

Study Introduction: "Zechariah, the Minor Prophet"

Week 1

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We will begin our study of the book of Zechariah by considering: (1) why we study prophecy, (2) why we are studying Zechariah now, (3) Zechariah the Minor Prophet and priest and how he was important in Israel's history, (4) the characteristics of a prophet of God, (5) keeping the big picture in mind as we study Zechariah, and (6) reviewing Israel's history up to the time of Zechariah.

1. Why do we study prophecy?

All prophecy is for the nation Israel and the Jews. Israel is in God's Prophetic Program and we are in God's Mystery program, the Body of Christ (Eph 3:1-9; 1Cor 12: 13, 27). However there are many reasons why we should study prophecy. The following are just a few:

- It is a part of the Word of God "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2Timothy 3:16-17)
- Prophecy causes us to consider our own destiny. What will happen to me when I die?
- To better understand the ages and the dispensations. For example we talk about dispensations/ages that have already passed: Innocence, Conscience, Human Government, Promise, Law, or Grace our current dispensation. However, The Apostle Paul expected the saints in the church at Thessalonica to also understand the prophetic plan of God: "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you" (1Th 5:1). Why did he have no need to write and explain the times and the seasons? What are the times and seasons? This expression refers to the prophetic plan of God, not the mystery program. The mystery program does not involve times and seasons. So why did he say that he didn't even need to write to them? "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1Th 5:2). In other words, they already knew about those things. If they already knew about those things maybe we had better know about them too.

2. Why are we studying the book of Zechariah now?

We are studying the book of Zechariah now for two reasons. First, it fits in well with our recent study of Daniel. In Daniel we studied the fall of Babylon to the Medes/Persians followed by decree of Cyrus which allowed the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem. This happened at the end of the Seventy Years prophecy. In our Study of Zechariah we will pick up where we left off in our Daniel study and we will see the restoration of the temple and Jerusalem. We will focus on Zechariah's role, and learn about the role of some of the other prophets and leaders, in the restoration of Jerusalem.

Second, so we can better understand the biblical history of the Jews and their lives during this time of rebuilding and restoring Jerusalem. Also, our Study of Zechariah will help us grow in our understanding of the hope the Jews had in their promised Kingdom on earth; reigned by their Messiah.

3. Zechariah and his importance in Israel's history

A. Zechariah was a Minor prophet who prophesied to the Jewish exiles who had returned to Jerusalem at the end of Israel's 70 Year Captivity to Babylon. The Temple and the City Wall of Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The returning Jews had started work on building the Temple but then stopped due to the opposition from the surrounding peoples. When this happened God used the Minor Prophets Zechariah and Haggai to motivate and encourage them to complete their work.

Zechariah's visions occurred in one night in 520 BC and his visions resemble those written by Daniel, Ezekiel, and prophecies in the Book of The Revelation. Zechariah prophesied two months later than his older contemporary Haggai and they apparently knew each other. However, their prophecies were different.

- Haggai's prophecies centered on calling the Jews to build the house of the Lord and how their struggles were connected with their disobedience to God in not completing the temple.
- Haggai is down-to-earth and Zechariah is visionary.
- The fourteen chapters of Zechariah are prophecies of Israel's near and distant future. It contains the largest number of messianic prophecies among the Minor Prophets. Because of this some have described Zechariah as the "Minor Prophet with a Major Message". His prophecies gave them the proper context for rebuilding the Temple and restoring Jerusalem.
- Zechariah's prophecies in Chapter 9-14 were likely written thirty years later.
- Little is known about the personal life of Zechariah.

B. Zechariah was also a priest. His grandfather was Iddo and was one of the priests that returned from the Babylonian exile under the leadership of Zerubbabel. A Babylonian Jew, Zerubbabel was entrusted by King Cyrus to lead the 49, 897 exiles home and to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 2:2, 64-65; Haggai 1:1-2). He later became the governor of Judea. Zerubbabel rekindled the hopes of the Jews!

Zechariah was in a priestly line:

"Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them" (Ezra 5:1-2).

- **Zechariah's name means "Yahweh remembers"**. His name, Zechariah, is a common name among the Israelites and it identifies at least 26-27 men in the OT. Zechariah was a young man compared to the older prophet Haggai.
- **Zechariah** was born in Babylon, likely by the canals just outside of the city of Babylon. His family was one of the nearly 50,000 exiles who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in 536 BC.
- There are a few theories concerning the death of Zechariah which will be covered later in one of the Lesson Reviews. It appears likely however, that Zechariah was murdered between the temple and the altar.

4. The characteristics of a prophet of God

- A. ***A prophet is someone who speaks in place of someone else.*** The word "prophet" comes from two Greek words, *pro* which means "before, in front of, or in place of" and *pheme*, which means "to speak". For example, Aaron spoke on behalf of his brother Moses: "And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet" (Exodus 7:1).
- B. ***God selected men to be his spokesperson or prophet.*** The writer of Hebrews, who was addressing the Hebrews said "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Hebrews 1:1). The prophets said what the Lord God said; they spoke the words of God.
- C. ***God would give his prophets visions and dreams*** "And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD, will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream" (Numbers 12:6).
- D. ***The prophets not only spoke God's words, but they often wrote them down.*** "And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it" (Habakkuk 2:2). Daniel wrote down his vision in Daniel 7:1 "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters."
- E. ***The people were not allowed to change one word of the message given them by a prophet.*** Moses, speaking to the Israelites said "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2).
- F. ***Not all who prophesized held a position of being a prophet.*** Consider the last words of David "Now, these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said. The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2Samuel 23:1-2).
- G. ***The Old Testament prophets continued until John the Baptist.*** "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Matthew 11:13). Furthermore in Hebrews we learn: "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:2).
- H. ***The Old Testament prophetic books are divided into Major and Minor prophets.*** The descriptions of major and minor does not indicate how important the prophets or their books are. Rather, it reflects the length of the books written by these prophets. The Major Prophets wrote longer books than the Minor Prophets and their books *generally* have a broader content or implications. The books written by the Minor Prophets generally are shorter in length with a more narrow content or focus.
 - ***The Major Prophets are:*** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. (Jeremiah wrote the book of Jeremiah and Lamentations)
 - ***The Minor Prophets are:*** Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Some refer to these twelve Minor Prophets as "The Twelve".
 - ***The prophet Zechariah is considered one of twelve Minor Prophets and is the focus of our Study.***

5. Keep the big picture in mind as you study Zechariah

As you study Zechariah, remember that God was speaking to the Jews and their leaders in Jerusalem. Through these prophecies God reminded them that he will judge sin, he urged them to complete the restoration of the temple and Jerusalem, and he reminded them of their future kingdom on earth when their Messiah will rule from Jerusalem. The ten visions God gave Zechariah in the first six chapters of this book may seem strange and hard to understand, but with a little study you will understand their purpose and meaning. Keep in mind that these visions use things common to the Jewish culture then which may not be common to us today. Prophecies written later in Chapters 9-14 remind the Jews that God will keep all his promises. In these chapters Zechariah prophesizes about Israel's Messiah and their future Kingdom in Jerusalem.

While our study of Zechariah adds to our understanding of the book of Daniel, if you were not a part of our Daniel study this will not hold you back from understanding Zechariah! You will also get a peek into one of the biggest prophecies Daniel was given: the "Image of a Man" dream that reveals all the kingdoms of the world which ends with the final kingdom of Israel's Messiah King Jesus!

6. A Review of Israel's History leading up to the time of the Prophet Zechariah so we will understand the times when Zechariah lived and prophesied.**A. *The nation of Israel first began with the promise God made to Abram***

- "And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Genesis 13: 14-15).
- Because Abram believed what God told him was true God declared he was righteous "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). That same day the LORD confirmed the promise of the land with a covenant "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

B. *The nation of Israel was named after Abraham's grandson Jacob (Israel)*

- Later in Genesis chapter 17 God changed Abram's name to Abraham, and he changed Sarai's name to Sarah. God also affirmed his promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah. In Genesis chapter 21 that promised son Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah.
- Isaac's son was Jacob who later became the father of the 12 Tribes of Israel. God changed Jacob's name to Israel in Genesis 32:28 "And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." God also referred to his nation, his first born, as Israel in Exodus 4:22 when he gave instructions to Moses about what he should say to Pharaoh: "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn."

C. An important part of Israel's history was the move Jacob (Israel) and his sons made to Egypt because of the famine in the land. Israel grew into a nation while in Egypt.

D. Jacob's sons came to Egypt to dwell at the invitation of Pharaoh.

Jacob's son Joseph was already in Egypt serving in a high position for Pharaoh. Pharaoh consented to Joseph's request to bring his father and his brethren to live in the land of Goshen in Egypt.

- "And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph saying Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle" (Genesis 47:5-6).

E. The number of Jacob's sons and their families who came into Egypt was seventy. "And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already" (Exodus 1:5).

- **Those 70 souls grew to 600,000 males, not including women and children** "And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot, that were men, beside children" (Exodus 12:37). Many estimate that the total number, after including the women and children, would have been closer to two million people.
- **Israel lived in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years before the Exodus.** "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years" (Exodus 12:40).

Moses first led the children of Israel but it was Joshua who brought them into the Promise Land...**F. Israel divided the Promise Land according to the 12 Tribes.** After the Exodus and the forty years wandering in the wilderness, Israel finally entered into the Promise Land under the leadership of Joshua because Moses had died "Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel" (Joshua 1:1-2).

- **The 12 tribes of Israel are:** Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Gad, and Naphtali. Numbers 1:4-16. The Promise land was divided according to the 12 Tribes. Joshua 13:7-17:18. ***These 12 Tribes became a Kingdom...***

G. Israel began as one Kingdom under King Saul, their first king, but later divided into two Kingdoms. After the period of the Judges who ruled over Israel, the people wanted a King to be like the other nations. Israel remained one kingdom under King Saul, King David and his son King Solomon. However King Solomon did not keep the covenant and statues which God had commanded so...

- **When Solomon died in 931 BC God divided Israel**, which had all 12 Tribes, between the son of Solomon's servant Jeroboam (10 tribes), and the son of Solomon, Rehoboam (2 tribes: Judah, Benjamin).
- **Later, in 722 BC Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel** (2Kings 17:13-23), either taking captive or driving out the 10 tribes. The Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 tribes) lasted 136 years longer. It was completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC (2Kings 25:1-12).

- **The Southern Kingdom of Judah *did evil by going after false gods and doing evil.*** The LORD sent prophets, most notably Jeremiah, who warned them to stop worshipping false gods and stop their evil ways but they didn't listen. They also did evil because they hadn't allowed their land to rest in the 7th year. They were to harvest for 6 years then allow the land to rest on the 7th year. This is described in Leviticus 25:1-7, 26:33-35. ***Because of these things...***
- H. God used Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon to punish Judah.** This punishment would last 70 years. "And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jeremiah 25:11).
- I. The 70 Years Prophecy (Captivity) is important in Israel's history** and it is important in our study of Zechariah. God used King Nebuchadnezzar to take the Jews captive from Jerusalem to Babylon for 70 years. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Babylonians.
- J. The 70 years began with the first deportation of the Jews to Babylon in 605/606 BC and ended in 536 BC** with the laying of the foundation for the second temple. (Ezra 3:8-3).
"In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolation of Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:2).
- K. The deportations of the Jews from Jerusalem to Babylon were: 605/606 BC, 597 BC, 586 BC (Jerusalem & Temple destroyed). A fourth deportation in 582 BC followed.**

The timeline of the Seventy Years, the Rebuilding of the Temple & the City Walls...

605 BC: The first captives taken to Babylon. This is the beginning of the 70 YEARS Captivity.

586 BC: Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

539 BC: Medes and Persians conquer Babylon. end of 539 BC...Then *one year later...*

538 BC: Cyrus of Babylon decreed that the Jewish exiles can return home to Jerusalem.

1. This marks the end of the 70 YEARS captivity. Accounting for the time involved for the Jews to prepare for their journey home plus the long journey itself (homes to sell, businesses to liquidate, and organizing the caravans for the journey etc) makes the actual arrival date of early 535 BC more feasible. This assumes that Cyrus's decree was issued near the end of 538 BC and allows time to prepare for the journey home (late in 535 BC). Counting from the first deportation in 605 BC to 535 BC is 70 YEARS.
2. When the Jews returned home to Judah they began rebuilding the Temple. They faced strong opposition from the Samaritans and the work on the temple stopped until around 520 BC when they began their work again. We read about this in the books of Ezra and Haggai. **The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were given prophecies to encourage the Jews to complete the Temple. Zechariah also prophesized about Israel's future.**

516 BC: Work on rebuilding the Temple is completed under the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

445 BC - Artaxerxes of Persia **issued the command to build and restore Jerusalem (Walls & Gate).**

God used Nehemiah, the king's cup bearer, to get King Artaxerxes to issue the command to restore and build Jerusalem.

In the first lesson of our Study "Zechariah the Minor Prophet", we will look into other prophets and priests who were his contemporaries. We want to see the big picture of building the temple and restoring Jerusalem.