usher in the Messianic age, purifying His people and their land (v. 9) and promising its ensuing fruitfulness (v. 10).

Jesus Christ has now been revealed to be God's promised Messiah and King who has removed the sin of those who put their faith in Him. The post-exilic community had seen the reinstatement of the priesthood, but they were also told to wait in expectation of the return of their Messianic King.

Command to Joshua and the Priests to Hear (v. 8a)

The Arrival of the Branch, the Lord's Servant (v. 8b)

The Purification of the Land (v. 9)

Elaboration on the Prosperity of the Land (v. 10)

## **Fifth Vision (4:1-14)**

### **The Vision Report and Its Interpretation (vv. 1-6a)**

The angel returns to awaken Zechariah from his sleep and to ask him to describe the vision he sees. The prophet then describes a lamp with seven spouts. The oil to light the lamps is provided from olive trees on either side of it. When Zechariah asks the angel what the vision means, the angel responds with a question of his own asking if Zechariah understands. The prophet emphasizes his lack of understanding, which shows the human inability to understand the vision and heightens the drama as the reader waits for the interpretation.

The Angel Awakens Zechariah (v. 1)

The Angel's Question and Zechariah's Vision Report (vv. 2-3)

The Prophet Asks for an Interpretation (v. 4)

The Angel's Question and Zechariah's Response (v. 5)

The Angel Begins His Interpretation (v. 6a)

### **Two Oracles Concerning Zerubbabel (vv. 6b-10a)**

Two oracles "interrupt" the angel's interpretation, which resumes in verse 10b. This may be to direct the focus of the vision to Zerubbabel, as the previous vision concerned Joshua the high priest. Zerubbabel was the governor of Judea and descendent of the Davidic kings and was responsible for leading the people in rebuilding the temple. Both oracles affirm Zerubbabel as God's chosen leader to complete the task, as well as rebuke those who stood in opposition to him.

The first oracle (vv. 6b-7) begins with a reminder that the Lord will accomplish His purposes by anointing Zerubbabel with His Spirit, just as he anointed the kings of the past. The following address to the great mountain that stands in his way symbolizes those who oppose him, who will be overcome, allowing Zerubbabel to bring the temple construction to completion.

The second oracle (vv. 8-10a) again affirms that Zerubbabel will complete the temple. Also, those who see the work as insignificant ("a day of small things") will rejoice when it is accomplished.

Oracle: The Great Mountain of Opposition will be Levelled (vv. 6b-7)

Introduction to the Oracle (v. 6b)

Zerubbabel's Dependence on God's Spirit (v. 6c)

Address to the Mountain that Stands in the Way (v. 7a)

The Temple will be Completed with Rejoicing (v. 7b)

Oracle: Those who Despised the Day of Small Things will Rejoice (vv. 8-10a)

Message-reception Formula (v. 8)

Zerubbabel will Complete the Temple Construction (v. 9a)

The Temple Reconstruction will Prove Zechariah is a True Prophet (v. 9b)

Those who Initially Resisted will Rejoice (v. 10a)

### **The Vision Report and Its Interpretation, continued (vv. 10b-14)**

The vision report continues in verse 10b, but now, due to the previous two oracles, focuses the application of interpretation on affirming the Lord's choice of Zerubbabel to lead the community in rebuilding. The angel explains that the seven lamps are the eyes of the Lord, which represent the fact that He sees all human activity. Specifically, the Lord's focus is on Jerusalem. Just as the light is constantly fueled by the two branches of the olive tree which dispense oil, so God will look upon His people perpetually. The community is to be encouraged that God's Spirit and presence will continually dwell among His people, and His word will continue to provide revelation through His prophets.

The Angel's Interpretation of the Seven Lamps (v. 10b)

The Prophet Asks for an Interpretation (vv. 11-12)

The Angel's Response (v. 13)

The Angel's Interpretation (v. 14)

## **Sixth Vision (5:1-4)**

Zechariah's next vision has to do with the purification of the community from those who practice theft and injustice. This was one of the prevalent sins that caused the previous generations to bear the covenant curses and eventually led to their exile. In this vision, the prophet sees a large flying scroll that bears the decree that those who break the covenant will be cursed. The particular aspects of the covenant mentioned here have to do with matters of justice (stealing and swearing falsely) as mentioned in Leviticus 19:11ff. Those who may have previously been able to avoid punishment will now bear the covenant curse in the form of the destruction of their houses.

Vision Report: The Flying Scroll (v. 1)

The Angel's Question (v. 2a)

The Prophet's Response (v. 2b)

The Angel's Interpretation of the Vision (v. 3)

Divine Oracle: The Lord will Bring the Curses Upon Those Who Break Covenant (v. 4)

## **Seventh Vision (5:5-11)**

Just as the covenant-breakers must be purged from the community (vv. 1-4), so the land must be purged of idolatry (vv. 5-11). This is illustrated in the vision of an ephah going out from the presence of the people. An ephah was a common measurement of the time and could refer to the container that held that specific amount. Thus, *ephah* here is often translated as "basket" or "barrel." The angel tells Zechariah that the ephah is identified with the iniquity of the land.

A woman is revealed to be seated in the midst of the ephah and identified as wickedness. She is quickly thrust into the midst of the ephah and covered with a heavy lid to remove any chance of her escape. The final part of the vision reveals two winged women ready to remove the iniquity and the wickedness away from Jerusalem and into the land of Shinar (i.e., Babylon).

The idolatrous worship of the previous generations has no place among the post-exilic community and certainly not in the house of God. The idols of Babylon belong in the temples of Babylon, along with all the judgments that will come to it. The people are called to leave their past idolatry behind as they prepare to finish construction on the house of God in order to worship Him alone.

The Vision of the Ephah Going Out

Command from the Angel to Behold the Ephah (v. 5)

The Prophet's Question (v. 6a)

Vision Report (v. 6b)

The Angel's Interpretation of the Vision (v. 6c)

The Vision of a Woman in the Midst of the Ephah

Vision Report (v. 7)

The Angel's Interpretation of the Vision (v. 8a)

The Angel Covers the Woman in the Midst of the Ephah (v. 8b)

The Vision of Two Winged Women Carrying the Ephah Away

Vision Report (v. 9)

The Prophet's Question (v. 10)

The Angel's Interpretation of the Vision (v. 11)

## **Eighth Vision (6:1-8)**

The final vision again returns to the theme of Babylon's judgment. Similar to the first vision of four horsemen, here Zechariah sees four horse-drawn chariots, also separated by colors. However, in the first vision the horsemen were sent as reconnaissance throughout the world; here the chariots are prepared for battle and eager to carry out the Lord's judgment on the nations. The chariots are called the "winds of heaven" (v. 5), which is likely a reference to the powerful devastation brought on by the Lord's agents (Ps. 104:3-4; Jer. 49:36). Two of the chariots are sent to the north, that is, to the land of Babylon. It was, in fact, during this time in Darius' reign over Persia that the last remnants of Babylon's former empire were finally defeated. The Lord assures the people that what remained of the Babylonian empire, Judah's oppressor, will finally be judged. Thus, the judgment complete, the vision ends with the wind sent to the north being set at rest.

Vision Report: Four Chariots (vv. 1-3)

The Prophet's Question (v. 4)

The Angel's Interpretation of the Vision (v. 5-6)

Vision Report Continued: The Chariots Patrol the Earth (v. 7)

The Angel's Interpretation of the Vision Continued (v. 8)

## **A Sign Act (6:9-15)**

In light of the above vision pronouncing Babylon's imminent judgment, the focus now moves to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. Zechariah is called to perform a sign act, which is when a prophet is called to act out a scene symbolizing a message from the Lord. Here the Lord tells the prophet to take gold and silver from among some of the representatives of the exiles in order to make a crown, and to place it on the head of Joshua the high priest. Joshua is then given an oracle from the Lord and told that the crown represents the Branch, the promised Messianic king and seed of David. Although Judah still had no king, the crown is to remain in the temple as a constant reminder that the king would eventually return and build the temple of the Lord.

Sign-Act: Making a Crown from the Wealth of the Exiles

Message-reception Formula (v. 9)

Sign-Act: Call to Make a Crown (vv. 10-11)

Oracle to Joshua about the Branch

Command to Speak to Joshua (v. 12a)

Message Formula (v. 12b)

The Branch will Build the Temple (v. 12c-13)

The Crown as a Memorial (v.14-15a)

The Coming of the King will Prove Zechariah is a True Prophet (v. 15b)

Call to Listen to the Voice of the Lord (v. 15c)