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## Zechariah Introduction



### **Zechariah** - Steve Gregg

Zechariah is one of the most difficult books in the Bible, but Steve Gregg offers a comprehensive introduction to the book. He explains how Zechariah is organized and touches on its four letters and the challenges with its pronunciation. Gregg also discusses the historical context of the book, its relevance to Christianity, and explains that the book is divided into two main sections. Overall, Gregg provides a useful guide for anyone seeking to further understand this complicated book of the Bible.

## Transcript

So today we begin to study one of the more difficult books of the entire Bible. I would put maybe two other books in the category of more difficult than Zechariah. The most difficult of all, I think, is the book of Revelation.

And almost all commentators would agree about that. Even those who are pretty sure that they know what it's about would agree it's about the most difficult book in the Bible. By the way, I do know some pastors who say it's not difficult at all.

You just take it for what it says, and it's as easy as can be. These are men who know very little about the book, and have just learned what their teachers told them, and haven't been very exposed to, you know, different viewpoints. But anyone who has actually done some serious study on the options knows that the book of Revelation is very challenging, but very rewarding too.

The next most difficult book, I think, in the Bible after Revelation would be the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel is very difficult for a number of reasons. I won't go into all those reasons now, but it's got a lot of strange visions, a lot of strange acted parables the prophet works out.

It's extremely repetitious. Some whole chapters are repeated. There are certain phrases that are repeated, you know, dozens of times in a single chapter.

A lot of repetition, yet very interesting, full of interest in some great, some very great passages in Ezekiel, but like the book of Revelation, very difficult. The book of Zechariah

would very possibly be the most difficult book if it was as long as the others. It's shorter, and that makes it present somewhat fewer challenges.

The first time I taught Zechariah was many years into my ministry. I'd been teaching the Bible, and I had taught several books of the Bible multiple times before I taught Zechariah the first time, and that's because when I read it, I realized that I didn't know what it was talking about in most of the, I mean, I could get some information from it, but teaching it verse by verse just seemed an impossibility. And then, I think it was 1983, I was invited to come to teach for the very first time at the School of Biblical Studies on the Big Island of Hawaii for Youth with a Mission, and they asked me to teach Zechariah, and I thought, well, that's great.

The first time I teach for this school, making my first impression on them, I have to teach a book I've never taught before, and that I find the most difficult Old Testament book except for Ezekiel. So, I was quite intimidated, so I made sure I did more study, diligent study in the book of Zechariah in preparation for that, because I did want to make a good impression on them, and apparently I did. They invited me back to teach many, many times after that.

But, the same year, it was the first year I ran the Great Commission School in Oregon, and I had to teach it that year, too, for my own students. So, I taught within the space of less than nine months, I taught the book of Zechariah twice, having never taught it before. What I found the second time was somewhat easier, and then I taught it every year for 16 years at my school, and I taught it also at the School of Biblical Studies on other occasions.

So, I probably have now taught Zechariah 20 times, and I will say that what was so daunting and hard to understand at first is much less so now. Any book is going to be like that. If you read it through 20 times carefully, you're going to understand a lot more the 20th time than you did on the 3rd or 4th or 5th time, and I would say that while it would be very, probably cocky to suggest that I understand the book of Zechariah as well as I should, I probably don't, but I do understand far more than I once did, and I can actually, for my own satisfaction, make some good sense of it.

And I hope I can do the same for you, because I'm guessing that if you've read Zechariah before, you have found it difficult also. I think after our lectures, you'll find it less so. There will still be some things that aren't the easiest, but it will be a world of difference for you just because, as I say, the more times I go through it, the more times I teach it, the more years that go by between teaching it one time and another time, I understand more things, and it's actually gotten to be a book I enjoy teaching.

A book I was very intimidated by initially is a book that I look forward to teaching. Some of the great chapters and verses and passages are in the book of Zechariah. In fact, it is very heavily used in the New Testament.

Though it's a book of only 14 chapters, and some of them very short, it's very easy to read through the book of Zechariah in a single sitting, yet over 50 times, it's quoted in the New Testament. So from a relatively short book, the New Testament writers got a great deal of light and relied on it fairly heavily. By the way, the book of Revelation also relied very heavily on Zechariah.

I shouldn't say relied on it, because I believe it was an inspired book. I don't think the Holy Spirit relied on Zechariah, but I should say there are many echoes of Zechariah in the book of Revelation as well. You'll see some even in the first chapter.

But first we want to introduce the book and maybe do a few things to help take away some of the mystery about it. We'll talk first of all about the author himself, whose name is given in the first verse. He gives his name as Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Edo.

Now, Zechariah means Yahweh remembers. If you're not familiar with the name Yahweh, it's the same as Jehovah. It's just a different vocalization of the Hebrew consonants.

If you're more familiar with the name Jehovah, Jehovah and Yahweh are both different pronunciations, different vocalizations of the same Hebrew consonants, which is sometimes called the Tetragrammaton. There's like four letters in this name, and they're all consonants and rather unpronounceable unless you add a few vowels, which the Jews did. And Yahweh, therefore, or Jehovah is the sacred name, the covenant name of God.

And many of the holy men and even not so holy men in the Bible have Yahweh or Jehovah as a component in their name. Not only did a lot of different names have Yahweh in them, but there were a lot of them who had this particular name, Zechariah. There's over 30 characters in the Bible whose name is Zechariah, including in the New Testament, where the father of John the Baptist has that name.

Now, you may have read in Luke one that his name is Zechariah. But Zechariah is only the Greek form of the Hebrew Zechariah. And since the New Testament is written in Greek, the names are often, you know, transliterated into Greek.

But the father of John the Baptist is also named Zechariah, but he's not this Zechariah. And there are so many Zechariahs in the Bible, you could easily confuse them with each other. This one is Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, and Berechiah was the son of Edo.

Edo was a very influential priest who returned to Jerusalem with the exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The timing of this book is post-exilic, that is, after the Babylonian exile, after 70 years were spent in Babylon, the Jews were given the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, where the city had been destroyed, burned to the ground, the temple had been totally dismantled, it was non-existent, and had lain waste for the better part of 70 years while they were in Babylon. And Cyrus the Persian king

conquered Babylon, and he was a very benevolent ruler to those people that the Babylonians had conquered and who had taken away into exile.

And Cyrus issued a decree in 539 BC, which allowed all the people who had been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, if they wished, to go home and re-establish their communities in their homelands where they'd come from. This included the Jews. Babylon had conquered many nations, and this decree of Cyrus actually allowed for people of any nation to go back, but the main concern for the Christian and for the Bible is that the Jews were permitted to go back and to rebuild their temple.

And Zerubbabel was the governor that was appointed. He was a direct, linear descendant of David, but he was not a king himself. He was just a governor appointed to lead the new Jewish community back in Jerusalem after the exile.

And he led 50,000 Jewish people back from the Babylonian exile back to Jerusalem. They re-established the community, and Zechariah was among the prophets who prophesied among them. His grandfather, Edo, was one of the major leading priests who traveled back from Babylon to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel.

And Zerubbabel was still living at the time that Zechariah wrote, though Zechariah is the third generation. Zechariah means Yahweh remembers. It may have seemed to Israel that Yahweh had forgotten them when they were in Babylon.

You know, more than one or two generations were born in Babylon, and a great number died there in the 70 years they were there. But they were not forgotten. God had told them through Jeremiah the prophet that they would spend 70 years in Babylon, and that's what they did.

And at the end of that time, God did what he said he would do and let them come back. So Zechariah's name, Yahweh remembers, may have even been significant. It may be that his father, Barakai, had named him that because he may have been among... Well, Barakai was almost certainly one of the exiles that came back too with his own father, Edo.

Now, Zechariah is mentioned also in the book of Ezra and in Nehemiah, because Ezra and Nehemiah are also talking about the exiles returning from Babylon. And there are mentions of this prophet and of his contemporary Haggai, whose book is also in our Bible. And in those places, Ezra and Nehemiah, when they refer to Zechariah, they call him the son of Edo.

He's really the grandson of Edo. He's the son of Barakai, who was himself the son of Edo, but son of can simply mean descendant of. And a grandson... I mean, Jesus is called the son of Abraham and the son of David.

And there's 14 generations, actually 28 generations between David and Jesus, and yet

he's called the son of David. So, for a man to be called the son of the man who's actually his grandfather was not an uncommon way to speak about it. But Ezra chapter 5, verse 1, it says, Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Edo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

So here we have Zechariah woven into the story of the exiles who returned from Babylon in the book of Ezra. He's mentioned again in Ezra chapter 6 and verse 14 says, So the elders of the Jews built and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Edo. And they built and finished, that is the temple.

The purpose of Haggai's and Zechariah's ministries, and they were contemporaries, Haggai a little older probably, was that they were there to encourage the returned exiles to complete the temple. And we'll talk more about that setting in a moment. Right now we want to concentrate on the man Zechariah.

But he is mentioned there, he's also mentioned in Nehemiah 12, 16. Again, referred to as Zechariah the son of Edo. But more properly he tells us he was the grandson of Edo, and that's fine.

There's a troublesome passage in the New Testament that mentions Zechariah, the son of Berechiah. And it's been a bugaboo for Christians forever. It's when people go looking for contradictions in the Bible, or mistakes in the Bible, they often look to Matthew 23, which mentions this prophet, and appears to be a mistaken reference to him.

The problem is the speaker in the case is Jesus, which makes it look like Jesus is making the mistake. But it's in Matthew 23, and verse 35, Jesus said to the Pharisees, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Now, he says Zechariah the son of Berechiah.

That's obviously our prophet who wrote this book. He's identified by that name. But Jesus said that the Jews had killed him between the temple and the altar.

This is problematic for a couple of reasons. If not more than a couple. One, is that we have no record in the Bible, elsewhere, of how this prophet, Zechariah the son of Berechiah, died.

Now, we could say, well, Jesus didn't need any reference in the Bible to know that. Jesus was God, Jesus knew these things, and so we know it from Jesus, how he died. And that would be possible.

I mean, it's entirely possible that Jesus knew the death of this prophet, though it's not recorded in Scripture. He may have known it by revelation. However, the way that Jesus says it, he expects his listeners to be familiar with what he's saying.

You know, all those prophets from Abel to Zechariah the son of Berechiah that you killed. You know, I mean, you'd think the Jews might say, well, we didn't kill any Zechariah the son of Berechiah. We don't know anything about this.

But if Jesus said, well, I just got it by revelation. That's how he died, by you guys. Well, I mean, that's a possibility.

It seems like a stretch. It doesn't seem very natural. And another thing that makes it unlikely is that Zechariah and his companion Haggai were just about the only prophets in the Old Testament that were well received by the Jews.

Most of the prophets were persecuted, ignored or killed by their countrymen. This was such a commonplace occurrence that Jesus said sarcastically once in Luke 13, he said it's impossible that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem. And it's not quite true.

Some prophets did perish outside Jerusalem, but he's making a snide remark about how the Jews can be pretty much counted on to kill their prophets. If God sends his people, his messengers, his people will kill his messengers. So Jesus said it's impossible that a prophet would perish outside Jerusalem.

A bit of a hyperbole, but the point is it was true for the most part that the Jews rejected and often killed their prophets, but not Haggai and Zechariah in all likelihood. We don't read of how either of these men died, but we read that their ministries were well received. Many of the prophets died at the hands of the Jews because they prophesied doom and gloom and the people didn't like to hear it.

And so they killed their prophets. They killed the messenger because they didn't like the message. But Zechariah and Haggai prophesied very positive things.

And at times they did rebuke the people, but the people responded favorably to the rebukes. That's a turnaround because after the Babylonian exile, the Jews had somewhat learned their lesson. They'd killed all the prophets or rejected the prophets before the exile, but now they'd been chastened by 70 years of exile.

Now they were able to listen. And after all, this was the faithful remnant that had returned from exile. This was not the generality of the Jewish race.

This was the faithful ones who returned because their hearts were stirred to follow the Lord and rebuild the temple. The less faithful Jews stayed in Babylon. And therefore, it's highly unlikely that this particular faithful remnant of Jews who were so receptive and obedient to the prophets and who were not scathingly rebuked by them, that they would somehow kill this prophet in that way, in any way.

So we've got this bit of a problem. Jesus says that the Jews killed Zechariah and Aberakai between the temple and the altar. We have no record of that in the Old Testament, and

it seems unlikely.

And there's another problem. And that's because there was another Zechariah who the Jews did kill between the temple and the altar. And it sounds like Jesus is mistaking that Zechariah for this Zechariah.

Because another Zechariah, by the way, this Zechariah was a priest. His grandfather was Edo the priest. There's another Zechariah whose father was a priest.

Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. And he was a priest that the Spirit of God came on. This is before the exile.

This is shortly before the exile. And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, actually did prophesy rebukes upon Jerusalem and doom and gloom. And he was killed between the temple and the altar, exactly as Jesus said happened.

And we have that story, by the way, in 2 Chronicles 24, verses 20 and 21. 2 Chronicles 24, verses 20 and 21. Now, by the way, when Jesus said, all the blood of all the prophets from Abel to Zechariah, it would appear, since Abel was the first martyr, that Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was the last martyr killed by the Jews, at least in Old Testament times.

And in the way that the Jews have their Old Testament books arranged, it's a different arrangement than ours, 2 Chronicles is one of the very last books. It comes even after Psalms and so forth in the Jewish arrangement. So that Jesus, if he was referring to Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, it's like the last recorded martyr in the Old Testament, in the arrangement where 2 Chronicles comes last in the Jewish Bible.

And therefore, Jesus would be saying, from the first martyr, Abel, to the last martyr in your Bible, Zechariah, who you killed before the temple and the altar, and he'd be referring to Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. And so this is why it's problematic. Jesus seems to be referring to Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, but he calls him the son of Berechiah.

Critics of the Bible often point this out as a bad thing, showing that the Bible isn't really inspired. First of all, there are ways to vindicate this. Some of them seem to be unnecessary, as far as I'm concerned, but it can be vindicated.

For example, one suggestion is that since there were over 30 men in the Bible named Zechariah, it's not impossible that 2 of them could have died in a similar manner, especially if they're both prophets, and prophets commonly did die at the hands of the Jews. It's not impossible that Zechariah the son of Berechiah, our present writer, may have died in a similar manner to the way that Zechariah the son of Jehoiada did. And Jesus is simply the only person who tells us so.

That's not impossible. I don't see it as a necessary solution. Another possibility is that Jesus didn't say the son of Berechiah, that Jesus just said from Abel to Zechariah, whom you killed between the temple and the altar, and Jesus meant the son of Jehoiada, but that a scribe copying the book of Matthew and hoping to clarify things, but himself being mistaken, stuck in the name of the more well-known Zechariah's father, son of Berechiah, because of course the author of the book is the most famous Old Testament Zechariah of all the many because he wrote a book of the Bible, and therefore that some scribe who is copying Matthew, who had a copy that simply said from Abel to Zechariah, that a scribe who overzealously wanted to clarify things, stuck in son of Berechiah, because he remembered this prophet's name was Zechariah son of Berechiah, and the scribes are not inspired, and the Bible has come down to us with some scribal errors in it.

Fortunately, not too many, I mean not enough to be a problem in most cases, but this could possibly be an instance. We don't know, it can't be proven that it is or that it isn't, but that it is, is not far removed from the realm of possibility, and therefore it could be that Jesus simply said from Abel to Zechariah, and it was a scribe copying the book of Matthew that added those words. Now, in favor of that particular theory, if you look at the parallel in Luke chapter 11, we have the same statement of Jesus in Luke 11, in verse 51 of Luke 11, Jesus making the same prediction, he says this, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple.

There's no reference to the son of Berechiah here in Luke. That doesn't really prove any particular theory to be true, but it would be consistent with the theory that somebody copying Matthew stuck in son of Berechiah when Jesus didn't really say it, and Luke preserves the actual words of Jesus as he said them, which are quite correct, but Jesus is referring in this case to Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, from 2 Chronicles chapter 24. This is a fairly easy solution, and I think probably the correct one.

Therefore, I would suggest Jesus probably didn't say son of Berechiah. If he did, it sounds like he made a mistake. Of course, there's a possibility he said it and wasn't making a mistake, but to say he said it and wasn't making a mistake would be an argument we would make dependent on our total confidence that Jesus can't make a mistake, because it would appear to be a mistake in any case.

It would have all the trappings of a mistake, but simply our conviction that Christ couldn't make a mistake would be that which says, well, he didn't make a mistake. It really must have happened that way, and we could do that. I mean, that's not an impossibility, but it's not necessary.

It's more realistic to suggest that Matthew or a copyist of Matthew made the mistake. I just mentioned Matthew. That wasn't one of the theories I suggested.

It is not impossible that Matthew could have made the mistake, that Matthew remembered Jesus saying Zechariah, but he didn't remember exactly that Jesus didn't



say Zechariah son of Berechiah, and maybe the son of Berechiah was sticking in Matthew's mind, and he put it in. Now, this particular argument is not as acceptable to people who have a particular view of verbal inspiration, because on the most evangelical view that I was raised with, Matthew himself was incapable of making a mistake. And so we have to say Matthew didn't make the mistake, but a copyist after Matthew's time, copying Matthew's book, entered a mistake, and that's an entirely credible suggestion, and it would vindicate both Jesus and Matthew.

We would not be required to assume that this Zechariah died in a highly improbable manner, exactly like another Zechariah did, and so I'm going to opt for the scribal error theory. Now, by the way, I'm not of the opinion that Matthew couldn't make a mistake. He never claimed that he couldn't.

The idea of verbal inspiration that I was raised with is one that the Bible doesn't teach about itself. It's an evangelical tradition, every bit as traditional as the Catholic tradition that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Catholics have such a high regard for Mary, they start making up things about her that aren't said in the Scripture.

Protestants have such a high regard for Scripture, as well we should, that we are tempted to make up things about it that the Bible doesn't say about itself, and one thing it doesn't say, Matthew never claimed he was writing under inspiration. He claimed he was writing what was true, and which he remembered. He's an apostle, he'd heard Jesus, but he wasn't necessarily an infallible man, and he doesn't claim to be.

He only claims to be telling the truth, and a person who tells the truth might make a technical mistake on a small point, and therefore it wouldn't bother me as much as it would bother some to say that Matthew did make a mistake, but it's an unnecessary thing. We don't have to go there. It's very reasonable to suggest that a scribe made the mistake, but unfortunately we don't have any of the copies of Matthew that predate that mistake.

Once a scribe has made that mistake, his copy has it, and later scribes copy it out of his copy, and so it stays in there, and all the manuscripts we have of Matthew contain that statement. If it is a mistake, then all the copies of Matthew that have survived have that mistake. You are certainly entitled to take another view, to take the view that Jesus said it as it is recorded in Matthew, and Luke simply left out that, but I think it more likely that Jesus said it the way Luke did, which doesn't involve any problem of any kind, and figure that someone who was copying Matthew made a mistake.

That's an easy, reasonable suggestion, and it involves the fewest difficulties, as near as I can tell. So, in other words, if Jesus did say that this Zechariah died, Zechariah son of Barakah died at the hands of the Jews, then we have some information about him we don't have from the book of Zechariah, and we would add that to our biographical sketch of the man, that he died at the hands of his own countrymen in the temple, but as I said,

his life and career did not seem to be characterized by angering the Jews, or having any resistance from the Jews, or they just seemed to be very eager to do what he said, and they did. And after that, he had nothing negative to say to get him into trouble with them.

So, the idea that he died a martyr is less likely than the alternatives. I hope you understand this matter of textual corruption, where a copyist can make a mistake, and then the mistake is perpetuated by later copyists who are copying the mistaken copy. This has happened, there's no question about it.

This can be demonstrated to have happened in some cases in scripture. The exact number of cases is not known, and would be disputed. A case like this would be disputed.

Some people would say, no, it's not a copyist error, Jesus said it, and it was true. Well, okay. I wouldn't go to the mat, I wouldn't go to war over that, but I would just say, I think for my money, it's more reasonable to suggest this was a mistake made by a copyist.

Alright, now the historical setting I've said something about. It was the exiles having returned from Babylon, because Cyrus had conquered Babylon and released them in 538 BC. The 50,000 of the Jews, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was the governor, and Joshua, who was the high priest.

And obviously, not to be confused with any other Joshua's in the Bible, especially the man from the book of Joshua. The book of Joshua's centuries and centuries earlier. And of course, Jesus' name was Joshua.

We shouldn't confuse this Joshua with him either, although there comes a point in the book of Zechariah where this Joshua, the high priest, becomes a type of Jesus. And I imagine you know that Jesus' name in Hebrew was Joshua. Jesus is just the Greek form of that name.

But there was a high priest at that time named Joshua, and a governor named Zerubbabel, and these were the two leaders of the nation, who not only led the people back from Babylon, but led them in the reconstruction of the temple. And the people had begun, they returned from Babylon in 538 BC, and they became discouraged. They laid the foundation successfully two years later in 536 BC.

Ezra chapter 3 records this. So after they'd been there for two years, the temple's foundation was laid, but nothing more. One thing we read in Ezra is that the foundation was much less impressive than the foundation of Solomon's temple, which had stood there 70 years earlier.

In fact, it says the older Jews who had been alive before the exodus, who had actually seen Solomon's temple, who had gone into Babylon and now had come back, when they

saw the temple, they wept. Apparently, because they were discouraged. Solomon had a mega budget to build a mega church.

His temple was like one of the seven wonders of the ancient world for architecture. Solomon's temple was magnificent. He had an unlimited budget.

The Bible says in Jerusalem in Solomon's day, silver, they didn't even keep account of how much silver they had. Gold was by the ton. The temple that Solomon had was not under any budgetary restrictions.

But this temple was made by a small group of Jews returning from exile, with a little bit of help from Osiris, who allowed them some of the government funds to help rebuild the temple. But they had a much smaller budget than Solomon, and they built a much smaller temple. And it was obvious, even when the foundation was laid, that this was going to be a much inferior temple to Solomon's.

And those who could remember Solomon's temple were sad, and they wept. Even in Zechariah, he makes reference to those who have despised the day of small things. What he means is there's some of the Jews were looking disparagingly on this temple because it was a small beginning.

This foundation was a small thing compared to Solomon's, and they tended to be discouraged. Well, they got so discouraged that in addition to that fact, but also the fact that the Samaritans who were there through the whole exile period and who didn't welcome the Jews returning to the area, persecuted them. Zerubbabel and Ezra and later Nehemiah, when they were leading the Jews there in Jerusalem after the exile, they found opposition from the locals there who were called the Samaritans.

This is one of the reasons that the Samaritans and the Jews had such animosity toward each other in the days of Jesus. It's because at this time, 500 years before Christ, the Samaritans had been very much opposed to the Jews reestablishing their nation, building Jerusalem, building the temple, and they persecuted them. They even wrote letters.

The Samaritans even wrote letters to the Persian kings saying, you've got to stop these people because they're, you know, they're rebellious people. Everyone who's ever ruled them has found them to be unmanageable, and they got the project stopped. And so the Jews had this opposition, even from the Persian government and from the local Samaritans, and the temple they were building was so small, they had a low budget, they just kind of gave up.

They threw their hands up and said, why even bother? Besides, they were having financial problems of their own. They were bringing in low yields in their fields, in their crops. The prophet Haggai, who was contemporary with Zechariah, described them as being, sowing much grain, but harvesting very little.

He said, and the money you have, you put it into bags that have holes in it, as it were. I mean, you get money, but it slips through your fingers. You don't even know where it went.

You know, you're just always low on cash. And yet Haggai indicated, in chapter 1 of Haggai, that the reason they were having their financial problems is because they weren't putting God first. They had, in fact, given up on building the temple because of these discouraging things.

And Haggai, who showed up a few months before Zechariah, and prophesied before Zechariah did, but continued prophesying while Zechariah was there, Haggai said, is this the time for you to build your paneled houses while my house, says the Lord, my house lies in ruins? In other words, you guys are building your own homes, and feathering your own nests, and making your own comfortable place to stay, and yet God's project is sitting there gathering dust. His house lay in ruins. And so this is the kind of rebuke that Haggai brought to people, and they listened to him.

And Zechariah also, and Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to start up the project again, which had actually lain dormant for 16 years, after they laid the foundation in 536 BC, and they gave up on it for 16 years. And it was after that in the year 520 BC, that these two prophets showed up and started prophesying. And they started prophesying and said, you need to get back on the job here.

God is not happy. You're experiencing crop failures because God is wasting your crops. He's not letting you have success.

And so after 16 years of laying dormant, the project was resumed under the encouragement of both Zechariah and Haggai. And so Zechariah's prophecies are, in the first part of the book at least, are all about that. Encouraging them in the project, but not just saying, hey, go get it, blah, blah, blah.

But basically he's giving them some revelation about what God is doing among them, what he's going to do. And actually looks forward to the Messianic Age, has some stuff about the Messiah in there. But at least the first six chapters are visions that Zechariah had that are their messages to encourage Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the other exiles to finish the temple.

Haggai had begun to prophesy on August 29th of 520 BC. He preached for only four months, Haggai did. But while he was preaching, Zechariah began to preach in November, two months into Haggai's ministry.

And so in November of 520 BC, according to Zechariah 1.1, Zechariah began to preach. He preached for at least two years. So he was still preaching for two years pretty much after Haggai retired.

And we don't know how much after that, because the last dates we have in Zechariah were two years after the beginning of his ministry. But the latter chapters, the last six chapters of Zechariah appear to be from a later period. There are no dates in them, and we don't know exactly what period they were from, but they appear to be later.

And so Zechariah might have had a ministry that extended years on into the future, but not all of his ministry was recorded. After all, when you think about it, even Isaiah, which is a pretty big book, represents 50 years of ministry. You know, on balance, that's only like about a page and a half per year of preaching that's recorded.

So it's obviously, these prophets did a lot more preaching than is recorded. And what is recorded is recorded for whatever reasons God wanted it to be. And so we're not sure exactly how long Zechariah proceeded.

Definitely proceeded longer than Haggai, and maybe much longer for all we know. We find that the people, for a change, obeyed their prophets, these two prophets, and they finished the construction of the temple in March of the year 15, excuse me, 515 B.C. This, according to Ezra 6.15 tells us that, that they finished, it was March of 515. So they got it done in a little less than six years, something like that.

And so that is really Zechariah's claim to fame, and Haggai's, they were the successful prophets. They were the prophets who told the people what God wanted them to do, and the people actually did it. Unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, most of the other prophets, Elijah, Elisha, very few of these prophets were ever listened to and heeded, but these ones were.

Not necessarily because these were better prophets, I'm sure they were not, but because the people were in a better place after the exile. They were chastened, humbled, and much less willing to immediately go back into such a discipline as they'd just encountered over the previous 70 years. So we have a rather upbeat prophetic book for a change.

Not so much rebukes, not so much disobedience to the people, or persecution of the prophet. This book is heavily alluded to as I mentioned earlier in the New Testament, and no one can really agree on exactly how many times, because an allusion in the New Testament might be only apparently an allusion, but the book is very much represented in the New Testament. There's something like 54 different passages in Zechariah, or different verses in Zechariah that are quoted or alluded to in the New Testament.

And some of them more than once. There's about 67 times in the New Testament that some passage from Zechariah is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament. Which obviously is on average about 3 times per New Testament book.

Now they're not really distributed quite that evenly, but still if you would stretch out 67

quotations throughout the New Testament, it's going to be almost 3 times per book on average. So you can see that Zechariah, though a short and late prophet, contributed significantly to our knowledge of Christ and Christianity, because usually when the New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament, they were doing so to show this was talking about not this, but Jesus is done. And so Zechariah does talk about Jesus, and the New Testament writers saw that quite plainly and frequently.

Now, let me talk to you briefly about the contents of the book before we get into the actual first chapter. We could divide the book naturally enough into 4 very unequal bits, based on their style or type of material. The first 6 chapters, that is up through half of chapter 6. Up through chapter 6, verse 8. Chapters 1 through 5, and the first half of 6. These are occupied with visions, possibly dreams, that Zechariah had.

I say possibly dreams, they happened at night. It's not entirely clear if he had them as dreams, or if he happened to be awake at night seeing visions. A dream and a vision are very similar to each other.

The main difference that I can tell is that a vision is had when a person is awake, and a dream when they're asleep. Otherwise, their characteristics are very similar. Judging from, for example, Joseph's interpretation of his dreams and of Pharaoh's dreams, or Daniel's interpretations of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams or his own dreams, they seem to be similar to visions.

In fact, there seems to be no difference between a dream and a vision, except whether the guy's awake when he's seeing it or not. There is one point in chapter 4, in the midst of this section. And these all happen in one night.

But it says in chapter 4, verse 1, Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. Now some think this would mean that he was dreaming, he was asleep. But on the other hand, he doesn't say he woke me from my sleep.

He says he woke me the way a man would be awakened from sleep. Which may suggest he's saying, I wasn't asleep, but I was in a trance-like state, or something not quite like natural sleep. But I was awakened at that moment from it, as if a man had woken me from sleep.

So I think we're probably to understand that these visions he had were not had as dreams. They did happen at night. And he was in some kind of a state, analogous to sleep, from which he could be awakened, but he didn't commit himself to being asleep.

Maybe he wasn't even sure himself. I could understand that, the nature of the situation. He had all of these visions in one night.

Depending on how you count them up, some people have thought there's as many as

ten visions. I don't see that many in there. I see two of them in chapter 1. I see one of them in chapter 2. That makes three.

Chapter 3 has another one. And that'd be four. Chapter 4 has another one.

That'd be five of them. The flying scroll in chapter 5 would be the sixth one. And in the same chapter, there's a woman in a basket.

That'd be a seventh one. And then you've got four chariots in chapter 6. That's an eighth one. So I would enumerate these as eight.

Some people have broken them into ten. I think the reason for that is in a couple of cases, in addition to the vision, there's like an oracle given that's related to the vision. It's like he sees something.

He describes what he sees. And then there's this prophecy that's given in just oracular verse. And maybe some people are calling those separate visions, in which case you could make it as many as ten.

But I would be inclined to say there were eight visions in one night. So he didn't get much actual sleep in all likelihood that night. And in fact, if you had dreams with these kinds of contents, you might wonder whether you had eaten something the night before that you want to avoid in the future.

Because these were very peculiar, disturbing, strange dreams. Not disturbing in the sense that they're scary. These were actually pretty positive in their nature.

But weird. I mean, similar to Revelation type imagery or Daniel type imagery. So we've got these, let's say eight visions in the first five and a half chapters.

That's the first type of material we encounter. The second type is an acted parable. Now we see a lot of these in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel acts out lots of his prophecies as sort of a parable done dramatically. We have one, at least one, in this book. And that is in chapter 6, verses 9 through 15.

And this is one where the prophet actually is told to take a crown of gold and place it on the head of Joshua, the high priest. Now a crown usually is worn by a king. And in Israel, the priest could not be a king.

Because the king had to be of the line of David, the tribe of Judah. The priest had to be of the line of Aaron, the tribe of Levi. So the king and priest could never be the same person.

They had to be of different tribes. But the crowning of Joshua, high priest with a kingly crown is followed by an oracle about Jesus. And the evident meaning is that Jesus is

going to be both king and priest.

Unlike any king of the Old Testament or any priest of the Old Testament who could not hold both offices, Jesus would uniquely hold both offices of king and priest. We'll talk about that more when we come to it. But this was acted out as a parable by setting a crown, a kingly crown, on the head of the priest.

And this then prophecy was given along with it. So that's the second kind of material in active prophecy. Now, Isaiah and Jeremiah and Hosea and Ezekiel, they all did active prophecies.

You might remember that Isaiah had to walk around naked for three years in order to depict how the Egyptians were going to captivity naked into Assyria. I believe it was the Assyrian captivity of Egypt that was there predicted. Jeremiah acted out a prophecy or two.

He hid a girdle up by the river and it got rotten and he had to prophesy about it. He put a yoke over his neck to depict bondage and said that Israel would come under the yoke of Babylon. So prophets sometimes had to be actors as well.

And Ezekiel had a whole bunch of them. We won't even go to his. He had more than anybody.

But Zechariah has at least this one. I say at least one because there could be another one in chapter 11, but it's not at all clear that the one in chapter 11 is an active parable. This is the one where he plays a shepherd.

He has two staves. He breaks them at different points, each with its own significance. This could be seen as an active parable.

I'm going to see it a little differently though than that. I think that that is something more like happened in a vision or a dream. I think the enactment of it requires too much of participation on the part of other parties for it to have actually been acted out.

I think it was probably done in a vision, but that's not too important. The main importance is what it means, of course. But we have the eight visions and we have an active parable.

Okay, that gets us through chapter 6. Now chapter 7 and 8 are four oracles, four prophecies, and they're all about the same thing. At the beginning of chapter 7, there are some exiles who still lived in Babylon and who had not returned to live in Jerusalem. But they came to Jerusalem to bring some gifts from the unreturned Jews.

The Jews who stayed in Babylon were expected to send some money back to help the temple project and Jerusalem stuff. And these men delivered that money. And in addition



to that, they had some questions and they approached the priests and the prophets.

Now Zechariah was both a priest and a prophet. So he is definitely in this conference. And they asked, should we still fast as we've been doing the past 70 years, that is during the exile.

They've been fasting. They'd actually been fasting four times a year. They fasted once on the fourth month of the year, once on the fifth month of the year, once in the seventh month, and once in the tenth month.

Now each of these dates that they fasted were like the anniversaries of some tragedy related to the fall of Jerusalem. The city had been besieged as a result of the murder of the Babylonian appointed governor of Jerusalem named Gedaliah. Gedaliah was appointed by the Babylonians to rule Jerusalem after he took away the last king into captivity, Jeconiah, and even Zedekiah.

And so Gedaliah was now the governor of Jerusalem that the Babylonians had left in charge. And some really wicked men killed Gedaliah. And that's what brought the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar down the city to destroy it and burn the temple and everything.

So Gedaliah's assassination took place in the seventh month of the year that it happened in. And so the Jews fasted on a certain day to commemorate this because it was the beginning of the end for Jerusalem. Now in the tenth month of the same year the siege of Jerusalem began.

After Gedaliah was killed, Babylon brought down troops and besieged the city of Jerusalem, a siege from which Jerusalem never recovered. Though it wasn't destroyed immediately, the siege lasted for a while, but nonetheless the siege began in the tenth month. And so they had a date in the tenth month that they fasted to mourn that.

And then six months later, after the siege had begun in the fourth month, Babylon breached the walls of Jerusalem. Once the walls were breached, the Babylonians came pouring in like a flood and that was the end of the city really. And so the city was breached in the fourth month.

And then the next month after that, the temple was burned down. So the fourth and fifth months were the months when the city was breached and the temple was burned down. Now these four months, the seventh month, the tenth month, the fourth and the fifth of the next year, were all great tragedies that the Jews experienced.

Sort of like 9-11 for us. You know, we don't have a holiday to commemorate it, but there are memorial you know, 9-11 has been memorialized most years since then. Now if we were like the Jews, we'd be fasting and mourning on that day because it represents a day of ignominious defeat for our country.

And so the Jews for 70 years in Babylon had been fasting those four times a week. I mean, excuse me, four times a year. And now the siege was over.

Now Jerusalem is being rebuilt, repopulated. The temple is being rebuilt again. The question was, should we still mourn over these things? After all, the things we're mourning about are no longer relevant.

The temple is back. Why should we mourn the burning of the temple? Well, maybe we should because it was still a great tragedy, but maybe now it's back. We don't need to.

And so the Jews in Babylon were saying, do we still have to fast on these four days like this? And so they came to the priests and the prophets in Jerusalem to ask them, what does God want us to do about these fasts? And that's the question. The answer comes from Zechariah in four short oracles, and they occupy chapters 7 and 8. Basically, these oracles each give a different, a slightly different answer, part of the answer. And the main question God says, why were you fasting in the first place? I didn't tell you to do it.

You're just fasting because you're feeling sorry for yourselves. This was a righteous judgment that I brought on you and you're mourning about it. Why should I want you to mourn over it? This was a righteous thing that happened to you.

Now get over it and stop doing the things that made this happen, really. And by the end of the chapter 8, he's saying God's going to turn things all around. The days of fasting are returning to days of feasting and celebration.

And actually, I believe the latter part of chapter 8 looks forward to the Messianic age. And so chapter 7 and 8 are in the context of this question being asked and the answer that Zechariah gives in four parts. So that is the third type of material.

We've got the eight visions and we've got the active parable that occupy the first six chapters. We've got these oracles, these four oracles given to answer this fasting question in chapter 7 and 8. Now when we come to chapter 8, that is the end of chapter 8, we come to a major dividing point in Zechariah. There's still one more section and it is a majorly different section than the earlier part.

Chapters 9 through 14 are so different from the earlier eight chapters that it's not uncommon for scholars to question whether they were written by the same man because the last six chapters, chapters 9 through 14, do not contain the name of Zechariah. The earlier chapters he gives his name as the one who's prophesied. His name appears quite a bit in the earlier eight chapters because he's he just says that he was the one who gave these prophecies.

Chapters 9 through 14 make no reference to Zechariah. Whoever wrote them doesn't claim to be him. And there's some other differences because the first section is largely about the rebuilding of the temple.

The second section, chapters 9 through 14, doesn't have a word about the building of the temple. It would appear that the latter section was written or prophesied after the temple had been rebuilt and there's no more need to talk about it, but it talks about other things beyond. And so again, the subject matter is very different.

And another thing, in addition to not mentioning Zechariah by name in these latter chapters, these latter chapters have no dates, whereas all the earlier chapters had dates. On this day of this month of this year, these men came and I had this vision on this day of this month of this year. And so the first eight chapters is full of dated prophecies.

The last six chapters don't have any dates. There's no indication of when they were prophesied. Therefore, it would not be irreverent or disrespectful to the scriptures if one were to take the position that the last six chapters were not written by Zechariah.

They don't claim to have been. They don't claim to have been written anywhere near his lifetime necessarily. But of course, the book has come down to us as a single book and therefore the indication is that he wrote the whole book, including those chapters.

It is my opinion that he did write all the book. Scholars are always looking for ways to divide up books of the Bible into multiple authors and so forth and I'm not sure why. I've sometimes speculated it's because they want to get a PhD and to get a PhD, you have to write a dissertation on something no one else has thought of before or no one else has written on before.

It must be getting hard at this late stage to think of anything that hasn't already been written on by some doctoral candidate. But when it comes to theology and biblical studies, if someone's an Old Testament scholar and they're trying to think of a dissertation, you know, and they think, well, I can't write about anything anyone else has written before. I know, I'll say Isaiah had three authors.

I know, I'll say that the Pentateuch has four traditions interwoven. I know, I'll say there are two authors of Zechariah. And then they can argue it, but it doesn't make it true.

To my mind, this is what motivates scholars sometimes, just the desire to come up with something and distinguish themselves for some insight that no one has had before. And somewhere along the line, someone says, you know, it looks like those last six chapters of Zechariah were written by maybe someone else. And it is a workable thesis since, you know, they don't claim to be written by him.

They don't have the dates that would peg them in his time frame. And the subject matter is entirely different. It seems like the setting is different.

The first eight chapters is while the temple is being rebuilt. The last ones, apparently not. So the thesis is not, you know, as it were, sacrilegious, but I just think it's unnecessary.

The fact is that although these differences exist between these two major sections of Zechariah, the vocabulary and the writing style is the same all the way through. It has the evidence of being one author. And of course, it has come down from antiquity only as a single work.

There's never been a version of the Old Testament that came down, copied out as two different books, and then someone put them together into one. It could have had those origins, but there's no reason to believe so. And to my mind, it just makes sense to take it as it is.

If there was some other prophet who wrote chapters 9 through 14, we will never know. And there's no reason for us to be concerned. The fact that the New Testament is cited so extensively from these last six chapters, because it's in those more than the earlier eight that we have the testimony about Christ and about New Testament things that the New Testament writers quote from those chapters.

It's obvious the New Testament writers at least accepted them as inspired, the work of an inspired prophet. They didn't always say which prophet they had in mind that said these things, but Zechariah is as good a guess as any, especially since they're attached to his book and I think they probably are his work. Like I said, the style and the vocabulary of both sections is essentially the same.

And that's important because prophets often have very distinctive vocabularies, different from each other. I believe that Zechariah, I think the evidence is that he wrote the latter section too, but apparently he wrote it after his first mission was accomplished. After the temple was complete, there's no reason to talk about that anymore.

The reason for giving dates in the early section may well have simply been that he wanted to point out what the date was when the prophecy gave so they could, it could be compared with the dates of the actions of building the temple and show that he prophesied at this point before they did that and so forth. I mean, dating a prophecy is helpful when you want to make it very clear that the prophecy was made before the event. But the events of chapters 9 through 14 are so far off beyond Zechariah's own time.

There'd be no need to date them to prove that he wrote them beforehand. If the book of Zechariah was a single book, everyone knew that he wrote them and their fulfillment is so far beyond his lifetime that it wouldn't really be an issue. No one could reasonably say, oh, these were written after the event.

So he wouldn't have to give dates and stuff. He wouldn't have the same purpose for doing so. So, I mean, there are explanations of why the same author could have written this second section and had these differences from the first.

The main thing is to recognize that when you come past chapter 8, you're coming to another section that is significantly different and, to my mind, more interesting and, to my mind, more important because of its many references to Christ and the New Testament realities. I would point out that this latter section, chapters 9 through 14, itself divides into two equal parts. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 is one section and chapters 12, 13, and 14 is another.

So, 9 through 11 and 12 through 14 are separate oracles. We know that because they both begin with the same phrase. In chapter 9, verse 1, which begins the first of these, says, the burden of the word of the Lord.

Now, the word burden is sometimes translated differently in different translations. Some say the oracle of the word of the Lord or something like that, but the burden is a good translation. The burden of the word of the Lord.

Now, this is a very unusual phrase. The burden of the Lord is found elsewhere in the word of the Lord, but the burden of the word of the Lord is not found anywhere else in the Bible except two other places. One of them is in Zechariah 12.1, which begins the other section.

12.1 begins the burden of the word of the Lord. Same phrase. And the only other place in the Bible that you find that is the opening verse of Malachi, who is also a post-exilic prophet.

Malachi 1.1 says the burden of the word of the Lord. These are the only three places in the Bible that use that strange expression, the burden of the word of the Lord. And chapter 9 of Zechariah and chapter 12 both begin that phrase as if they're introducing a new burden or oracle or prophecy.

And indeed they are, because I believe that chapters 9 through 11 give us a consecutive prophecy and actually bring us up to the period of the time of Christ and even in the last verse of chapter 11, the destruction of Jerusalem or the giving over of the Jews to the Romans after they've crucified Christ. That's what I believe. I believe that chapter 9 opens in the time of Alexander the Great when he's conquering the formerly Persian Empire.

The Persian Empire was the contemporaneous world empire in Zechariah's day, but that empire after a couple of hundred years and almost that long after Zechariah's time fell to Alexander the Great and the Grecian Empire replaced it. And I believe that chapter 9 looks beyond the time of Zechariah to the time of Alexander the Great, which was followed by the Maccabean Wars. Not recorded in our scriptures, but extremely significant time in Israel's history.

The festival Hanukkah that they still celebrate is a celebration of the Maccabean

victories. We'll say more about that later. But after the Maccabean Wars, it comes to the time of Christ and the rejection of Christ in chapter 11 for 30 pieces of silver.

And at the very end of chapter 11, God says, okay, you rejected your true shepherd. I'm going to give you over to a harsh shepherd who's going to beat you up real bad. And I think he's referring to the Romans because the Jews rejected Christ and they said we have no king but Caesar.

God said, okay, you want Caesar, your king? He's not going to be a very good shepherd. He's going to take over and conquer you. And so that burden of the word of the Lord, chapters 9 through 11, goes from the time of Alexander from the fall of the Persian Empire to the time of the Romans conquering Jerusalem.

That's what I believe. Now when you come to chapters 12 through 14, I believe that this picks up the story and runs parallel somewhat to the other three chapters. It picks up a little later.

I think it picks it up, if I'm not mistaken, at the Maccabean period. And it also mentions Christ in chapter 13 where we have the famous statement, strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. Jesus said to his disciples on the night he was betrayed, all of you will abandon me tonight as it is written, strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

So clearly chapter 13 is about Christ's crucifixion. And then chapter 14, in my humble opinion, begins with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. That's where chapter 11 ended.

Chapter 14, the last chapter of Zechariah, begins with the destruction of Jerusalem and I believe, and this is very much a minority opinion, but I'll prove myself correct by appeal to scripture. I believe the rest of chapter 14, after it's finished, it's talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, is about the church age in which we now live. The age subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem and continuing on into our own time.

Now why would I say a thing like that? Especially since it's quite different than what most people think, because the New Testament writers compel me. That's the point. Whenever I'm trying to understand the Old Testament, I want to find out how Paul understood it, how Jesus understood it, how Peter quotes it, how the apostles understood it.

And that is what informs us. And as I mentioned, the New Testament writers quote or allude to this section of Zechariah a great deal. And whenever they do, you know what they refer to? What I'm talking about.

Now the more popular view, you may be aware, is that especially chapters 12 through 14, the last three chapters, are about Armageddon and the Tribulation and the Second

Coming of Christ and the Millennium. Obviously a very different view than that which I just suggested. On the popular eschatological view, chapters 12 through 14 are some of the favorite passages of dispensationalists talking about the end times.

It's there, for example, in chapter 14, that they derive the idea that Jesus will set foot on the Mount of Olives and split it in two. Almost everyone has heard that when Jesus returns, he'll set foot on the Mount of Olives and the Mount of Olives is split in two. That comes from Zechariah 14.

It comes from a major misunderstanding of Zechariah 14 which I think can be demonstrated very clearly when we get to it. But the point is, I'm seeing these chapters differently than the popular way, and this is something that will require some justification on my part. I never want to take an unusual view and just leave you there saying, hey, just believe me, just trust me on that.

I don't want you to trust me. I want you to search it out. Search the scriptures, see if these things are so.

So we'll be doing that together and you can do so on your own also, subsequently, but we've run out of time for tonight. So with this introduction, we will close with the one other statement I just want to make clear. And we'll make this again tomorrow night when we come back to it.

And that is that the visions in Zechariah are bizarre. They're really strange. It's not just straightforward, predictive, you know, stuff.

It's weird visions similar to Revelation's visions. And it's apocalyptic in style. And I believe that the reason that God chose this kind of bizarre way to depict things, and it really is bizarre in most cases, is that they're more memorable that way.

Really things that are out of the norm stick in your mind more. You don't notice all the traffic that goes by on the freeway. When you see a car laying on its roof at the side of the road, you don't forget that easily.

You know, you see a car that's rolled over and it's in flames. That's out of the norm and it's memorable. And I think a lot of times weird visions and weird imagery is used simply to stick in the mind because it's hard to get it out of your mind once you've seen it or thought of it.

And so we see that Zechariah does this. The same thing with those weird acted prophecies that Ezekiel did. The things he did were bizarre.

In fact, some critics think that Ezekiel is mentally ill. There's actually commentators that suggest this. But I believe that God just happened to do really weird stuff because it arrests the attention.

You know, if you're just doing kind of normal stuff, people may not even notice you're there. You do really weird stuff, it gets everybody's attention. And then they want to know what this is about.

And of course, weird stuff is memorable and attention getting. And that's, I think, one of the reasons visions are going to be as weird as they are. We'll have something to say tomorrow night about how to approach these visions as well as starting to go through them and talk about their contents.

All right. And it's going to be fun, really. Zechariah is a fun book once you are no longer afraid of it.

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