



# Zechariah

## Transcript

### Introduction

00:00-01:01

The book of the prophet Zechariah. The book is set after the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem, and we're told in the book of Ezra that Zechariah and Haggai together challenged and motivated the people to rebuild the temple and look for the fulfillment of God's promises. Now, long ago, Jeremiah the prophet had said that Israel's exile would last for 70 years and that, afterwards, God would restore his presence to a new temple and bring his Kingdom and the rule of the messiah over all nations. The dates at the beginning of this book tell us that those 70 years are almost up, but life back in the land was hard, and it seemed like none of these promises were going to come true. Why? And the book of Zechariah offers an explanation.

It has a fairly clear design. There's an introduction, which sets the tone for a large collection of Zechariah's dream visions, and that's concluded by chapters 7 and 8, and then this is followed by two more large collections of poetry and prophecy. Let's just dive in and see how the book works.

### Chapters 1-6

01:02-05:05

It begins with Zechariah's challenge to his generation to turn back to God and not be like their ancestors, who rebelled and refused to listen to the earlier prophets, which landed them in exile. And so now, the returned exiles respond positively to Zechariah. They repent and humble themselves before God—or so it seems.

The next large section is a collection of eight nighttime visions that Zechariah experienced, and just to prepare you, these are full of very bizarre, strange images, a lot like your dreams. The idea that God communicates to people through symbolic dreams, it's very old; it goes back to the book of Genesis, the dreams

of Jacob or Joseph or Pharaoh. These gave meaning to current events at the time, but they also gave a window into the future. And so Zechariah has his own dreams now, and they've been arranged in this really cool symmetrical design.

The first and the last visions are about four horsemen each. They're like rangers patrolling the world on God's behalf, and it's a representation of God's attentive watch over the nations. Their report is that the world is at peace, and in Zechariah's day, this refers to how God raised up Persia to conquer Babylon and bring peace. And so the question now arises. The 70 years of Israel's exile are almost up. Is now the time for the messianic kingdom in Jerusalem? And God responds by saying that he's determined to fulfill those promises, but he leaves the question of timing unanswered.

The second and seventh visions are paired because they're both reflections on Israel's past sin that led up to the exile. So the second vision is about these horns that symbolize the nations that attacked and then scattered Israel, Assyria and Babylon. But then, these horns, or empires, are themselves scattered by a group of blacksmiths, an image for Persia. The seventh dream is about a woman in a basket, and we're told that she's a symbol of the centuries of Israel's covenant rebellion. And then this woman is carried off to Babylon by other women, who carry the basket flying with stork wings. This is so strange.

The third and sixth visions are paired, as they're both about the rebuilding of a new Jerusalem. So a man is measuring the city. It's an image of God's promise that Jerusalem will be rebuilt and become a beacon to the nations, who will join God's people in worship. And then the sixth dream is about a scroll that flies around the new Jerusalem, punishing thieves and liars, the idea being that the new Jerusalem is a place that is purified from sin by the Scriptures.

The fourth and fifth visions are at the center of this collection, and they're about the two key leaders among the returned exiles, so Joshua the high priest and then Zerubbabel, the royal descendant of David. So Joshua had been symbolically wearing Israel's sin in the form of these dirty clothes, but then those are taken off, and he's given new clothes and a new turban, a symbol of God's grace and forgiveness. And then an angel tells Joshua that if he remains faithful to God, he will lead his people, and Joshua will become a symbol of the future messianic king. The other vision is about two olive trees that supply oil to this elaborate golden lamp, which itself is a symbol of God's watchful eye over his people. And these two trees symbolize the two anointed leaders, Joshua and then Zerubbabel, who's leading the temple rebuilding efforts. And God says that success will not come to this new temple if it's the result only of political maneuvering. Rather, these two leaders must be dependent upon the work of God's Spirit.

The visions come to a close with a bonus vision from the prophet, and it picks up the themes of the central fourth and fifth visions. It's Joshua the high priest again, and he's given a crown and presented as a symbol of the future messiah, who will also be a priest over God's Kingdom. And then Zechariah closes it all out saying that all of these visions will be fulfilled only if the current generation is faithful to God and obeys the terms of the covenant. And so altogether, these three visions emphasize how the coming of the messianic kingdom is conditional upon this generation being faithful to God, which leads to the conclusion of the dreams.

## **Chapters 7-8**

**05:06-05:51**

It's another challenge from Zechariah, and a group of Israelites come and they've been mourning over the former temple's destruction for nearly 70 years. And they ask him, "Is it time to stop grieving? I mean, is God's Kingdom going to come very soon?" And Zechariah again reminds them of how their ancestors rejected God's call through the prophets, which led to the exile, and so he challenges them too. He says, "This generation will see the messianic kingdom only if they pursue justice and peace and remain faithful to the covenant."

So in other words, Zechariah reverses their question. He asks, "Are you going to become the kind of people who are ready to receive and participate in God's coming Kingdom?" And that question is left just hanging there. The people don't answer, and the book just moves on.

## **Chapters 9-11**

**05:51-06:35**

And so we come to the final sections that are very different from chapters 1-8. Each section is a kaleidoscopic collage of poems and images about the future messianic kingdom. So the first one, chapters 9-11, describe the coming of the humble messianic king, who's riding a donkey into the new Jerusalem to establish God's Kingdom over the nations. But then all of a sudden, this king, he's symbolized as a shepherd over the flock of Israel. And then he's rejected, first by his own people, but then also by their leaders, who are also symbolized as shepherds. And so God hands Israel over to these corrupt shepherds, and it raises the question: Will Israel's rejection of their king last forever? In the final section, chapters 12-14 say no.

## **Chapters 12-14**

**06:36-07:17**

It's another mosaic of poems and images about the future messianic kingdom, and they depict the new Jerusalem as a place where God's justice will finally confront and defeat evil among the nations. It's very similar to the same themes in the

prophet Joel or Ezekiel. But then God also will confront the rebellion within the hearts of his own people. He's going to pour out his Spirit on them, he says, so that they can repent and grieve over the fact that they have rebelled and rejected their messianic shepherd.

The final chapter concludes with the new Jerusalem as the gathering point for all of the nations. And then this city becomes a new garden of Eden, and there's a river of living water flowing out of the temple, bringing healing to all of creation. And that's how the book ends.

## **Conclusion**

**07:18-08:08**

And so Zechariah just leaves you to ponder the connection between chapters 1-8 and 9-14. And the point seems to be that this future messianic kingdom of the book's second half will only come when God's people are faithful to the covenant, the point of the first half. Reading the book of Zechariah is a wild ride. These visions and poems are full of startling imagery, and they do not follow a linear flow of thought. And that's part of the point. It's like history and our lives; it doesn't always fit into neat, orderly patterns.

But the prophets offer us glimpses of God's hand at work, guiding history towards his own purposes. And so ultimately, Zechariah invites us to look above the chaos and hope for the coming of God's Kingdom, which should motivate faithfulness in the present. And that's what the book of Zechariah is all about.