

## ZECHARIAH

### Comments by Ben Ollenburger unless otherwise noted.

- 1) 1:1 – Believed to have been written by two people. Chapters 1-8 and 9-14 are distinctly different in style. Except for chapter 11, the prophetic persona in First Zechariah is completely absent. No identifiable person, uncertain date; religious, social, and political concerns can be inferred with difficulty. Few reasons to connect these to Zechariah. In contrast to the symmetrical arrangement of visions in First Zechariah, Second Zechariah exhibits a profusion of genres: “invective, threat, heraldic odes, promises, metaphors, symbolic actions” (Meyers and Meyers) /// This word came from the Lord to Zechariah two months after the Lord spoke to Haggai (see Haggai 1:1). Zechariah was much younger than Haggai. Both mentioned together in Ezra 5:1. And both returned from Babylon, probably together under Zerubbabel’s leadership. /// Before the captivity, Jerusalem probably had 6-7,000 residents; now only a few hundred. Entire country probably had one-third of its former population. /// In Ezra 5:11 and 6:14, Iddo is named Zechariah’s father, not his grandfather; this cannot be resolved.
- 2) 1:4 – A direct allusion to Jeremiah 25:5: “Turn back, each of you, from your evil way and from your evil deeds.”
- 3) 1:6 – First sentence echoes the curses in Deuteronomy 28:45, the second one Lamentation 2:17.
- 4) 1:8-9 – The NAB has the horseman standing “in a shady place,” in Hebrew a reference to a deep place, like in Eden or in Jacob’s dream in Gen 28:17, reinforced by the darkness and the myrtles which shroud the present of Yahweh. /// This is an interposition of an angel between God and man, indicating a waning of the skill of prophecy. /// The rider of the red horse is the angel of Yahweh. He is the leader of the horses who are the hosts of heaven. They are Yahweh’s agents and have just patrolled the entire earth (see chapter 6). The obscure and fantastic images of Zechariah’s visions should not let us lose sight of what Zechariah is doing: portraying the restoration of the world by God to its proper order.
- 5) 1:12 – A clear reference to Jeremiah 25:12-14 and Jeremiah 29:10 where Jeremiah announces first a 70-year Babylonian hegemony and then its end.
- 6) 1:14 – Can also be translated “zealous.” The NAB reads “deeply moved.”
- 7) 2:5-9 – The man is a surveyor and is told it is unnecessary to survey the walls of Jerusalem because the city will grow so rapidly that the walls cannot contain all the people and animals. Besides, God will protect the city with walls of fire.
- 8) 2:10-13 – Messianic Judaism uses vv 10-11 to indicate that even Gentiles would eventually become Jews and would be welcome. /// The exploitation of Judah or Zion is a poke in the pupil of God’s eye. Those who plundered will be plundered. Zechariah “does not escape the logic of reciprocal violence, the plundered being the plunderers (see also Revelation 6:9-11). Yet in v. 15, God says many nations will “join themselves to the Lord on that day.”
- 9) 3:1-4 – Joshua represents the Jewish nation cleansed. Satan is a Persian idea and came to the Jews only in 538 when Cyrus conquered Babylon. Here, only 20 years later, he appears as the “prosecuting attorney” of the Jews for the heavenly court. In Hebrew, it is “ha \_\_\_an,” the satan. Here the satan is not yet an independent figure who acts against God. /// The distinction between the Yahweh angel and Yahweh is blurred. /// The

“brand plucked from the fire” is a clear allusion to Amos 4:11, where God claims that the errant Israelites were like the survivors of Sodom and Gomorrah who were plucked from the fire and saved.

- 10) 3: 3-5 – Closely resembles Isaiah’s cleansing so that he could be given a divine commission.
- 11) 3:6-10 – Gives Joshua and his fellow priests the prerogatives usually reserved for kings and governors. The Branch refers to many biblical texts (see NIB, p. 766) that promise that future kings will be legitimate, i.e. of Davidic lineage. For the Christian, the promise is Messianic, the Branch being Jesus. (See 6:12 and the note there). /// The seven-eyed stone refers to the royal diadem or crown, a sign of his priestly office. The seven eyes may be what Yahweh is engraving on the stone (see note at 4:10b).
- 12) 4:2-5 – In placing a bowl atop the lampstand, Zechariah alludes to the Temple of Solomon. But instead of blossoming pillars with bowls at the Temple’s entrance, Zechariah sees two olive trees “flanking the gate of heaven.” The menorah symbolized the restored Jewish state. Zerubbabel is thus warned that success of his kingdom will not depend on military strength.
- 13) 4:7 –The great mountain is the pile of rubble that was once the Temple.
- 14) 4:9 – Ezra 6:14 says that the elders, not Zerubbabel, finished the Temple. Zerubbabel’s fate is unknown, though his daughter Shelomith served as his successor’s (Elnathan) administrative assistant (1 Chron 3:19).
- 15) 4:10b – The seven facets are the eyes of the Lord, which like in 2 Chronicles 16:9 “range the whole earth to strengthen those who are completely true to him.”
- 16) 5:1-4 – One side of the scroll predicts that thieves will be cut off, and on the other side that false swearers will be cut off. /// The vestibule of Solomon’s temple was 20x10 cubits (30’x15’). The cherubim over the ark were 10 cubits tall. /// The scroll, like the sun in Genesis 19:23, “goes out over the whole earth.” /// The terms “swept away” and “expelled” are more accurately translated as “held innocent” or “acquitted.” But in v 4 they receive their due punishment. (Confusing!) What Zechariah is getting at is that the legal system has become corrupt and has become a machine for issuing verdicts of innocence, even to thieves and liars. See Matt 5:33, where Jesus says not to swear an oath at all, and James 5:12 where James quotes Jesus. In swearing on the Bible, the Bible has come to function as the scroll and is placed in a position to exonerate those who testify falsely.
- 17) 5:6-11 – The Hebrew word for basket is “ephah,” two-thirds of a bushel, which represents money in ancient Judah. The lead cover or disk also connotes money. This makes a connection between vision 2 (horses oppressing Judah) and this vision because of the heavy taxes levied by rapacious provincial governors, exploiting Judah. . Shinar is in Babylon, where the Tower of Babel was built (Gen 11:2) and where man first rebelled against Yahweh. /// The woman representing wickedness may be the Phoenician Astarte, Jeremiah’s “Queen of Heaven.” Why a woman? In the worship of Astarte, women played an important role. They wove baskets as houses for the goddess. Maybe the “ephah” here was a woven basket (see line one in this note). Removing the ephah from Judah reclaims the identity of Judah. But the outright misogyny cannot be ignored. “How do we hear the word of God in a text that identifies a woman as wickedness?”
- 18) 6:1-4 – The imagery here is that of the horses bursting from the east like the sun, between two mountains representing the gates of heaven. Appropriate for the last vision since the first one occurred at dusk. The chariots would have a martial character – see Psalm 68:18

- “God’s chariots were myriad, thousands upon thousands...”
- 19) 6:6 – In both the NIV and the NRSV the black horses go north, the white south, the grey west. None go east because that’s where they came from.
- 20) 6:9-15 – These vv stress that the Branch will build the temple. Recall that 4:6b-10a stresses that Zerubbabel would complete the temple, but in neither of these vv as well as 3:8-10 is Zerubbabel mentioned. Zechariah, like Haggai, names Zerubbabel as the Messiah. A later editor may have removed the name from 6:13 because the prophecy was quickly proved to be untrue. His omission here is striking. Ollenburger offers no explanation. /// One crown will be placed on Joshua’s head but the other will remain in the Temple as a reminder that the Branch has not yet come. And by the time the Temple was finished (March 151 [Ezra 6:14-15]) both Zerubbabel and Joshua have vanished. /// This Zechariah oracle, then, affords contemporary Christians with the opportunity to experience the intensity, desire, and yearning of the Jewish messianic theologies.”
- 21) 7:3 – The practice in question is mourning and devotion, not fasting as in the NIV, or abstinence as stated here.
- 22) 7:5-6 – Rhetorical questions? Zechariah knows they didn’t fast to mourn the Lord or eat and drink to praise
- 23) 7:7-14 – All this unit refers to the past. Zechariah recounts the obstinacy of the people and their dispersal as punishment by the Lord.
- 24) 8:9-13 – Verbal links with Haggai: v 9 and Haggai 2:18, v 10 and Haggai 1:11, v 12 and Haggai 1;10. /// The reference in v 13 to a curse means that Israel and Judah were no more, and once could say, “May you be like the house of Israel, i.e. suffer its fate.” 25) 9:1-8 – Hadrach, not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, is apparently a town in northern Syria. A conquering army passes down the length of Syria and Philistia and may be Alexander’s. In 333 BC he defeated Darius III at the battle of Issus, 400 miles north of Jerusalem, at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean. He then marched south and took all of Syria, Phoenicia, and Gaza (9:5) and executed its Persian governor. The Jews considered this to be the hand of God preparing the way for the Messiah. Thus with the military affairs taken care of, the Messiah could come in peace (9:9-10). But then, confusingly, there is a picture of war (9:13, 10:11). Javan in vs 13 was a son of Japheth (who was a son of Noah). His sons were Elishak, Tarshish, Kittim and Dadahim, referencing the lands on the north shore of the Mediterranean, esp. the Ionian Greeks. The reference here seems to be to the two portions of Alexander’s army which were of interest to the Jews: Ptolemaic Egypt and the Seleucid kingdom (Syria -- the Assyria in 10:11 is probably a copyist’s error).
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- 26) 9:6 – “Mongrel people” here is translated in the NAB as “baseborn,” and in the NIV as “foreigners.” The point was that people of mixed ancestry will occupy the cities of Philistia (See note # 25 above).
- 27) 9:7 – Refers to eating meat from the blood had not been drained. “Abominations” maybe idolatry or more likely proscribed meat. V 7b may be a reference to Joshua 15:64 where the Judahites could not drive out the Jebusites, the original inhabitants of Jerusalem and they “continue to live there to this day.”
- 28) 9:9b – “Triumphant” is “righteous” in NIV. But would be better translated “legitimate,” that is, a direct descendant of David (see Jeremiah 23:15). “Colt/foal” refers to Genesis 49:10-11, Jacob’s blessing of Judah. This is misquoted in John 12:13-15 and Matt 21:5.
- 29) 9:11-13 – See Exodus 24:7-8, where Moses takes the book of the covenant in one hand and with the other sprinkles the people with sacrificial blood from the altar. /// “Dungeon” in both NIV and NRSV is better translated as “waterless pit”(NAB), referring either to the pit Jeremiah was thrown into (Jer 34:8) or more likely, the pit Joseph was thrown into by his brothers (Gen 3:24). More likely because Ephraim was Joseph’s son, included in Zion’s kingdom (vv 9-10), and with Judah wages war against Greece (v 13). /// Javan is literally Ionia, a Greek area in southwest Asia but refers more generally to all of Greece. Joel 3:6 (in the Persian period) charges that Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia sold the sons of Jerusalem to the Greeks.
- 30) 9:15b – The word “blood” does not appear in the text. Consuming blood was strictly forbidden (Lev 1:10-12). The picture is that of drunken revelry. NIV: “They will drink and roar as with wine.”
- 31) 10:3a – These shepherds and rams are the nations and their rulers who have ruled Judah and kept Israel in dispersion.
- 32) 10:10-11:3 – Imagery at two levels: 1) 10:10 promises that Israel will expand into and beyond Lebanon and Gilead. In order to do so, the trees must be burned and/or cut down to allow for agriculture. 2) In Isaiah 2:43, the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan will be brought low when Yiahweh is exalted. In Amos 1:8, trees represent the nations, and in Ezekiel 17:3 the cedar is Judah’s king. In Ezekiel 31 the cedar is Assyria cut down and sent to Sheol. “Against the background of Isaiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah’s imagery possesses a political quality.” /// The word translated “mighty” is in Jonah 3:6 the Assyrian king’s royal robe. The word translated as “thickets” is the sovereignty of Assyria. Zechariah 11:3 alludes both to pride/sovereignty and to the shepherds whom Yahweh opposes. Yahweh will strike out like a young lion against the rulers of all nations, but it is impossible to detect which nations Zechariah is talking about.
- 33) 11: 4-17 – The “shepherds” perhaps refers to the High Priests of the Temple during the Seleucid persecution. But the events of the time, known in full detail to the original readers, are sketchy and confusing to us now. Interpreters have identified the shepherds of 11:8 with everyone from Moses and his siblings to Judas Maccabeus and his. (This is among the most complex texts in the OT.) First Zechariah promises to guard the sheep (the people of Judah and Israel) and then eliminates the three shepherds, then abandons the sheep. This is to the advantage of the sheep merchants and they pay Zechariah 30 shekels of silver (cf. Matthew 17:7-10 where Judas’s wages for betraying Jesus is he same. See also Exodus 21:32 where this was the compensation for injury to a slave.) The sheep merchants are never identified, may be 1) all the people who have contracted

- to preserve the sheep, 2) priestly administrators of the Temple-centered economy, 3) the civil, even Persian, rulers of Judah.
- 34) 12:1-8 – The “nations” will attack Judah in Jerusalem, but Yahweh will blind their horses make them powerless. /// V. 8 is “eerily reminiscent” of the serpent’s prediction in Genesis 3:5.
- 35) 12:10-13 – The only “firstborns” in the OT are Isaac and Jephthah’s unnamed daughter. In Ollenburg’s “Reflections”, he refers to John 19:37 (“And again, another passage says, ‘They will look upon him who they have pierced.’”) and Revelation 1:7 (“Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.”) Echoes also in John 1:18, Matt 3:17, Luke 9:35, Luke 2:7, Romans 8:29, and Colossians 1:15.
- 36) 13:2-6 – A confusing scenario: parents are instructed to kill their sons as soon as they begin to prophesy, yet the prophets go to great lengths to deny that they are *not* prophets. Does the prophet hide his prophesying so he won’t be killed by his parents? Not answered in NIB.
- 37) 13:7 – The term “associate” is obscure. It occurs in the OT only in Leviticus where it designates a fellow community member. The shepherd is killed in order to scatter the flock. WHY? Jesus quotes this verse to Peter in Matt 20:31, predicting the shepherd’s death and scattering of his disciples. And in Luke 13:34 he laments the killing of prophets by Jerusalem.
- 38) 13:8-9 – Borrowed from Ezekiel 5:1-12. Perhaps answers the question WHY? in 13:7. The death of the shepherd and the scattering of the flock causes a cleansing of David’s house, scattering and death of Jerusalem’s inhabitants, and a refining in fire of the remnant.
- 39) 14:9ff – Along with Malachi 1:11 and Zephaniah 3:9, this verse was taken as a prophecy that in the Messianic Era all nations will serve God as One.
- 40) 14:16-21 read on the first day of this feast, also called the Feast of Tabernacles, and celebrated as Succoth by the Jews now, an 8-day thanksgiving for the harvest. Inspired the Thanksgiving of the Pilgrim fathers. /// Mark 11 has Jesus begin his entry into Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives, hailed as king, comes to the Temple and drives out those engaged in trade.