

## **Zechariah-by Nathan White**

### **Chapter 1**

Zechariah returned with the people of Israel from their exile in 538 BC. Along with Haggai, he calls the Israelites to renewed faithfulness, reminding them of their covenant with God. The book contains eight visions, the last four mirroring the first four. The first is connected to the eighth, the second to the seventh, the third to the sixth, and the fourth to the fifth (A-B-C-D-D-C-B-A). After concluding these prophecies, the final chapters of Zechariah will end with visions of the reign of the Messianic king in whom these prophecies find their final and complete fulfillment. In the first vision (v.7-17), Zechariah sees the nations at rest, even though Israel is not. Israel, full of anxiety after decades of captivity, desires to see Jerusalem rebuilt. God promises that he will restore his people. The second vision (v.18-21) features four horns, representing the oppressors of God's people, and four craftsmen who are coming to destroy those horns, representing judgment on those who have harmed God's people.

### **Chapter 2**

In chapter two, Zechariah describes his third vision. He sees a man with a measuring line preparing to measure the restored Jerusalem. The focus of this vision is on the grandeur of the restored city, over and against the reality of its current disrepair. The job of the angel who is to measure it might be tricky, because we quickly learn that this new Jerusalem will be massive and so filled with inhabitants that it doesn't even have physical walls (v.4). God promises to himself be the protection for his people as well as dwell in their midst (v.5). God again promises to judge his people's oppressors and promises refuge in Zion, but this time also includes that people from many nations will join themselves to the Lord to be his people (v.11). As these visions unfold, it becomes increasingly clear that that they are about more than just an immediate restoration to the land for Israelite captives. Zechariah has larger picture in view, looking forward to Christ's eternal reign.

### **Chapter 3**

In the fourth vision, Zechariah sees Joshua, the high priest, standing before God in filthy clothes and accused by Satan. The scene evokes a courtroom. A guilty defendant and an accuser who has him dead to rights. But in this courtroom scene, the judge does something entirely unexpected. Instead of delivering the guilty verdict, God rebukes the accuser and clothes Joshua in clean garments. He takes Joshua's iniquity away from him and declares him righteous. God then assures the high priest that a day is coming when he will take away the iniquity of all of his people. He will raise up a righteous Branch, a term used throughout the Old Testament for the coming Messiah, who would remove the sins of all of God's people in a single day. He would be the ultimate priest. This Branch would be the fulfillment of the office that Joshua and his fellow priests hold. They were just signs pointing to someone greater than themselves: Jesus Christ, our great high priest.

### **Chapter 4**

Zechariah describes a vision about Zerubbabel, a descendant of David and rightful heir to the throne of Israel. God proclaims that by the power of his Spirit, rather than by Zerubbabel's might, the Davidic heir would lead God's people through the obstacles in front of them. The imagery is powerful. Mountains would become plains before Zerubbabel and he would complete the work he began. Though scorned as a "day of small things" (v.10), God's work would reach a beautiful conclusion. This vision ends with Zechariah seeing Joshua and Zerubbabel next to God as his anointed servants (v.14). Zerubbabel would help lead God's people in the postexilic quest to rebuild the temple, but it paled in comparison to the temple under Solomon and it would eventually be destroyed as well. Did God's promises fail? Absolutely not! As will become even clearer throughout the book, Zerubbabel's life is not only about what God

accomplished through him, but also about the work of the final Davidic king, Christ, who he foreshadows.

### **Chapter 5**

The sixth and seventh visions address how God will deal with wickedness. In the sixth vision, Zechariah sees a giant scroll flying through the air. It proclaims judgment on all those who have rejected the Lord and acted in opposition to the covenant he made with his people. The seventh vision centers on a woman, wickedness personified, being trapped in a basket with a heavy lid, being removed from the land, and being housed forever far away from God's people. We first see wickedness judged and then we see it removed altogether. It is striking to recognize in these visions that even wickedness is under God's sovereign control, but it's also important to note the finality with which this judgment and removal is described. It obviously is not fully completed by Zerubbabel and Joshua, or even by the prophetic warnings of Zechariah. These visions help us look forward to Christ, in whose life, death, and resurrection we have the satisfaction of God's wrath for our sin and the removal of our sins from us.

### **Chapter 6**

Chapter six contains the eighth vision and a sign-act to signify the coming completion of the visions. The eighth vision foresees the Spirit of God going out over all the earth, easily conquering, and reigning over everything. The vision pays special immediate attention to the directions of Israel's enemies, but also looks forward to a day when God will subdue all his enemies. After this vision, God tells Zechariah to symbolically crown Joshua. This forces us to ask why Zechariah would perform this symbolic coronation on the high priest instead of Zerubbabel. The answer is because he wants the people to look forward to a king who would function also as a priest. This priest-king, whose name means "God is salvation," would build the temple of the Lord and would bring in people from far off to enjoy the presence of God as well. It's not hard for us to see how this sign-act points us again not to something so small as a rebuilt temple, but to Christ, our priest, our king, and God with us.

### **Chapter 7**

Like so many other prophets, Zechariah reminds the people that rote obedience is not what God desires. He desires their hearts. Rituals without genuine repentance and faith are not what they need. He even calls them to consider the fasting and praying they did while in captivity. Even now, after decades of captivity, they need to be reminded that covenant faithfulness is not just a matter of completing to-do list. Repentance would mean living lives of joyful service to others. It would mean performing acts of mercy for the benefit of their most vulnerable neighbors. It would mean acting selflessly, not in constant pursuit of personal gain. The prophets had told their forefathers the very same thing, but they refused to listen and God's judgment fell on them. They were given the status of the vulnerable neighbors that they once oppressed and their homes were made desolate. Zechariah reminds the people that it is entirely possible, even in the humble state that Israel now found itself, to fall to the same sins again.

### **Chapter 8**

In stark contrast to the way Israel suffered under the rule of other nations, Zechariah points to a time when Jerusalem will be a place of peace where the nations come to seek God's favor (v.20-22). God not only reminds his people that he intended them to be a light to the nations, he promises them that they will be. He will see to it that his people will dwell in peace and prosperity. The hope in this chapter revolves around what we see in the third verse: God will dwell among his people. This is the promise that gives birth to all the others. It is the presence of God that makes the difference for his people. They

tried strategic military alliances. They tried capitulation to surrounding cultures. They tried everything that would make sense if they were seeking security and none of it worked. They understood this, which is why they were so eager to rebuild the temple. However, like so much of Zechariah's prophecy, God's promise to dwell forever with his people finds its final fulfillment in the redemptive work of Christ.

### **Chapter 9**

Chapters 9-14 shift focus away from some of the people and ideas that were present in the first half of the book. Zechariah no longer deals with dreams like he does in chapters 1-8, and neither Joshua nor Zerubbabel function as key figures like they have so far. Although this second part of the book does change in some significant ways, the covenant faithfulness of God's people, their interactions with the nations, and the coming messianic Priest-King all remain central to Zechariah's message. This chapter begins with an oracle of judgment against Israel's enemies, beginning in northern Syria, and progressively moving further south. Even these nations, however, will have a remnant that belong to the Lord. Zechariah goes on to describe the entrance of this king to Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, bringing salvation to his people. Christ's application of this prophecy to himself by riding a donkey into Jerusalem is so clear and so significant that all four gospels record it (Matt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk. 19; Jn. 12).

### **Chapter 10**

In Zechariah 10, God again promises a day of restoration for his people, but first, he promises judgment on the wicked shepherd who led them into their sins and failures in the first place. God's anger burns against the false shepherd who have neglected their duties, and he intends to gather his scattered people to restore and protect them. Thematically, this chapter is reminiscent of Ezekiel 34 where God promises that he will be the shepherd his people need. God would certainly exercise his judgment against the leaders of Israel, but the fulfillment of his people's need for a shepherd is found again in Christ who tells the Jewish leaders that he is the Good Shepherd that God had promised (John 10). This theme of Israel's wicked shepherds and their need for a good shepherd continues into the next chapter as well, where Zechariah goes on to prophesy that Israel will actually reject the shepherd that they need.

### **Chapter 11**

In chapter 11, Zechariah performs a sign-act like he did when he crowned the high priest in chapter 6. Zechariah takes the role of a shepherd, but he knows that this flock is doomed from the very beginning of the act. He removes other shepherds who did not care for the flock, but the sheep come to detest Zechariah. Eventually, he abandons them to sheep traders. The flock detested the shepherd sent to protect it and the sheep found themselves back in the hands of worthless shepherds. God will still judge these false shepherds (v.17), but Israel prefers them. Whereas chapter 10 echoed Ezekiel 34, chapter 11 reads like the inverse of Ezekiel 34. God gives Israel a true shepherd who they reject, so he returns them to foolish shepherds. Throughout Zechariah's prophecies, God has been promising a messianic king to rule over a new Jerusalem, but now Israel is forced to confront a serious question: Will they reject him when he comes?

### **Chapter 12**

Zechariah shifts his attention again to the reign of the coming messianic king. God will restore his people in spite of their sin. God will raise all of his people to the dignity and strength of David, and the Davidic king will lead them into battle like the angel of the Lord. It is a glorious vision of a conquering king to whom all nations will bow. But the restoration of God's people is not just about an earthly power shift. God promises that they will be repentant. He will give them "a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one weeps

over a first-born." (v.10). God's people will look on the God they rejected, the God who they pierced, and mourn in repentance. Again, it's impossible to read this without seeing Christ as the central figure to whom Zechariah points, the coming Priest-King, the Good Shepherd, the righteous Branch, and the pierced God will draw his people to repentance and faith.

### **Chapter 13**

Zechariah goes on to promise that one day, a fountain will be opened for God's people that will cleanse them from their sins. God will so thoroughly purify his people from their idols that they will not even be remembered. Every false prophet will be removed from among God's people and their wickedness will not be tolerated. It is a total transformation of the people. God also promises that his shepherd will be stricken. Reminiscent of Isaiah 53, this righteous shepherd will suffer and die at God's direction. It's a startling turn after reading the previous few verses concerning the purification of God's people and an uncomfortable call-back to 13:10 (they look on me, on him whom they have pierced). What is the connection? Why the immediate turn to a stricken shepherd after a promise of forgiveness? The striking of this shepherd, his suffering and death, will ultimately be the means by which God purifies his people and draws them to himself (v.9).

### **Chapter 14**

Zechariah 14 culminates in the full and eternal institution of a new Jerusalem from which the Lord will rule over the whole earth. Rivers of living water will flow from it, bring life to everything they touch. This language is remarkably similar to the language used to describe Eden, and that is not an accident. God will make all things right and will dwell with his people. His people's enemies will be utterly destroyed under a curse (v.12-15) and people from all nations will gather to worship the one, true God (v.16). In fact, there will be no way to live outside of the presence of God (v.17). God's reign will be absolute and unchallenged. Nothing will exist that is not in complete submission to him. Nothing in this new creation will be unholy. Even the horses and the cookware, beasts of burden and common household objects, will be as holy as the instruments in the temple. No trace of the fall will be left. No semblance of wickedness will exist. The King will come. The King will save his people. The King will reign.

### **-Reflecting on Zechariah-**

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Zechariah. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Zechariah before we move forward?

*"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Psalm 19.7!*