

Session 1

The Importance of the Book of Zechariah

A. Introduction

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 for Jerusalem (Isa. 62:6–7).
3. 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 are 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 of 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, judgment and glory that God will release to Israel during the Great Tribulation and in the Millennial Kingdom will be similarly released to the Church and the nations, but to a lesser degree.
 - ii. This gives us a powerful picture of what God has planned for us!
 - e. Jerusalem is the only city for which God commands us to pray and stand with. It is not an option (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.

B. Theme and Outline of the Book of Zechariah

1. The theme of the book of Zechariah is God's zeal for Zion. It also provides fuel for Houses of Prayer to pray for Israel (Zech. 1:14–17).
2. 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.
3. The book of Zechariah is divided into two main sections:
 - a. The first section: Chapters 1 – 8 (dated around 520 BC) comprise a series of eight visions together with a message of fasting from chapters 1 – 6, and four messages concerned with encouraging the people to complete the building of the Temple in chapters 7 and 8.
 - b. The second section: Chapters 9 – 14 (undated) are made up of two prophecies that focus, with great detail, on many of the End-Time events surrounding the return of the Messiah and the salvation of Israel.
4. 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 House of Prayer (Zech. 1:7 – 6:15):
 - i. The vision of the horses (Zech. 1:7–17);
 - ii. The vision of the horns and craftsmen (Zech. 1:8–21);
 - iii. The vision of the measuring line (Zech. 2:1–13);
 - iv. The vision of the high priest (Zech. 3:1–10);
 - v. The vision of the lampstand and olive trees (Zech. 4:1–14);
 - vi. The vision of the flying scroll (Zech. 5:1–4);
 - vii. The vision of a woman in a basket (Zech. 5:5–11);
 - viii. The 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):
 - i. The promise of the coming Messiah and His rejection by Israel (9:1 – 11:17);
 - ii. End-Time prophecies concerning Israel (Zech. 12:1 – 14:21).

C. Historical Story of the Return of Jewish Exiles and Rebuilding of the Temple through Ezra 1 – 6

1. Ezra 1 – 6 describes significant events related to the return of Jewish exiles in Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple of God. The entire story can only be seen clearly when we read these passages together — Ezra 1 – 6; Haggai 1 – 2 and Zechariah 1 – 8.
2. In 538 BC, king Cyrus Persia defeated the nation of Babylon. Within a year of his victory over Babylon, Cyrus made a surprising decree to free the Jewish captives from Babylon and allowed them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of God (Ezra 1:1–5).
3. The king of Persia assigned a stipend from the royal treasury to support 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 the temple in Jerusalem.
5. In the seventh month of their first year in Jerusalem, the altar was built. In the second year, they began to work on rebuilding the temple itself (Ezra 3:1–2, 8–9).
6. Some months later, when the foundation of the temple had been laid, they celebrated. The older men wept because it was a far cry from Solomon's temple (Ezra 3:10–12).
7. Adversaries arose against those who were building the Temple of God and their enemies hired counsellors to frustrate them and accuse them before the Persian authorities (Ezra 4:1–6).
8. The Persian authorities intervened and stopped the Jews from building the Temple. They became discouraged in the face of obstacles and opposition, and lost their vision and sense of purpose. They ceased building the Temple entirely in 536 BC for 16 years (Ezra 4:24).
9. After a delay of 16 years (i.e. 536–520 BC), God sent prophet Haggai and prophet Zechariah to stir up the leaders to restart the construction of the Temple. Due to opposition and discouragement, the people had stopped the construction of the temple and were 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 4 years of hard work, they completed the temple in 516 BC (Ezra 6:14–16).

Chronology of the Post-Exilic Period of Israel

Persian Kings	Dates of Reign	Biblical Events	Scripture References	Dates
Cyrus	559 – 530 BC	Edict of Cyrus for the Return to Jerusalem.	Ezra 1:1–4	538 BC
		First Return of 49,897 exiles led by Zerubbabel.	Ezra 2	538 BC
		The altar and Temple foundation built — exactly 70 years after the first exile (606 BC – 536 BC).	Ezra 3:1 – 4:5	536 BC
Cambyses	530 – 522 BC	Rebuilding of Temple stops because of lack, opposition and compromise.	Ezra 4	536 BC – 520 BC
Smerdis	522 BC			
Darius I	521 – 486 BC	Haggai's prophetic ministry.	Haggai 1 – 2	520 BC
		Zechariah's prophetic ministry.	Zechariah 1 – 14	520 – 518 BC
		The Temple completed — exactly 70 years after the 3rd exile of Israel (586 BC – 516 BC).	Ezra 5 – 6	516 BC
Xerxes (Ahaeuerus)	485 – 465 BC	Accusation against Judah.	Ezra 4:7–23	486 BC
		Esther becomes Queen.	Esther 2:17	479 BC
Artaxerxes I (Artashasta)	464 – 424 BC	Artaxerxes stops the rebuilding of Jerusalem.	Ezra 4:7–23	464 - 458 BC
		Second Return of 5,000 exiles led by Ezra.	Ezra 7 – 10	458 BC
		Third Return of exiles led by Nehemiah.	Nehemiah 1 – 2	445 BC
		Nehemiah's Second Return	Nehemiah 13:6	430 BC