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ZECHARIAH

*Keep building and the Messiah will come!*

SETTING

520-518 BC + two undated messages later

KEY VERSE

*"Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'"*

6:12-13

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# Introduction

Zechariah barely overlaps with Haggai. Chapters 1-6 take place during the year 520 BC, and chapters 7-8 during the year 518 BC, while chapters 9-14 are not dated (and also very difficult to understand). The content also has the same theme as Haggai: Finish building the temple, and it will lead to the coming of the Messiah. But while Haggai mostly focused on rebuilding the temple, Zechariah had more focus on the people's repentance.

Repentance is also the focus of Zechariah's first message, with which he opens the book in 1:1-6. It is not enough to return from Babylon; they must also return to God in their hearts. Their surrender is fundamental to the message in the rest of the book.

The night visions in chapters 1-6 are encouragements that God is in control, that they must build the temple, and that something great will come out of this. The result - the Messiah - will break all boundaries. The 8 visions are set up as a "chiasm", where the visions in the middle are the most important: the high priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel, the two leaders of the people, both receive promises of the Messiah attached to them.

In 6:9-15, Joshua again becomes a clear reference to Jesus, who, surprisingly enough, will be both king and priest. In chapters 7-8, almost two years later, a question about fasting turns into a call to be different from their ancestors before the exile so the same thing does not happen again. God reminds them again of His plans for them.

Chapters 9-11 are some of the most difficult to understand in the prophets. The most obvious are some glimpses of Jesus now and then in the form of verses quoted in the NT. Based on these, we can say that chapter 9 is about the King coming to Jerusalem. Chapters 10-11 are about how bad leadership led them to be sent into exile. However, God will strengthen them and gather them. Now that the temple is probably finished, Zechariah looks ahead and encourages them to welcome the King when he comes.

Chapters 12-14 are not particularly easy to understand. In chapters 12-13, the nations attacked Jerusalem, but God protected them. They realize that they have killed God Himself but are cleansed of their sin and impurity. Here, too, there are glimpses of Jesus, so perhaps we can only understand this as a description of Jesus' 1st coming. Jesus' return occurs in chapter 14, where the kingdom of God comes, the judgment takes place, and God will be king over the whole earth (14:9). The book ends with everything becoming sacred.

Since the people needed to get some glimpses of the goal they were working toward, there is a lot about Jesus in Zechariah. The main theme is that the temple itself points to the Messiah, who is going to fulfill its function. The high priest Joshua (="Jesus") becomes a model for the "Sprout" (Joshua II), who will take away all guilt in one day (3:9) and who will be both priest and king (6:9-15). Zerubbabel also points to Jesus by being his ancestor. Jesus riding into Jerusalem fulfills 9:9; Judas' 30 pieces of silver fulfill 11:12-13; and the crucifixion fulfills 12:10 and 13:7. The "end-time river" in 14:8 and the Feast of Tabernacles in 14:16-21 also have their fulfillment in Jesus (John 7:37-38).

* Finish building - then the Messiah will break all the boundaries
* Work faithfully for God even if you don't see results

*"Sometimes you just have to take a step back and lean on Jesus."* Lars Olav Gjøra, teacher at «[Gå Ut Senteret](https://gus.no/portfolio/)» Bible School

## Judah under Persia

Persia was divided into 20 provinces/satrapies. Judah was part of 'Eber Nahara' (“On the other side of the river”).

Judah had a maximum of 50,000 inhabitants (more than halved from before the exile) and was a small community with several challenges:

1. Economic: Dependent on agriculture
2. Social: With people who had not been in exile and with immigrants.
3. Political: Formerly under the authorities of Samaria, now a partially independent sub-province with its own governor. This reduced the power of Samaria.

Great contrast between pre-exilic greatness and the humiliating circumstances after the exile.

They are few, face a great task, and have faced opposition for 16 years. The return had not turned out quite as they had imagined. Maybe their self-confidence is not quite at its peak.

## The Persian kings

Cyrus: 559-530 BC

Cambyses: 530-522 BC

Darius I the Great: 522-486 BC

## Darius I the Great (522-486 BC)

522-521 BC: Put down 19 rebellions

520 BC: Was warned about the reconstruction, searched the archives, and supported the Jews (Ezra 5:1-17, 6:1-7).

516 BC: The temple was completed (Ezra 6:14-15).

## Important years

539 BC: Return from Babylon

536 BC: The foundation wall was laid.

520 BC: Haggai and Zechariah (1:1)

516 BC: The temple was completed (Ezra 6:15)

## Structure

**520-518 BC**

Ch 1-6 8 visions that God is in control and that they must build the temple.

Ch 7-8 The people must change their attitude and get the temple finished so that God can once again live among them and be their God, and they can be his people.

**Undated**

Ch 9-11 A king on a donkey, deliverance, and shepherds

Ch 12-14 The nations go to war against Jerusalem

## Zechariah

Son of Berekiah and grandson of Iddo (1:1). Probably the same person as mentioned in Neh 12:16, in the case of Levites and priests. And if so, quite young in 520 BC. (2:8?) The name means "Yahweh remembers". Zechariah asks the people to remember the past and not be like their fathers.

# Intro (1:1-6)

520 BC (between Hag 2:9 and 10)

**“Lord of hosts”: The expression is repeated 53 times in Zechariah.**

* Express that God is the Lord of all kinds of powers (military, spiritual, the stars).
* Used a lot after the exile. The few Judeans needed to be reminded how great and powerful their God was compared to the Persian Empire and other gods.

**“Repent/return” (*shuv*): 4x**

They had physically "returned" to God's land, but they must also return to God himself.

**Situation**

They had begun to build (Hag 1) and were encouraged that this temple would be "more glorious" than Solomon's temple (Hag 2:1-9).

Zechariah stands in continuity with the prophets before the exile. Now it's time to listen.

v. 6: The ancestors or Zechariah's audience? No matter when - the people realized that God had acted rightly.

Message: *"Return to me, and I will return to you."* v. 3

Basic for the message in the rest of the book. And the first point is "where do we go now?" The most important thing is their devotion and closeness to God. Surrender is essential to doing His will.

*“Obedience is our responsibility. The result is God's responsibility.”*

The ancestors worshiped idols; visible success can become our idol. We should be less concerned with results and more concerned with being faithful. The most important thing for God is our surrender. In order to carry out His plans, we must surrender.

➡ James 4:8a *“Come near to God and he will come near to you.”*

# The night visions (1:7-6:8)

519 BC (3-4 months later)

A. Colored horses. Universal focus

B. Horn – blacksmith. International focus — twofold vision

C. The people resettled in the country. National focus — measurement

D. Joshua, the purified high priest. Real Person — Messianic

D Zerubbabel, the Anointed Governor. Real Person — Messianic

C Flying scroll. National focus — measurement

B Woman in a basket - carried away. International focus — twofold vision

A Colored wagons. Universal focus

## Vision 1: The horsemen (1:7-17) Universal focus

Darius had put down 19 rebellions in 522-521. He didn't strike down Egypt until 519, so perhaps Judea wondered what that meant for them.

*"the whole world at rest"* (v. 11)

v. 15: calm = “confident” in Ps 123:4 (parallel to 'haughty')

Message: Now after the exile, God's wrath is no longer directed against his people (vv. 13-14, 16-17), but against the peoples who went too far in carrying out His judgment (v. 15). It is peaceful and therefore safe to continue building His house.

➡ Due to Jesus, God's wrath is never directed at us either. *“Whoever believes in him will not be judged. He who does not believe is already condemned because he has not believed in the name of God's only begotten Son."* John 3:18

## Vision 2: The horns and the blacksmiths (2:1-4)

International focus – a twofold vision

4 = the celestial directions (2:10), as in the 1st vision?

Horn = strength (1 Sam 2:10). Used of kings in Daniel. Here the term is used about the nations that scattered Judah (and Israel and Jerusalem).

Blacksmiths = craftsmen. Carpenters in Ezra 3:7.

**Message**

God will judge the nations that scattered the people, but surprisingly by craftsmen who will build His temple. He is on their side now, and they can trust Him for the future. They work for God's victory when they build.

➡ The building of God's kingdom broke through with the craftsman Jesus, who will ultimately judge the nations, and God's kingdom will take over the whole world.

## Vision 3: The measuring line (2:5-17)

National focus - measurement

A glimpse of the goal: Jerusalem will be bigger than they think, and God himself will be the wall, show His glory in the city (vv. 8-10), and take up residence there (v. 14).

God wants more people to return from Babylon (vv. 10-11). A few more came with Ezra.

Also, many peoples will come (v. 15).

**Message**

God will protect the building even if the wall is down (for another 75 years), and Jerusalem will continue to grow until it outgrows the walls. They have to think bigger because the result will break all boundaries.

➡ God wants people from all nations to come out of Babylon (the world in rebellion against God, in 2 Cor 6:17, Paul quotes Is 52:11, which is about the exodus from Babylon and uses it as a metaphor of sanctification), to a "Jerusalem without walls" (Ezek 38:11, and with open gates in Rev 21:25), which has been His plan with Jesus ever since Genesis 12:3 (Isa 2:2, 11:10).

*"Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the Lord’s house."* Is 52:11

*"Therefore, “Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."* 2 Cor 6:17

## Vision 4: High priest Joshua (Ch. 3)

Real Person — Messianic

The high priest is unclean, which means that all the people he represents before God are also unclean.

It is repeated for the third time (1:16, 2:16) that God has again chosen Jerusalem.

Joshua is cleansed by God's grace as a symbol of the people being cleansed and the priesthood reinstated.

*“shoot”*, *“Root of David”*, and *“a righteous Branch”* = Messiah in Isa 11:1, Jer 23:5, 33:15, Rev 5:5, 22:16.

**Message:** God cleanses the people in one day so they can serve Him and build the temple.

➡ Josva (Gr.: "Jesus") and the other priests must point to the great high priest Jesus, who will take away all the world's guilt in one day and bring peace.

## Vision 5: The candlestick & the olive trees (ch. 4)

Real Person — Messianic

*"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit."* (v. 6)

**Message**

God's Spirit will make the building of the temple possible. God's Spirit and power come via Zerubbabel and Joshua, who were anointed as king and priest, respectively.

➡ Both Zerubbabel and Joshua point to Jesus as the one who gives God's spirit to us (John 7:37-39).

*"On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive."* John 7:37-39a

Vision 6: The scroll (5:1-4)

National focus - measurement

About 10 x 5 meters - unbelievably wide! Same dimensions as the vestibule in front of the temple room (1 Kings 6:3).

God's law is represented by two commandments (one from each "tablet of the law"?)

**Message**

God's law still applies and must be followed.

➡ Jesus kept the whole law for us, and we follow the intention and heart of the law by faith in Him (Rom 3:31, 13:8-10).

## Vision 7: The woman in the ephah measure (5:5-11)

International focus – a twofold vision

Efa = over 36 liters

Woman because:

* «Lawlessness» is feminine in Hebrew
* Representing Ishtar or other Babylonian goddesses?

A picture of the people's spiritual life. Perhaps they were still influenced by Babylonian religions?

**Message**

God will remove all Babylonian religions from his people. They must keep the Law of Moses.

➡ *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29)

## Vision 8: The four chariots (6:1-8)

Universal focus

Wagons were mostly used in war.

Wind (v. 5) = spirit (v. 8)

The chariots are the four winds of heaven. Do they only go north and south because of Israel's location? (some translations also have west)

*"the north country"* (v. 6) = Babylon in 2:10-11 and Jeremiah. Generally, that is where Israel's enemies came from.

**Message**

God is in control of all nations, so they need not fear them when they build. The goal of God's plan is that His Spirit will eventually fill the whole earth. (→ *"The Lord will be king over the whole earth."* 14:9a)

➡ Revelations Ch. 21-22

## The night visions (1:7 — 6:8) - A summary

Reassured the generation that had grown up in Babylon that the exile and return were God's plan and will.

They must remember the Law, who they are, and why they build.

Zerubbabel and Joshua point to the Messiah — who will eventually come because they build. They are part of God's plan to fill the whole earth with his kingdom.

# The Branch (6:9-15)

A word to Joshua

*"It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two."* Zech 6:13

Two Messiahs, as in the Dead Sea Scrolls?

"Crown" is actually plural. Perhaps to unite the priest and king in one person?

Not only Zerubbabel but also Joshua points towards someone who will build the Lord's temple.

*"Those who are far away"* (v. 15): This could be more people who return from exile or Gentiles who want to build (Ezra 6:8-13). They will confirm Zechariah's message.

**Message**

A royal high priest called “the Branch” will build the Lord's temple, be exalted, and rule. The temple they are building is for a king.

➡ Jesus is king and priest like Melchizedek (Genesis 14, Psalm 110). It is He who builds the Lord's spiritual (real) temple, where people from distant countries (Acts 2:39, Eph 2:13) are the stones (Eph 2:20-22, 1 Pet 2:4-5).

*"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."* Acts 2:39

# Ch. 7-8: False fasting and hypocrisy (518 BC)

4th month: When the Babylonians broke through the city wall (Jer 39:2)

5th month: When the temple was destroyed (2 Kings 25:8-9)

7th month: Probably the murder of Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:25, Jer 41:1-2)

10th month: When the siege of Jerusalem began (2 Kings 25:1-2, Jer 39:1)

Should they fast for this now that the temple was soon to be rebuilt?

The answer: In any case, they were not fasting for God but for themselves (7:4-6), expressing "poor us" and not repenting for the sin that was the cause. They must be different from their ancestors before the exile (7:7-14). Justice and truth are more important (8:16-19).

A. Men from Bethel pray for favor before the Lord (7:2)

B. Questions about fasting (7:3)

C. Previous prophets said, “Do not plot evil against each other” (7:10)

D. God's wrath made the land desolate (7:12b-14)

E. Promise of blessing for those who were left after the destruction (8:3-6)

F. God saves His people from east and west so He can be their God (8:7-8)

E. Promise of blessing for those who were left after the destruction (8:9-13)

D. God now plans, on the contrary, to do good to Jerusalem (8:14-15)

C. "do not plot evil against each other" (8:17)

B. The fasting will become a feast (8:19)

A. Many peoples will come and ask for favor before the Lord (8:20-23)

**Message**

They are not sincere in their fasting and behave like their ancestors, who were exiled for the same reason. They must listen to the prophets and change their ways so the same thing does not happen again. The fasting will become a celebration because the temple will now be rebuilt. In the middle of this message, God confirms His promises and plans to save His people from the east and west and be their God.

More Israelites were scattered everywhere (Jer 16:15, 23:8, 40:11-12).

➡ This becomes even greater in Jesus when God saves His people from even further east and west and brings them to Himself to be their God. Many more Gentiles than Jews will believe in Israel's Messiah.

# Ch. 9-11

**Ch. 9:** The king comes to Jerusalem

**Ch. 10-11:** Bad shepherds have caused the people to be scattered, but God will strengthen and gather them.

## 9:1-10 The king's campaign against Jerusalem

The neighboring countries represent Judah's enemies. This time it is God who comes from the north, as the enemies often did, to overcome them and protect the temple.

But some of the enemies will belong to God, and when the king comes to Jerusalem, it becomes clear that it is a man riding a donkey.

### **9:9-10 A glimpse of Jesus #1**

The *"sprout"* comes to Jerusalem! He comes to build the Lord's temple in 6:12 and is described as a king in 6:13.

A humble/poor and peaceful king. A contrast to the enemies in vv. 1-8, yet rich in victory. Also a contrast to all other kings.

Jesus deliberately steps in to fulfill this prophecy in Matthew 21:4-5 and John 12:15.

Donkeys and colts are also mentioned regarding Judah in Genesis 49:11. Possibly in the context of judgment (wine/grape blood).

*"He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes."* Genesis 49:11

## 9:11-17

What does this king mean for Jerusalem?

"You" (v. 11) is feminine: Daughter Zion (v. 9).

Those who recognize this king will be set free because of the blood of the covenant (v. 11). Several are called back from exile (vv. 11-12) to a reunited Israel (v. 13) that is focused on the Messiah (vv. 9-10), who triumphs over the world - here represented by the Greeks (vv. 13-15).

Javan is also used for peoples on the fringes of the known world in Genesis 10:2, 4 and Isaiah 66:19, continuing the global picture in 9:10.

➡ We shall also rule with him in his victory (2 Tim 2:12, Rev 5:10, 20:6, 22:5, 1 John 5:4-5). And He triumphed by doing the apparent opposite: suffering and dying. Paradoxically, we are called to follow Him in this.

## Ch. 10-11

Theme: Bad shepherds and a God who intervenes and gives new, good shepherds (Jer 23, Ezek 34, etc.)

He will strengthen his people, free them from the whole "world" (Egypt — Assyria), and there will not be enough room for everyone. There will be a new exodus (v. 11).

➡ Joh 10: Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gathers the whole flock.

Dramatization of the story of the shepherd God and his flock Israel (11:4-17):

* The three shepherds in one month: The last three kings of Judah (Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah). (40+ suggestions)
* God breaks the covenant with all the nations: Probably the tribes of Israel when they were sent into exile. Not the usual Hebrew word for *"nations"*.
* The sheep traders think he is worth 30 pieces of silver in wages, but he throws this "precious sum" into the treasury in the temple.

### A glimpse of Jesus #2

30 pieces of silver (30 shekels) was no small sum. But if they had valued him as their Shepherd, they would have followed Him. Any payment essentially becomes an insult.

Perhaps symbolically, the money is thrown into the temple, since it was there that the people's leaders had shown the most contempt for God by worshiping other gods there. According to Ezek 8-11, this is what caused God to leave the temple and let it be destroyed.

➡ History repeated itself. The good shepherd Jesus was also valued by the people's leaders at 30 pieces of silver, which Judas finally threw into the temple (Matthew 27:5-10).

## Chapters 9-11

How does this fit into the theme of the book?

The temple is now fully built, but it points to something bigger ahead.

When God comes, represented by the Messiah, will they make the same mistake as their ancestors and reject him again? Or will they *"Rejoice greatly"* (9:9) and welcome him as king?

➡ On Palm Sunday, Jesus is first welcomed by the people but later rejected by the leaders. His own people generally did not welcome him. (John 1:11).

# Ch. 12-14

**Ch. 12-13:** Jerusalem is besieged, protected, mourned, and cleansed.

**Ch. 14:** The day of the Lord and the kingdom of God are coming.

*“Here, in this chapter, I give up. Because I am not sure what the prophet is talking about.”* Martin Luther

## 12:9-10 A glimpse of Jesus #3

Considered messianic by the Jews, but it is unthinkable that this would happen to God Himself.

God's own people have pierced God. Yet He pours out a Spirit (Isa 32:15, Joel 3:1, Ezek 39:29) of grace and prayer so that they realize what they have done.

➡ About Jesus, God's "only son" and "firstborn", in John 19:37.

*"and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced."* John 19:37

➡ Allusion in Rev 1:7: The whole world pierced him, and they will mourn at His return.

## 13:7 A glimpse of Jesus #4

God strikes his own shepherd, who is close to Him.

➡ Mark 14:27, Matt 26:31

Zechariah says twice that the Messiah had to suffer so that cleansing from sin would become possible, as in Isaiah 53.

## Ch. 12-13

Do these four glimpses of Jesus mean that we are meant to understand chapters 9-14 as an unusual description of the coming of God's kingdom? And that these glimpses keep us on that track?

*"The first phase of the climactic battle to usher in the kingdom of God has already been fought in Jerusalem, in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ."* Barry Webb

**Message**

Jerusalem would face much opposition in the future (12:1-3, cf. Psalm 2), but God will protect the city (12:4-9). The inhabitants will at some point realize that they have killed God Himself (12:10-14), but they will be cleansed of sin and impurity (13:1-9).

➡ The church, the New Jerusalem, will always face opposition from the world (John 15:18-19), but will always be protected by God. Those who regret their rejection of Jesus will be cleansed of their sin.

## Ch. 14

The day of the Lord and the kingdom of God are coming.

About the *"Day of the Lord"* (v. 1) — the day of judgment (cf. Ezekiel 38-39)

The whole world again goes to war against Jerusalem (v. 2), including Judah! (v. 14). By all accounts, the heavenly Jerusalem is meant.

God is coming and will be king over the whole earth (vv. 3-11)! The Messiah is not mentioned in Chapter 14 because when God's kingdom comes, God will be *"all in all"* (1 Cor 15:28, Zech 14:9).

He will judge those who attack his city (vv. 12-15)

The Festival of Tabernacles is celebrated (vv. 16-21)

### 14:8,16-21

During the Festival of Tabernacles, it was read from Zech 14 and Ezek 47 that water should flow from the temple and bring life to the whole world.

These "end-time rivers" were symbolized by a procession from the pool of Siloam to collect water that was poured out at the altar.

In John 7:37-38, during the Festival of Tabernacles, Jesus speaks of living water and eternal life. He says that He is the source of the Spirit and the fulfillment of the end-time rivers in Zech 14:8.

## Ch. 12-14

How does this fit into the theme of the book?

Judah was small and insignificant among many neighbors who were not always friendly. This message makes them aware that this resistance will not decrease but rather increase. But God will protect them, and finally, the Messiah will come with salvation, and God's kingdom will come. The temple has been completed, but the goal has not yet been reached.

*“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”* 1 Corinthians 15:58

God's kingdom-building project in Zechariah's time was the temple; now it is his congregation, the spiritual temple. God's building projects will always face adversity from the world. How do we react when that happens? How does this book encourage you when you don't see the goal clearly?