

Session 13

# The Narrative of Israel from the Book of Zechariah

## – Part 1 –

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### A. Introduction

1. Two sections of Scripture are important to understanding the issue of Israel. They are Romans 9 to 11 in the New Testament and the book of Zechariah from the Old Testament.
2. These two passages provide a Biblical foundation for understanding the mystery of Israel. They reveal:
  - a. God's heart and zeal for Israel;
  - b. His plan for Israel;
  - c. His redemptive plan for nations through Israel; and
  - d. The narrative of Israel at the End of the Age.

### B. The Importance of the Book of Zechariah

1. The book of Zechariah is primarily about God's Plan for Israel and specifically for the city of Jerusalem.
2. Its secondary theme is about praying for God's destiny for Jerusalem — the raising up of a global prayer movement at the End of the Age, specifically in Jerusalem (Isa. 62:6–7). This book provides the fuel for the Gentile Church to pray for Israel (Zech. 1:14–17).
3. God is not neutral about Israel and Jerusalem, and thus as His people, we should not be too. There are five reasons why we should care about Jerusalem:
  - a. Jesus is zealous for Jerusalem and He will dwell in Jerusalem when He returns (Zech. 8:2–3).
  - b. God's End-Time purpose and eternal plan is Jerusalem-centric (Jer. 3:17; Ps. 2:6). Everything is centred around Jerusalem. God's eternal city is Jerusalem and not any other city.
  - c. The issue surrounding Jerusalem is the issue of God's sovereignty and faithfulness. How God deals with Jerusalem is a witness to God's leadership and faithfulness to His Word and to the nations. How God deals with Israel reveals God (Ezek. 36:22–23).

- d. Jerusalem is a unique model of how God will deal with nations.
  - i. Theologically, God will deal with nations according to the principle of “like kind but lesser degree”. This means that the blessings, judgement and glory that God will release to Israel during the Great Tribulation and in the Millennial Kingdom will be released in like kind but to a lesser degree to the Church and the nations.
  - ii. This gives us a powerful picture of what will happen to us!
- e. Jerusalem is the only city that God commands us to pray for and stand with. It is not an option for us to stand with God in accordance to His heart and zeal for her (Isa. 62:6–7; 66:2; Ps. 122:6).

Note: Jerusalem is mentioned over 800 times in the Bible. Zion is mentioned about 160 times.

### **C. The Context of the Book of Zechariah from Ezra 1 – 6**

1. Ezra 1 – 6 provides the context for the messages contained in the Book of Zechariah.
  - a. Ezra 1 – 6 describes significant events related to the return of Jewish exiles from Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple of God in Jerusalem.
  - b. The entire story of ancient Israel’s return from exile and the rebuilding of the temple can only be seen clearly when these passages are read together — Ezra 1 – 6; Haggai 1 – 2 and Zechariah 1 – 8.
2. In 538 B.C., King Cyrus of Persia defeated the nation of Babylon. Within a year of his victory over Babylon, Cyrus made a surprise decree to free the Jewish captives from Babylon, allowing them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:1–5).
3. Furthermore, Cyrus provided a stipend from the royal treasury towards supporting the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 2:65).
4. Ezra 1 – 2 is a description of the 50,000 exiles that returned from Babylon. After seventy years in captivity, they returned. It was not because life in Babylon was hard, but because they believed what the Lord had spoken about rebuilding His house in Jerusalem.
5. In the seventh month of their first year in Jerusalem, the altar was rebuilt. In the second year, they began to work on rebuilding the temple itself (Ezra 3:1–2, 8–9).
6. The foundation of the temple was completed several months later, resulting in both lamentation and rejoicing. The older generation wept because it was a far cry from the temple of Solomon, while the younger generation, who had never seen the former temple, rejoiced because of the accomplishment (Ezra 3:10–12).

7. However, adversaries arose against the Jewish people and they sought to stop the work of rebuilding. These adversaries hired counsellors to frustrate them and accused the Jewish people before the Persian rulers (Ezra 4:1–6).
8. The Persian government intervened and stopped the Jewish people from building the temple. They became discouraged in the face of obstacles and opposition and lost their vision and sense of purpose. Thus, the work of rebuilding the temple ceased in 536 B.C. and stopped for 16 years (Ezra 4:24).
9. After 16 years (i.e. 536–520 B.C.), God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to exhort the leaders to restart the construction of the temple. By that time, the Jewish people had been focusing on their own houses and building their own lives. Through Zechariah and Haggai, the Lord brought correction and direction to them to begin anew (Ezra 5:1–2).
10. After approximately four years of hard work, they completed the temple in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:14–16).

#### **D. Theme and Outline of the Book of Zechariah**

1. The book of Zechariah was written during the post-exilic period of ancient Israel's history. It consists of 14 chapters and through the prophet Zechariah, God gave many promises to the nation of Israel.
2. The theme of the book of Zechariah is God's zeal for Jerusalem and Israel (Zech. 1:14–17, 8:2).
3. The book of Zechariah gives many specific promises concerning God's End-Time plan for Israel. These promises are primarily found in Zech. 9 – 14.
4. The book of Zechariah is divided into three main sections:
  - a. The first section: Chapters 1 – 6 (~ 520 B.C.) comprise a series of eight visions that Zechariah received in one night. These visions concern Israel's future destiny and contain four messages of assurance from God.
  - b. The second section: Chapters 7 – 8 (~ 520 B.C.) comprise a further four messages to encourage the Jewish people to complete rebuilding the temple. These messages arose out of the issue of fasting and feasting.
  - c. The third section: Chapters 9 – 14 (undated) are made up of two prophetic oracles that focus, with great detail, on many of the End-Time events surrounding the return of the Messiah and the salvation of Israel.
5. Outline of the Book of Zechariah:
  - a. A call to repentance and to return to God (Zech. 1:1–6);

- b. Eight prophetic visions concerning Israel and the temple of Jerusalem (Zech. 1:7 – 6:15):
  - i. Vision of the horses (Zech. 1:7–17);
  - ii. Vision of the horns and craftsmen (Zech. 1:8–21);
  - iii. Vision of the measuring line (Zech. 2:1–13);
  - iv. Vision of the high priest (Zech. 3:1–10);
  - v. Vision of the lampstand and olive trees (Zech. 4:1–14);
  - vi. Vision of the flying scroll (Zech. 5:1–4);
  - vii. Vision of a woman in a basket (Zech. 5:5–11);
  - viii. Vision of the four chariots (Zech. 6:1–8).
- c. The vision of the Millennial Kingdom and the rebuilding of the Millennial Temple (Zech. 6:9–15);
- d. Four explanatory messages concerning Israel (Zech. 7:1 – 8:23):
  - i. Rebuke (Zech. 7:1–7);
  - ii. Repentance (Zech. 7:8–14);
  - iii. Restoration (Zech. 8:1–17);
  - iv. Rejoice (Zech. 8:18–23).
- e. Two prophecies concerning Israel (Zech. 9:1 – 14:21):
  - v. Promise of the coming Messiah and His rejection by Israel (9:1 – 11:17);
  - vi. End-Time prophecies concerning Israel (Zech. 12:1 – 14:21).

### **E. God's Four Messages to Israel Through Eight Visions in Zechariah 1 – 6**

1. Through the eight visions given to Zechariah (Zech. 1 – 6), God affirmed, encouraged and assured the nation of Israel amidst her domination by Gentile nations. Even though these visions were given over 2000 years ago, they are still applicable to the Jewish people today.
2. God gives these four affirmations and encouragements to Israel:
  - a. Throughout her troubled history as a nation, He has always been with her and has been watching over her. He assures her that He is also present in their current situation (during the time of Zechariah) and that even in the future, He will be with her in the midst of coming crises, judgement and trouble.
  - b. He promises that He will fully restore Israel to all that has been promised her through the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. He also assures her that all eight visions in Zechariah 1 – 6 will come to pass for her.
  - c. He promises to eventually deliver her from all her enemies. Her deliverance will be ultimate, complete, and permanent, and she will no longer face Gentile domination. God also assures Israel that He has not completely and utterly rejected her, but that all the promises given to her will come to pass.

- d. He assures Israel that He will give her grace to walk out the fullness of her destiny as a people, despite her weaknesses and lack. God emphasises that this will not be based on her own righteousness, strength, ability or capability, but based on His grace.
3. Scripture bookends the eight visions with two revelations of the “Angel of Yahweh” — the pre-incarnate Christ who is their Messiah and King of Israel (Zech. 1:6, 6:12). Through these two revelations, God is calling Israel to place her ultimate confidence and hope not in herself or her destiny, but in Yeshua her Messiah.

## **F. Conclusion**

1. Knowledge of the book of Zechariah is necessary for us to understand God’s zeal and plan for the nation of Israel, especially as we near the End of the Age.
2. This book will provide the fuel for Gentile watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem to give God no rest regarding Israel and the fullness of her destiny.