**ZECHARIAH**

Introduction:

Zechariah, a contemporary of Haggai, began his ministry about 2 months after Haggai’s. Zechariah’s ministry began in the 2nd year of Persian King Darius, Oct/Nov.520 BC. (Haggai began in Aug.520 BC). About 75 years had elapsed since Jeremiah and Habakkuk predicted Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Judah. The exiles had been in Palestine about 16 years.

Both prophets admonished the approximately 50K returned Jewish exiles, who arrived in Jerusalem about 539/538 BC, to finish building the Temple.  *Zechariah* also called his people to spiritual renewal, to love and obey God. *Haggai* and *Zechariah* were called prophets or seers. [The Hebrew word, *navi,* is 1 of 2 the Bible for prophet. The other is *choze/*seer, one who sees the future.]

Zechariah was the son of Berekiah and grandson of Iddo, the priest. Zechariah’s name means “the Lord (YHWH) remembers.” Berekiah meant “the Lord blesses” and Iddo probably meant “timely.” The names, together, preached a sermon in themselves.

On February 15, 519 BC, about 2-3 months after Haggai’s final oracle, Zechariah had 8 nighttime visions. The Temple was dedicated about 3 years later, March 12, 516 BC. Zechariah’s final prophecy occurred after 480 BC.

The book has 2 parts: Chapters 1-8 and 9-14:

1:1-6= introduction and call to repentance

1:7-6:8= 8 visions

6:9-15= symbolic crowning of Joshua as high priest

7 & 8= questions about fasting

9=14= 2 prophetic oracles= 9-11 and 12-14.

The prophet’s visions sometimes are so difficult to comprehend that casual readers may pass over the book. The prophet himself needed an angelic interpreter to explain/interpret what he saw.

No one challenged *Zechariah*’s inclusion in the canon. The NT frequently quotes from *Zechariah*. Some view *Zechariah* as the most messianic OT book. It is filled with apocalyptic and eschatological elements. *Zechariah* predicted Christ’s lowly coming, His humanity, His rejection, His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver, His deity, and His 2nd Coming. He also predicted the final eschatological battle, God’s victory, and His earthly kingdom.

Chapter 1:

Most of the exiles who returned to Judah were the poorest Jews with nothing to lose. *Zechariah* reminded the people how angry God had been with their forefathers’ sins, which they knew had resulted in Jerusalem’s destruction and their exile. Then *Zechariah* promised that divine wrath could be followed by divine grace if the people repented and turned to God. But refusal to repent would result in God’s further wrath. The people must not make the same mistake.

 *Zechariah* repeated that the Lord God, through the prophets, had called for their forefathers to repent. Jerusalem fell to Babylon because the forefathers did not listen to the prophets and did not repent and obey God. The result of their failure was disaster. But *Zechariah* assured them, if they repented/returned to God, He would return to them. The emphasis was on relationship. The words of Zechariah, God’s messenger, had the authority of the One who sent him.

 The people did repent (changed their minds) and acknowledged Israel had been punished for refusing to listen to God’s Word through the prophets and to obey God, and they acknowledged God was just and righteous. So, God forgave and restored them.

 During the time of Persian King Darius, on the 24th day of the 11th month of 520 BC, God gave Zechariah 8 nighttime visions, which fit a regular pattern:

* Introduction
* Description of what Zechariah saw
* Zechariah’s request for interpretation of the vision
* An angel’s explanation of the vision to Zechariah, and
* 4 times an oracle followed.

*Vision 1- Horsemen Among the Myrtle Trees* (1:7-2:13)

 In the 1st vision, Zechariah saw a man/angel on a red horse. (In Rev.6:4, the red horse was associated with a sword, an instrument of war and death. The same image was recognized in Persia whose cavalry was the mainstay of the army.) Other horsemen also were standing among the myrtle trees. [Myrtle trees were symbols of the Feast of Tabernacles/*Sukkot*. Myrtle branches were used to make booths and were part of the lulav waved during the Sukkot ritual. They also were thought to symbolize the blessings of the Messianic Age.] In the vision, the trees were in a ravine, possibly at the foot of the Mt. of Olives in the lower part of the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem.

 Other riders were present- one was on a black horse, perhaps symbolizing death; one was on a dappled horse, representing disease and plague; and one was on a white horse, meaning vengeance and triumph. The Lord sent the angelic riders through the earth (like Darius’ well-known, efficient Persian messenger system, that resembled the Pony Express). The riders reported that the earth was at peace. (The Behistun inscription contains a similar report- See *Haggai Notes*).

Then, the angel interceded and asked God (the Lord of Armies/Lord Almighty), how long He would withhold mercy from Jerusalem and Judah after 70 years (the period of exile *Jeremiah* had prophesied.) The Lord responded, saying He had been furious with Judah/Jerusalem and meant to discipline them. But Babylon, the instrument of His discipline, had become arrogant and overly oppressive. So, God would turn his fierce anger on Israel’s oppressors. God was jealous for Jerusalem and was angry with those who had treated His people so harshly. He had re-elected His people and would return to Jerusalem with mercy.

In summary, in the 1st vision the Lord’s angel:

* Came to the prophet of lowly Israel
* Interceded for God’s people
* Received God’s promise of future blessing for the people

But, Israel had not yet received God’s future blessings, though God announced He was mindful of Israel and ultimately would bring glory to Israel in Messiah’s reign. Now, God’s heart and eyes were upon Israel and the Temple in Jerusalem.

Chapter 2:

*Vision 2- 4 Horns and 4 Craftsmen* (2:1-5)

 This vision and the next built on God’s promise to comfort and care for Israel. God would execute His anger against the oppressor nations, the 4 horns that had attacked Israel/Judah and Jerusalem. He would scatter their people. The horns were symbols of strength. Some say the horns were the 4 nations of *Daniel* 2 & 7. Others suggest the horns were Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and Media -Persia.

 The craftsmen were nations that overthrew the oppressors. Some suggest the craftsmen also were *Daniel* 2 & 7 nations. Some say they included the Medo-Persians, Greeks, Romans, Mesopotamians, and others. The *Ryrie Study Bible* declared the referenced enemies of Israel were Egypt, Babylon, Persia, & Greece. Whichever nations were the craftsmen, the vision meant Israel’s oppressors (the horns) would become the oppressed by the Lord through the craftsmen.

*Vision 3- The Surveyor* (2:6-9)

 The cast now included Zechariah, the interpreting angel, and another, unidentified angel. A man (some say an angel) set out to measure Jerusalem’s Temple and its ruined walls preparing to rebuild them. Clearly, the vision was not about the current Jerusalem; rather, it referred to the Jerusalem and Temple of the Messianic kingdom.

The angel told the surveyor God would spread Jerusalem beyond its old dimensions. Indeed, it would be unwalled because it would be so large. It would have no limits because no one would be excluded from God’s kingdom, the new Jerusalem. God, not walls, would defend Jerusalem. He would protect it with a ring of fire and His glorious presence through Messiah.

*An Oracle/Exhortation (2:10-17)*

The Lord Almighty/Lord of Armies then declared: Those who had not returned from Babylon or from the rest of the Jews in the Diaspora (the 4 winds) should escape to Jerusalem at once. [Rev.17,18 had a similar exhortation.] Israel’s enemies were God’s enemies, and He would turn on them.

God would live in Jerusalem’s Temple, and Zion would be holy and reserved for God and His people. God would gather the nations to Himself there -an echo of His promise to Abraham, which applied universally. All would become people of God on the Day of the Lord. [This oracle about the new Jerusalem with God was part of the Zadokite priestly tradition, but here, as with *3rd Isaiah*, God applied it universally, not exclusively for Jews.]

Chapter 3:

*Vision 4- The Cleansing and Restoration of Israel* (3:1-10)

This vision differed from the first 3 visions. The prophet asked no questions, and the angel made no interpretations. The prophet was allowed to see into the courts of heaven, in the heavenly Temple. The angel told Zechariah to witness the trial of high priest Joshua. [Background: Joshua’s grandfather was killed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18-21) and his father was exiled (1 Chron. 6:15). Joshua was born in Babylon and was in the 1st exile group to return.]

 In the court, Satan was acting as accuser/prosecutor in the quasi-judicial proceeding. God was the defending counsel. Depending on the commentary, high priest Joshua, represented either sinful Israel as a nation, or the Zadokite priesthood. [Commentators who suggest Joshua represented the Zadokite priesthood align with *3rd Isaiah* and argue that God chastised Joshua for the Zadokites’ failure to obey God’s ethical and ritual commandments; hence, before Joshua could serve as high priest in the new age, his sins had to be forgiven.]

In either event, Joshua was before the court dressed in filthy rags. [The word, “filthy” meant the most vile and disgusting things imaginable, e.g., excrement.) Satan argued God should reject Joshua forever. [Remember, Joshua may have meant Israel or the Zadokite priesthood.] God refused and rebuked Satan. God declared Joshua would be forgiven of his sins and restored as high priest (or as a holy, priestly nation). Symbolically, the angel took away Joshua’s filthy clothes and dressed him in festal priestly garments (God’s righteousness), cleansing him from sin and making him worthy to appear before God.

If Joshua represented Israel, the new clothes depicted Israel’s restoration to its original calling. (Remember: In Lev.19:2, God commanded Israel, “You must be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.”) In addition to providing Joshua new clothes, he received a new high priestly turban, with a tiara, a narrow golden head plate or crown (*tsiyts*), worn over the turban on the high priest’s forehead and inscribed on it were the words, *kodesh l’YHWH* (set apart to YHWH).

The angel warned Joshua: Thus says the Lord:

* If you walk in My ways, and
* Keep My requirements, and
* Govern My house (Temple), and
* Guard My courts

I will give you free access like the angels to God - This was greater power than the Zadokite priests formerly had. (Joshua would have access to full communion with God so he could mediate between God and man. Zadokite priests only had direct access to God once a year at *Yom Kippur* to mediate for forgiveness of the peoples’ sins.)

 God declared He would send His servant, the Branch- a common Messianic symbol spoken of in all 4 Gospels. Then, He shifted metaphors and spoke of a stone with 7 eyes (perhaps meaning all-seeing eyes) which was engraved (perhaps Christ’s wounds). God would wipe all guilt away from the land on a single day. On that day, every person would sit under his fig tree and vine, typical symbols of peace and prosperity in the land. Note: Again, the health of the land was tied to the people’s spiritual faithfulness.

Chapter 4:

*Vision 5- Gold Lampstand and 2 Olive Trees*

 The angel then awakened Zechariah from his sleep and asked him what he had seen. He responded that he saw a gold lampstand, probably not a menorah, but one like those found by archaeologists in the area, with a cylindrical column tapering up to an oil bowl on top. Around the rim of the bowl were 7 smaller bowls, each with 7 wick-holders pinched into the rim. (This would produce 49 lights.) On either side of the main bowl was an olive tree with a branch over-shadowing the bowl. The branch directly fed oil to the bowl through a golden pipe, without human assistance. [The oil probably symbolized God’s Spirit.]

Then, the angel told Zechariah the Lord’s message to Zerubbabel- probably the most famous verse in the book (vs. 6): “Not by might and not by power but by My Spirit said the Lord of Armies/Lord Almighty.”

Zerubbabel’s hands had laid the Temple foundation, but just as no human hands provided oil to the lamp, the work on the Temple proceeded with the Spirit’s power. The Spirit working through Zerubbabel could overcome all obstacles. When it was completed, Zerubbabel would place the capstone on the Temple, which he did to the crowd’s cheers.

Then *Zechariah* asked about the 2 olive tree branches. The angel said they represented 2 men, consecrated with oil, who served the Master of the earth. Those 2 men were high priest (Joshua) and king/governor (Zerubbabel).

 [In Jesus’ time, some Jews including those at Qumran, expected 2 Messiahs - a priestly one and a royal one from David’s line. Part of the genius of *Hebrews* was its revelation that Jesus was the king of the Davidic line (a question answered in the Gospels), and the great high priest, in the order of Melchizedek (not from the line of Aaron, or his oldest surviving son, Eleazer, or their descendent, Zadok, who was David and Solomon’s high priest.) Jesus performed the ultimate priestly role of mediating between God and man. The cross was the symbol of that mediation as Christ/Messiah, the Anointed One, hung between heaven and earth, and the Temple veil tore from top to bottom as He died.

**Chapter 5:**

*Vision 6- The Flying Scroll* (5:1-5)

 Next, *Zechariah* saw a huge flying scroll descending from the heavenly courts. (30’long by 15’ wide- a cubit= 18”) The scroll was open for all to read. [In the post-exilic period, new interest had arisen in Torah study.] On the scroll were words of judgment, cursing Judah’s lawbreakers. (A curse was an active, evil power, bringing destruction and death and cutting a person off from God.)

 *Zechariah* was concerned about spiritual renewal in Judah. The scroll condemned the law breakers and declared the land was to be purged of wickedness. Anyone who stole (committed a wrong against their neighbor) and anyone who swore falsely (committed a wrong against God) would be punished.

*Vision 7- The Woman in a Basket* (5:5-11)

 The 6th vision dealt with purging sin within the Holy Land and the 7th focused on removing wickedness generally. *Zechariah* saw an ephah, a 5–10-gallon barrel/basket. Inside of it was a woman who personified all the evil in Judah, including systemic evil. (The Hebrew word for wickedness was feminine in gender.) 2 female agents of evil with long, strong wings, like storks (unclean birds), took the barrel to Shinar (an archaic word for Babylon, used at the beginning of the Tower of Babel story in *Genesis*. It is located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers). The barrel was put in a house (ziggurat/temple) where the contents would become an idol for evil worshippers. When the cover was lifted from the ephah, the evil one tried to escape, but God’s angels were stronger and forced her back into the barrel.

 The message: God dealt with Judah’s evil in 2 ways: by exiling Judah to Babylon where they would live with evil ones, or through direct chastisement as with the destruction of Jerusalem. Accordingly, God’s people must not dally with evil. They must remove it entirely.

Chapter 6:

*Vision 8- The 4 Chariots (*6:1-8)

 This vision corresponded with the 1st one. *Zechariah* saw a false peace on earth which was enforced by Israel’s oppressors. God said He would destroy the oppressors and bring true *shalom*/peace to all His people all over the world*.*

Horses of the same colors again appeared with God’s angelic messengers. The horses were pulling war chariots, symbols of God’s sovereign might. They had come from heaven’s entrance- 2 bronze impregnable mountains, from whence they would travel to the 4 corners of the earth. They were ready to dispense universal judgment.

The black horse (death) went North, the direction of Israel’s largest enemies. It was followed by the white horse (vengeance) which went West to the Mediterranean coast where the Philistines lived. The dappled horse (plague and disease) went South toward Egypt. The red horse (war) went over the whole earth. [Nothing was said about the East, probably because it was desert.] All the horses were powerful and eager to do God’s will.

 After God’s Spirit was at rest in the North, He would be ready to bring in God’s kingdom. (In addition to the North being the place from which most of Judah’s enemies came, the pagan gods of the Canaanites were said to have lived in the north mountains.)

*Oracle/Exhortation/Symbolic Act* (6:9-15)

 Then, the Word of the Lord came to *Zechariah*. He was to take some silver and gold brought by men arriving from Babylon with gifts for the Temple and to make a double ringed crown/diadem to place on Joshua, the high priest’s head. (Joshua was a symbol. Note: He and Jesus had the same name in Hebrew.)

*Zechariah* was to say to Joshua- the Lord of Armies/Lord Almighty says:

* Behold the Man, whose name is the Branch, Messiah, will hold 2 offices, Davidic king and high priest. [Jewish literature used “the Branch” as a term for Messiah, including:
	+ The *Aramaic Targum* (an early translation of the OT from Hebrew into Aramaic),
	+ The *Jerusalem Talmud* (**a collection of rabbinic notes on the 2ndC Jewish oral tradition known as the Mishnah),** and
	+ *Midrash* (an **expansive Jewish Biblical exegesis**using a**rabbinic** interpretation common in the Talmud. The word itself means "textual interpretation").]
* He will build the Temple (Zerubbabel built the 6thC Temple), but the eschatological Temple in the new age (like *Ezekiel’s* Temple) would be built by Messiah.
* He/Messiah would sit on the throne and rule His Kingdom and the high priest would be next to His throne and there would be harmony between them.

The prophesy inferred that God would create harmony between the royal

and priestly offices in one Person in the new age. The combined Messianic offices of king and high priest would bring *shalom* to all peoples. Finally, people, including Gentiles, would come from far away with gifts for Messiah.

 After a ceremony, the double ringed tiara of the high priest/king would be placed in the rebuilt Temple as a reminder of the Messianic age to come. But the promise of Messiah was conditioned on diligent obedience to the Lord. Indeed, a later tradition developed that Messiah would come if Israel perfectly fulfilled the Law for a brief, few moments in time. Of course, that led to Israelite legalism.

Chapter 7:

 About 2 years later, on Dec.7, 518 BC, a 2-man delegation arrived in Judah. (The text refers to Beth-El, 1 of 2 Northern kingdom sanctuaries built after the kingdom split as substitutes for the Jerusalem Temple. The delegation may have come from there, but Robert Alter suggested that was unlikely. Although Beth El usually meant “house of God,” documents from the Jewish community at Elephantine Island, Egypt, indicated the word also was a man’ name.) In any event, the men had come to sacrifice and worship and to ask for a legal opinion.

 Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. Since then, Jews had observed 4 annual fasts, not prescribed in the Mosaic Law, but observed as national times of mourning related to the Babylonian conquest of Judah. [The only fast God required was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.] The 4 other fasts were:

* 9th day of the 4th month= Breach of Jerusalem’s walls (2 Kings 25:8-10; Jer.39:2)
* 3rd day of the 7th month= Assassination of Gedelaih, the Governor Nebuchadnezzar installed in Judah (2 Kings 25:25, Jer.41:1)
* 7th day of the 5th month= Destruction of the Temple (2 Kings 25:8-10)
* 10th day of the 10th month= Start of the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1,2; Jer.39:1).

The delegation asked whether, after the Temple was rebuilt, they

should continue to observe those fasts while they were awaiting God’s kingdom.

The Word of the Lord came to Zechariah, and he asked whether they were fasting for themselves (self-pity) or for the Lord (repentance). Their disobedience and unfaithfulness had led to God’s judgment and their exile. Their fasting meant nothing to God. Instead, God desired them to:

* Administer true justice for all
* Show mercy and compassion in all relationships
* Care for and not oppress, the weakest, most disadvantaged, needy, and defenseless (the widow, orphan and poor) and
* Think no evil.

Ritual fasting, compared to these qualities, was nothing but hypocrisy.

 Their ancestors’ hearts had turned as hard as stone. They would not listen to God’s Word. The result was God’s wrath, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and exile. They should repent and turn to God.

Chapter 8:

 *Zechariah* was then overwhelmed by an eschatological vision of the coming Kingdom of God. The contrast between Israel’s judgment and her future restoration should cause Israel to repent and live righteously henceforth. Jerusalem would be called the City of Truth and Temple Mount would be the Holy Mountain because the Lord would be there.

*Zechariah* depicted God planned for His people if Israel lived in obedient love. He pictured a beautiful, peaceful park with older persons watching and children safely playing. *Zechariah* exhorted the people to live in the light and cling to God’s promises. If they did, security, peace, and prosperity would come with a universal re-gathering from East and West. The people would be in intimate relationship with God.

The Lord Almighty had determined to bring disaster on Israel. Now, He would do good for Jerusalem and Judah, but the people should:

* Not be afraid
* Speak the truth to each other
* Render true, sound judgments in court
* Not plot evil against a neighbor
* Not swear falsely.

Love is what God loves.

Like *Haggai, Zechariah* declared God would replace blessings for the curses He had placed on Israel because of its unfaithfulness. He would cause rain to fall, and the crops would be plentiful.

*Zechariah* reminded the people that God would keep His Word. Israel would become the cornerstone of a universal community under God. Their 6thC struggles had meaning, but God would bring His Word to fulfillment for all nations. But he urged, the people to keep their hearts true.

To the delegates’ question, *Zechariah* finally gave a direct answer. Do not continue to fast about Jerusalem’s sorrows. Replace those fasts with the joy of rescued people. God was giving them salvation. Israel should give God their hearts in love and thanksgiving. Formalistic religion, like fasts, was no good. Love, truth and peace, and a wholehearted response to God’s love with love of God and neighbor was what was needed. Israel was to be the light on the hill, the shining community that would be a source of blessing for the whole earth attracting all people to it.

Introduction to Part 2:

 Some scholars believe Chapters 9-11 and 12-14 were later additions. They have even named those chapters “*II Zechariah”* and “*III Zechariah*.” But specific dates for each for each have not been agreed upon, though some say they probably were written after 480 BC when Zechariah was very old.

 *“I Zechariah*” was written to the struggling, returned exiles about the certain, but future, coming of the Kingdom of God, where their oppressors would be defeated, and evil would be banished from earth. But that would be difficult because evil was so ingrained in the world. The apocalyptic sections of Scripture- *Daniel, Revelation, Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21*- depicted God as throwing away the old world and creating a new heaven and earth. *Zechariah*, however, portrayed the Kingdom as coming to earth, which God would transform.

“*II and III Zechariah*” frequently emphasized the eschaton and the great Messianic Era to come. Part 2 centered on judgment and the coming blessing of Messiah, Who would be rejected when He came. *Zechariah* reminded God’s people that victory would require suffering by God and His people because human sin had real power to resist God.

Chapter 9:

 The Word of the Lord again came to *Zechariah*. God’s judgment would begin North of Palestine. It would travel down the Mediterranean coast, and then to Egypt. Many have noted the prophecy essentially traced Alexander the Great’s route of conquest. After defeating the Persians (North of Palestine), Alexander moved toward Egypt, on the way, he conquered:

* Damascus, capital of Syria/Aram = the Arameans whose language was

Aramaic, which also were North of Judah, then he moved down the

coast to

- Phoenicia= the city-states of Sidon and Tyre, an impregnable island

with 150’ walls that Nebuchadnezzar could not conquer even after

13 years of siege, but Alexander built a causeway across the sea to

carry siege engines to the island and conquer the impregnable

city [what *Ezekiel* had prophesied about Trye was fulfilled, not by

Babylon, but by Alexander], then he proceeded South to

* Philistia= 5 city states that were tradition thorns in Israel’s side,

especially in the early monarchy period. [Note: The word,

“Palestine,” was derived from “Philistine.”] God especially abhorred

the Philistines’ stubbornness and obnoxious sacrifices and rituals, but

ultimately, He made them a part of His people, like the Jebusites of

Jerusalem that David incorporated into Judah]. The 5 cities were:

Ekron, the northernmost city, was especially fearful and alarmed

by Alexander’s advancing Greeks, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ashdod, and

Gath, which was not included- perhaps it was insignificant by then,

then Alexander turned to

* Jerusalem, but God intervened, and Alexander did not destroy Judah,

finally, he headed to

* Egypt.

[Note: Each of the conquered kingdoms were enemies/oppressors of Israel.]

 Josephus, historian, general, Jewish priest-turned Roman collaborator, wrote about Alexander’s approach to Jerusalem. After he had taken Damascus and Sidon, and was about to take Tyre, Alexander wrote a letter to high priest, Jaddua, demanding that he pay Alexander tribute and provide the supplies Judah previously had sent Darius/Persia. Jaddua responded that he had sworn an oath in God’s name to Darius, and he could not break while Darius lived. (Judah’s King Jehoiakim broke his sacred oath to Nebuchadnezzar and allied with Egypt. The result was God’s disfavor and Jerusalem was besieged by Babylon). Alexander was furious with Jaddua’s rejection of his demand, but first he had to finish Trye and take Gaza.

 Just before Alexander turned toward Jerusalem, Jaddua received a message from God in his sleep. God promised to protect Jerusalem and instructed Jaddua to have all the people wear white garments. The priests were to don their sacred vestments, including Jaddua, who was to wear his exquisite high priestly attire. They were to throw open the city gates and go out to meet Alexander.

 Jaddua did as God directed. When Alexander approached Jerusalem, the high priest went out to him alone. Alexander saw the high priest, dismounted, and bowed to the ground. This caused Alexanders’ friend, Parmenion, to ask why he had bowed. Alexander said he had a dream in which a god, who was dressed and looked exactly like the high priest, assured Alexander he should go against Persia, and he would be victorious. Then, Alexander, Parmenion, and Jaddua went to the Jerusalem Temple and sacrificed to God.

 Afterwards, they showed Alexander the book of *Daniel,* which symbolically portrayed the Greeks defeat of the Persians. Alexander believed it spoke of him and asked the high priest what he wanted. Jaddua said he wanted to be exempt from taxes/tribute every 7th year, as provided by Scripture. He also wanted all Jews in Babylon and Media to be able freely to practice their religion. Alexander agreed. Some Jews even joined his army based on that promise.

 This may all be myth, or parts of it may be true. History does say that Alexander the Great did not take Jerusalem and he was friendly to the Jews.

 On the other hand, the prophesy also may be about the final eschatological battle between good and evil leading to institution of the Kingdom of God in Jerusalem when all Israel’s enemies would be subdued by God. Chapter 9 does not portray a battle, but its result, which was God’s protection of Jerusalem.

 Zech.9:1-8 contemplated God coming as a Divine Warrior against Israel’s enemies. No one would besiege God’s house, the Temple, and no oppressors would attack Jerusalem.

 Beginning with verse 9, Zechariah poetically announced the coming of King Messiah. [A Gospel reference to verse 9 often is read on Palm Sunday. Mat.21:4, 5, 29; Jn.12:12-15.] The verse was classified as Messianic in Jewish literature:

* The *Talmud-* a large 2-part collection of writings comprising the whole written and oral law and consisting of:
	+ *Mishna,* the "second law," which compiled the whole oral and ritual law and was reduced to writing about 200 AD, and
	+ *Gemara,* a supplemental, rabbinic commentary on the *Mishnah*, and
* *Midrash,* ancient commentary on the Hebrew scriptures, attached to the biblical text.

The Messianic King would establish His Kingdom of universal peace/*shalom,* but this prophesy would not be fulfilled until the end time, when the implements of war, the battle bow, war-horse, and chariot, would be removed and the whole arsenal would be destroyed.

First, Messiah had to conquer all enemies and restore/deliver His people. That was Messiah’s kingly role. *Zechariah* painted a picture of an epiphany/ theophany where God, as Lord of Hosts (commander of the heavenly and earthly armies), came to do battle against the forces of evil and to deliver and bless His people. Ephraim (Northern Kingdom) and Jerusalem (Southern Kingdom) would join in battle, and the united army then would prevail to the ends of the earth. [The poem said the blood of the covenant would free the prisoners from the waterless pit. Both Jeremiah and Joseph were cast into waterless pits.]

In it, YHWH roused the sons of Zion (Jerusalem) against those of Javan, Greece. (Javan, was a descendant of Noah’s son, Japheth, purportedly ancestor of the Greeks.)

Chapter 10:

*Zechariah*, called the people to look to God in prayer. In Chapter 9, *Zechariah* spoke of the Divine Warrior leading the final battle, establishing the Kingdom of God, and ruling a united Israel from Jerusalem. In Chapter 10, *Zechariah* recognized that no ideal realm had been established yet. Idolatry and injustice dominated due to corrupt leaders.

*Zechariah* again declared that nature’s fertility was connected to human faithfulness, especially that of Israel’s leaders, a frequent OT message. God was the One who gave the late rains (in May) and blessed His people with good crops. But the people had gone to household gods, idols, and diviners. The people were like lost sheep who had strayed without a shepherd. [In the ancient world, including in Israel, the regular metaphor was of a shepherd, the king/leader, and the sheep/the people. Hammurabi’s Code described king, Hammurabi as the shepherd…who makes affluence and plenty abound.]

God was about to bring a reckoning to Judah, God’s special people. Since their leaders had failed to care for Judah/the flock, God would do so. He would make them like a proud war-horse in His service. Messiah, the cornerstone, tent peg, battle bow, ruler, would come from Judah. The Lord would reunite Judah and Joseph/Ephraim (one of Joseph’s sons/the dispersed Northern Kingdom.) He would gather His people from distant lands (the Diaspora) and strengthen them while their oppressors’ power would dwindle. His people would remember Him, as God remembered them. (Note: Zechariah’s name= “the Lord remembers.”)

Chapter 11:

God would begin his judgment in the North, with the legendary cedars of Lebanon, which had been used to build the Temple and the king’s palace. The cedars would be felled. Bashan, East of the Jordan, and South of Mt. Gilead, had been allotted to the ½ tribe of Manasseh. It had rich pastures, choice cattle, and beautiful oak groves. Bashan’s forests and oaks were prophetic symbols of pride. The coming destruction would leave no pastures, groves, or food for flocks/herds.

 The reason for judgment was the people’s rejection of the Shepherd/ King (Messiah). In return, God would leave the flock to its fate, which meant disaster. [Some suggest this prophesy envisioned Rome’s devastation of Palestine and Jerusalem in 70 AD, as well as other Roman incursions. So, some commentators suggest this portion of *Zechariah* was written later and by a different author. Others believe *Zechariah* received predicative prophesy.]

Now, continuing the metaphor of the sheep and shepherd, God directed Zechariah to perform a symbolic act. God called Zechariah to dramatize God’s judgment on the land and people. [Most commentaries/translations indicate the Lord told Zechariah to act out the message, like *Ezekiel* and *Hosea.* Robert Alter treats the prophesy as a sermon, spoken, but not acted out.]

 Zechariah was to act like a good Davidic shepherd, and “Pasture the flock ….” God charged that the current bad shepherds had bought, sold, and slaughtered sheep with impunity, even thanking God for the riches they had gained. Since the shepherds had not spared the sheep, God would have no pity on the flock, which had no one to rescue them.

So, *Zechariah* pastured the flock. Assuming this was enacted prophecy, Zechariah would have had to dress the part, wearing shepherd’s clothing, and carrying shepherd’s gear. The Lord told him to take, 2 staffs one named “Favor,” and the other “Unity.” (Robert Alter named them “Pleasantness” and “Bruising” because he believed the names should be antithetical to each other.)

Zechariah, as good shepherd, cared for the flock and protected them from oppressors; indeed, in 1 month, he fired 3 worthless shepherds. Nonetheless, the flock hated him, and he grew impatient with the sheep. So, he resigned/quit/ walked away as shepherd. (How Zechariah portrayed all is difficult to imagine, and it got more challenging, so Alter may be correct.)

Without a shepherd, some sheep began to eat one another. (Josephus said cannibalism occurred during the siege of Jerusalem.) Zechariah asked for severance pay to terminate the employment, and he was given 30 pieces of silver. (The standard price for the death of a slave in Israel. Ex. 21:32).

The Lord told Zechariah to throw the money to the potter in the Temple. [Alter opined Zechariah was to throw the silver into the potter’s kiln where it would be smelted. Others suggest he was to throw it to a menial Temple employee.] Then, he broke the 2 staffs.

After that role play was completed, the Lord told Zechariah to play the role of a worthless shepherd, because that was the kind of ruler the people wanted. God would give them up and leave the people to their own devices. That ruler/ shepherd would desert the flock; he would not care for the lost or weak sheep; heal the injured ones; or even feed the healthy ones. He would eat them -down to the hoofs= destroy the flock.

Chapter 12-13:

Chapters 12-14, which some commentators call *III Zechariah*, concern Israel, not just Judah and Jerusalem. *Zechariah’s* message unfolded in 2 scenes: The siege of Jerusalem, and Messiah’s return to defeat Israel’s enemies and establish the Kingdom.

*Zechariah* encouraged the people that God’s judgement against them was not the last word; rather, God was at work to bless, not curse, the world:

* He would deliver Judah/Jerusalem from its enemies (12:1-9)- All the nations would attack Jerusalem, but the Divine Warrior would save it, a familiar picture in both *Psalms* and *Isaiah*. In short, God would fight with Judah and secure Jerusalem.
* He would pour out the Spirit of repentance on Jerusalem (12:10-14) – The future king would be rejected by the people, who wanted to rule their own lives, so they killed him. (The LXX, Syriac, Aramaic, and Latin translations said: They will look on *me* whom they have pierced.]
* This deed would destroy Jerusalem, but it would weep over the murder of Messiah after God’s Spirit was poured out on the people so they would understand what they had done and turn to God in repentance. By slaying Messiah, Judah would wound God to His heart and in repentance they would weep in grief for their injury to their Lord. (See Ps. 51:41). But God would not be deterred, His promised Kingdom would come.
* He would cleanse the land of idolatry and false prophecy (13:1-6).

God, the Almighty Creator, guaranteed fulfillment of those promises.

 First, God declared He was about to make Jerusalem a cup of poison (His wrath) around which the nations would gather and then stagger. Next, He declared He would make Jerusalem a huge stone too heavy to lift. If invaders tried to do so, they would be injured.

God, through *Zechariah*, then used the image of invaders’ horses which would become blind and confused, and their riders insane. On the other hand, the eyes of Jerusalem’s/Judah’s riders would be opened- the opposite of the plight of the invaders. Judah’s leader then would know the people were their strength through the Lord.

Then, *Zechariah* used a 3rd image. God would be like a flaming brazier/ torch, a hugely destructive force, that would consume all those around it, but Jerusalem would continue in safety. This was the most violent image.

Then, *Zechariah* moved from physical to spiritual deliverance. He promised to pour out His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of graciousness and grace, on Jerusalem’s people. Water, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, would be poured out on the leaders and the people of Judah/Jerusalem. The Spirit would bring them to contrition and repentance. The people would look at the one they stabbed, mourn him, and grieve bitterly as for an only child/1st born son.

Their mourning would be as great as at Hadad-Rimmon of Megiddo. (Various explanations have been proposed for this. Some suggest the reference was to the ritual lament of Tammuz/Baal worshippers, who mourned the mythical death of their fertility god at the end of each spring with the approaching heat of summer. Perhaps the more persuasive explanation is the mourning Judah’s good King Josiah who died from an Egyptian arrow shot at Meggido.)

In addition to the mourning of the people, the land would mourn, together with its civil and religious leaders- the family of David, the great king and his son, Nathan (2 Sam.5:14), and the family of Levi, the priest, whose eldest son was Gershon, and his son, Shimei (Num.3:7-18,21).

In cleansing Jerusalem, God Almighty/the Lord of Armies would cut off all idols from the land; their names would not even be recalled. Furthermore, all false prophets would be eliminated. (False prophets continued into NT times.)

But God would not allow Messiah’s murder to go unpunished. The nations would come against Jerusalem. Many in Judah would be scattered; 2/3rds would be slaughtered; and the remaining would be purified by adversity (like precious metal through fire). But God’s remnant would turn to Him in prayer and supplication, and He would have mercy on them. He would call them, “My people,” and Judah would reply, “my God.”

Chapter 14:

 Continuing where Chapter 13 concluded, *Zechariah* declared that a day was coming when the Lord would gather all the nations to do battle against Jerusalem. The city would be captured and looted. Half of its people would be taken into exile; the rest shall remain in Jerusalem.

But just as the nations seemed about to win, the Lord/Messiah/Divine Warrior, would appear in glory on the Mount of Olives, to the East of Jerusalem. [The Mount faces the Temple. It is 2710’ above sea-level and 330’ higher than the Temple Mount. On its slopes are tombs of pious Jews. The *Mishnah* and *Talmud* call it the “Mount of Anointing.”]

A cosmic, cataclysmic phenomenon, a great earthquake, would follow, as in the days of King Uzziah, and the Mount would be split in ½ from East to West into a great valley. Half of the mountain would move North and half South, creating a level plain on the East side of the city. Then the Lord would come with His “Hosts” /His angelic troops. There would be no light, no day or night, until all the suffering and judgment were done. At evening, the light would come.

 On that day, fresh water (symbol of the Holy Spirit) would come from Jerusalem half toward the Eastern Sea (Dead Sea) and half to the Western Sea (Mediterranean). This living water would not dry up even in the dry summer of Palestine. Jerusalem would be elevated, and the surrounding land levelled. Jerusalem never again would be destroyed.

Then, the Lord God would take His throne and rule over all the earth. (Thy Kingdom come). No other god ever again would be worshipped. On that day, the Lord would be One, as declared in the Shema (Deut.6:4- Hear of Israel, the Lord, the Lord is One). All the land would be at peace and secure- no more devastation.

 But the Lord would strike those who fought against Jerusalem and their animals with awful plagues and sudden death (like the army of Sennacherib when it came against Jerusalem). And the enemies of Jerusalem/Judah would fight each other, and Judah and Jerusalem would fight them. After their victory, Judah/Jerusalem would receive much plunder, gold, silver, and garments.

Thereafter, the survivors of the nations that fought against Jerusalem would be required to send people to the Temple each year to bow to the Lord of Armies and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles/*Sukkot,* the final festival of the Jewish year, which is observed after the last harvest is gathered. It is a joyful time of thanksgiving to the Lord and generally was the most crowded one. (The other nations were not required to attend all 3 mandatory Jewish festivals each year, i.e., they did not have to attend Passover and Pentecost, which were singularly Jewish observances.) Those nations that failed to send people to Jerusalem to worship and sacrifice at *Sukkot*, would have no rain on their land.

On that day, the Kingdom would be holy to the Lord, consecrated like the high priest, whose turban bore the words, “Holy to the Lord.” Indeed, everything in Jerusalem, even the horses’ harnesses and the pails, would bear the same inscription as the high priest’s turban. The Kingdom would reflect God’s admonition to the Israelites centuries before when He commanded Israel: “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.” (Lev.19:2).

On that Day, no merchant would be in the house of the Lord. [Money changers were in the Temple in Jesus’ time, and He famously drove them out.]