

# OUTLINE OF ZECHARIAH

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## CHAPTER XXV

### PREFACE TO ZECHARIAH

Zechariah was contemporary with Haggai. With him he shared the task of encouraging the returned remnant to rebuild the temple.

## PREFACE TO ZECHARIAH

(The reader is urged to re-read Chapter 23, "The Preface to Haggai," by way of reviewing the historic setting of both of these prophets.)

In contrast to Haggai, who was a "layman," Zechariah was a Levitical priest, and a member of one of the outstanding priestly families. His grandfather, Iddo, had been among the first to return from Babylon under Zerubbabel. The prophet himself may well have been born in Babylon. (2:4)

There is no difficulty in specifically dating the beginning of Zechariah's prophetic work. He places it in the second year of Darius and the eighth month. This would make it, on our calendar, November of 520 B.C. just two months after the beginning of the work of Haggai.

Zechariah's second messages, a series of visions, began three months later on February 24, 519 B.C. The final message, another series of visions, was delivered on December 4, 518 B.C.

As was Haggai's, so was Zechariah's purpose the motivation of the people to build the temple. His approach is strikingly different. Whereas Haggai's message was simple and plainly written, the younger prophet, Zechariah, writes poetically and with flights of fancy which sometimes make his writing almost indecipherable to the twentieth century reader. He goes even beyond Isaiah in the use of symbolic and figurative language, establishing his book as distinctly apocalyptic.

Zechariah thus takes his place with Daniel and Ezekiel among Old Testament apocalypse. Only four Biblical books, including Revelation are written in this way.

Perhaps a word should be said here concerning apocalyptic writing. While it is no less inspired, and so no less important than other Biblical literature, it is extremely difficult of exegesis and therefore does not lend itself to dogmatic certainty. Many, failing to recognize this limitation, attempt to prove their pet systems, particularly systems of eschatology, by quoting passages from these books out of both historical and grammatical context. These proof texts are usually organized into printed charts, thus forming a supposedly irrefutable proof of the chart-maker's peculiar position and prophetic views. This is, to say the very least, dangerous procedure if not downright dishonest.

The figures and symbols used in apocalyptic writings are figures common to the day in which the writer and his first readers lived. The difficulty of the modern student in understanding these symbols lies largely in the fact that centuries have passed, and with them, the common usage of the symbols.

Generally speaking, there are three keys to the understanding of apocalyptic figures and symbolism: (1) Often the figure or symbol sug-

gests its own meaning. With such there is little difficulty, if one will "do his homework" and place himself in the historic climate of the writer. (2) The context of the symbolic passage often contains the necessary key to the meaning of the symbol. This type of symbol is not so easily understood as the first, but it is less difficult than the third. (3) The third key is the historical allusion. Here one must be thoroughly conversant with the historic setting of the book in question. Often this requires years of disciplined study of ancient and Biblical history. Most dogmatic chart-makers are not inclined to this sort of discipline and so read into such symbols their own ideas which would be completely unrecognizable by the prophet.

Unfortunately, there are many passages of apocalypsis in which none of the three keys is apparent. Further, the symbols are not always used with the same meaning from book to book, or even within the same book. Many times a particular author, as for instance Zechariah, uses symbols that are found in no other Biblical work. These of course require special attention indeed.

The difficult nature of apocalyptic writing does not make these books any less the Word of God. In fact, such symbols frequently are used because God is attempting to communicate an idea for which human language has no literal terminology. Obviously any literal interpretation of such language cannot be accurate.

Whatever else may be said about the study of apocalyptic prophecy, one must never allow himself to become closed-minded in his understanding of it. It certainly ought never become the basis of division among God's people.

To come back specifically to Zechariah; his message may be summed up simply as God's appeal to Judah to "Return to me and I will return to you." (1:3)

This is a recurring theme of the prophets, particularly the minor prophets. It is stated repeatedly in terms of unfaithfulness, punishment, exile, restoration, remnant. Sometimes it applies to historic return from captivity. Other times it refers to a more long-ranged return.

Zechariah re-opens a series of prophecy which, in a sense, had been closed by Ezekiel. Ezekiel had been told to lie for 390 days on his left side and then lie 40 days on his right side. The 390 days represented the punishment of the northern kingdom and the 40 days represented the punishment of the southern kingdom. At the close of that time (390 plus 40 days) during which he was silent, Ezekiel forecast that there would be a period of prophetic silence. The vision would be removed from Judah.

## PREFACE TO ZECHARIAH

Zechariah re-opens the prophetic contact. This work is to bridge the silence gap, to bring the people back to the land from which they had been taken and to look ahead to the coming of the Messiah. They were within the borders, but they would not be completely returned until they re-built the temple of Jehovah.

Zechariah does not refer to the Messiah by inference or allusion. He's the most specific of all the minor prophets in his Messianic forecasts. Only Isaiah is more graphic and realistically recognizable in his pre-picturing of the life of Christ. For this reason, Zechariah ranks with Isaiah, some have even said above Isaiah, in his influence on the Christology of the New Testament, particularly the Gospels.

An outline of Zechariah shows the book divided quite naturally into two sections. The first begins with a series of eight symbolic visions (1:6:15) which were designed to remove from the people, step by step, the obstacles which stood in the way of Messiah's coming. They are followed by the coronation of Joshua in a symbolic merger of the functions of priest and king.

Following the coronation, Zechariah presents a rather lengthy passage (chapters 7-8) in which he teaches concerning worship. This he also relates to the coming of Christ.

The second major section of the prophecy begins with chapter nine and concludes the book. Here Zechariah foretells the coming of the Messianic age and the glorious future of God's people. The present (520 B.C.) returnees are only a token of those who will return. A time will come when false shepherds will betray the people, but at least God's Israel will be vindicated. Then will come the universal reign of God over all men.

### Chapter XXV—Questions

#### Preface to Zechariah

1. Zechariah was contemporary with \_\_\_\_\_.
2. These two prophets shared what common task?
3. Contrast Haggai with Zechariah.
4. What is the date of Zechariah?
5. Zechariah's writing is apocalyptic. What is apocalyptic writing?
6. Why is apocalyptic writing especially difficult to understand today?
7. What are three keys to understanding apocalyptic symbols and figures?

8. What verse in chapter one sums up Zechariah's message?
9. Zechariah re-opens a series of prophecy which in effect had been closed by \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Does Zechariah refer to the Messiah by allusion or directly?
11. How does the second section of Zechariah differ from the first?
12. Outline Zechariah.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### INTRODUCTION TO SECTION I

#### ZECHARIAH 1:1-6

RV . . . In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah unto Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, Jehovah was sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Return unto me, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers unto whom the former prophets cried, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, Return ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings; but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith Jehovah. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? and they turned and said, Like as Jehovah of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

LXX . . . In the eighth month, in the second year of the reign of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zacharias, the son of Barachias, the son of Addo, the prophet, saying, The Lord has been very angry with your fathers. And thou shalt say to them, Thus saith the Lord Almighty; Turn to me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn to you, saith the Lord of hosts. And be ye not as your fathers, whom the prophets before charged, saying, Thus saith the Lord Almighty; Turn ye from your evil ways, and from your evil practices: but they hearkened not, and attended not to hearken to me, saith the Lord. Where are your fathers, and the prophets? Will they live for ever? But do ye receive my words and mine ordinances, all that I command by my spirit to my servants the prophets, who lived in the days of your fathers; and they answered and said, As the Lord Almighty determined to do to us,