

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 17, Chapter 9

Zechariah chapter 9 makes a significant turn in the nature and style of what is being prophesied. So much so that mainstream scholarship no longer accepts that Zechariah is still the one doing the prophesying.

The Book of Zechariah as it has been handed down seems to be two separate projects: chapters 1 – 8, and then chapters 9 – 14. The first 8 chapters are clearly connected to, and coordinated with, the Book of Haggai. Not so with chapters 9 – 14. Therefore, in more modern terminology, Zechariah is usually spoken of as First Zechariah and Second Zechariah. So, for now, I'll speak using that terminology although I'm not convinced about the different authorship.

When we back away and look at Haggai and First Zechariah together as a unit, clearly we see how the Babylonian Exile was the backdrop and the experience that shaped Jewish life when they returned to their former homeland. They returned to a place controlled by Persia and populated with mixed ethnicities and therefore mixed faiths and often opposing religious observances. They returned to a non-operational Temple and Priesthood. They came home with the beginnings of a new and alternate religious system that later came to be called the Synagogue; something that was formed out of necessity up in Babylon in order to keep the Jewish culture and faith alive. That meant that even after the Temple and Priesthood once again became functional, they had to decide how the Synagogue and its lay leadership might be incorporated into their faith system... or would it be jettisoned altogether.

A large population of Jewish people had left Judah 70 years earlier; a tiny fraction of the exiled Jewish population returned. An entire new economy had to be re-established. They had to learn how to operate under a political system that had no Jewish monarch. Rather, they would operate under a Jewish governor, with limited authority, who was appointed by the Persian King. The Jewish governor's authority was watered down even further because the High Priest office (also chosen by the Persian King) was now given the additional duties of judging the civil matters of the people. These changes were drastic,

traumatic, and long lasting, only to be further altered about 200 years later when Alexander the Great conquered the Middle East and changed the order of the known world.

It is no coincidence that even before Alexander the Great, we see the declining proliferation and influence of Jewish Prophets and therefore, to the point that we find no more books of prophecy written or recorded after that time, and therefore nothing more beyond Malachi in our Bibles, until perhaps we get to John and the Book of Revelation in the late 1st century A.D. This is why after the Prophet Malachi, and then some years later after Ezra and Nehemiah, there is said to be the "Silent Period" of 400 years between the last book of the Old Testament, and the first book of the New.

It may seem insignificant to us, but it could not have been more important to the Jewish people of Yehud, that the governor was of David's dynasty. Zerubbabel was just that. However, after him the only member of David's dynasty to operate in a high government position was **Shelomith**. Once she was no longer in government, the presence of members of David's dynasty disappeared within government. This, of itself, created some deterioration of Jewish society in Yehud, and this is the period of time where Second Zechariah picks up.

I won't get deep into the larger geopolitical picture of the region that would have major effects on the Jewish people of Yehud, and therefore adds to the backdrop of chapters 9 – 14, but I do need to at least mention it. On the turn from the 6th to the 5th century B.C., what had been a fairly stable time in the region, with their many provinces well managed and controlled by Persia, things became volatile. A series of wars began between Greece and Persia. It more or less began with rebellions against Persia in the Greek cities of Cyprus and Ionia. Athens soon joined them. Although Persia was able to hold onto the bulk of its territories throughout the 5th century, the fuse of revolt throughout their empire had been lit.

As the instability of the Persian Empire increased, both Babylon and Egypt saw this as an opportune moment to try to regain their own independence. It was probably the wars Persia fought with Egypt and Babylon that had the most

profound effect on the political situation in Yehud. Thus, in Second Zechariah, we don't even see Persia mentioned by name. Even so, the enormous unrest and instability of that era is reflected in the writings of Second Zechariah with its focus turning, now, to apocalyptic End Times events. However, how it is that they envisioned when and what the End Times would look like is far different from our own speculations in the 21st century.

It appears that the events separating chapters 8 and 9 (First Zechariah from Second) are anywhere from a couple of decades to as much as perhaps 50 years apart. Therefore, the meaning and impact upon the Jews of the Babylonian Exile, the destruction of the Temple, and then the return of some Jews to their occupied and shattered homeland (that form the core of the first 8 chapters of Zechariah), are put to rest and now are in the rearview mirror of chapters 9 – 14. More immediate, and future, matters are what concerns the prophet.

We can pretty well pinpoint on a calendar the various events spoken of in First Zechariah, because dates are given to us, or if not directly given they can be pretty easily extrapolated. But, Second Zechariah has no chronological details. Haggai and First Zechariah were probably written over a very short time span; maybe as few as 3 or 4 years. Second Zechariah was written over a much larger time span, and that has led to the speculation that not only was Second Zechariah not written by Zechariah, it was written by more than one person. Many Bible scholars think it may well be a collection of prophecies from a few prophets (I have grave doubts about that). But, I can accept the possibility that another Prophet writing under the name of Zechariah might have penned chapters 9 – 14. A writer writing under the name of a revered person was common in that era, and later. It was not an attempt to deceive; it was simply how things were done. Even today, we have ghost writers who don't use their own names, but rather that of a more famous person (with that famous person's permission, of course).

So, why would someone decide to write under the name of Zechariah, intending to imply that this was part of Zechariah's original work? No doubt, there was not just one reason. It can only be speculation, but I feel confident in saying that one likely reason was because even after the Temple being

rebuilt and put back into operation, and the Jews having had some time to reinvigorate their fields and the local economy, things hadn't gone as well as expected. The economic prosperity that they believed would happen, didn't. And, neither did the hope that once Jerusalem was restored and the Temple rebuilt that many more Jews would come back to join their brothers. But, I also think one other thing: God has this way of putting within us an instinct, a sense, that something was changing. We might not be able to put our finger on it, but we can feel it. In this case, I believe it was an inner sense that the prophetic era was winding down (not that they had any notion of the why of it).

It was around that time that we also see the era of oral transmission of the ancient traditions that handed down the Words of God to each succeeding generation being exchanged for the written word. That is, what had been only oral was now written down. We must be aware that long before most of the Old Testament was written down, all the stories, and genealogies, and historical happenings, and so on were strictly mouth to ear. So, of course, each time it was told the words were not precisely identical. Not that they told a different story, but nonetheless, the same story was told differently. Changing to the written form required a literary structure and some deep decisions about what to include and what not to. Which traditions, and in what order, were to be transferred from speech to writing? We don't really know precisely how or when that happened nor who decided, nor what the criteria was. Some think it occurred before the Babylonian Exile; others think it happened up in Babylon during the 70 years of exile, and still others think it was perhaps not long after their return.

The oldest extant Book of Zechariah we have found thus far contains all (or most) of what we call chapters 1-14 and it is not divided into a First and Second Zechariah. The oldest was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint. But, upon the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (written around 100 B.C.), we found Zechariah in it as well, entirely in Hebrew. Both have all the chapters of Zechariah. And, around 900 A.D. or so when the Masoretic version of the Hebrew Bible was created, it also had all the chapters of Zechariah as a single unit. So, as far back as we can currently reach, it was accepted that even if more than one hand was at work in creating Zechariah, it

was nonetheless considered legitimate and inspired of God. And, that is how I look at it and ask you to look at it that way as well.

One of the more interesting features about Second Zechariah is what academics call its intertextuality. That's a big word that simply means that Second Zechariah drew upon already existing biblical documents... mostly other Prophets... probably more than any other book in the Bible. The author (or authors) draws especially from the works of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. And, interestingly, when we look in the Synoptic Gospel accounts of the New Testament, it appears that more quotes from Christ can be attributed to Second Zechariah than to any other Old Testament book. So, Second Zachariah had a profound effect on what Yeshua and people in His era thought about the End Times. And, unknown to most Christians, it also has the most effect on what Christians think about the End Times.

And finally, this: I told you that the reality and effect of the Babylon Exile upon the Jewish mindset, and then their return to the Jewish homeland, was the background and core of the meaning of chapters 1 -8. And, that upon opening chapter 9, that background was all in the rearview mirror and was no longer the subject. So, what was out there beyond the windshield in chapters 9 – 14? It was the future of the House of Ephraim. The 10 lost tribes.

Because of my use of the term "Ephraim" where most Bibles will say "Israel" as referring to the post-civil war division of Israel into two separate kingdoms (the other kingdom being Judah), some explanation is needed. First, in nearly every instance the writings of our English Bibles that speak of this as the Kingdom of Israel (the northern of the two kingdoms), in fact that is NOT what the original Hebrew says. Rather it says "The Kingdom of Ephraim". Secondly, this is because 10 of the 12 Israelite tribes formed that kingdom, and the tribe of Ephraim was easily the most dominant. Therefore, their name was what the kingdom was known by.... and NOT Israel. So, when Second Zechariah speaks about the House of Ephraim, it indeed is speaking about that northern kingdom of 10 tribes... better known in later times as the 10 Lost Tribes of Israel... and it does **not** include Judah, which was the subject of chapters 1 – 8.

So, to be clear: First Zechariah dealt with the Judeans and the former Kingdom of Judah. Second Zechariah deals with the 10 tribes of the former Kingdom of Israel... or better, Kingdom of Ephraim.

Let's read Zechariah chapter 9.

READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 9 all

I've often said that Zechariah is without doubt the most challenging and difficult book I have ever undertaken to teach. The vocabulary and style and its mix of prose and poetry and symbolism are daunting and that is why there is such a wide variation of interpretations in the different Bible versions.

The opening verse immediately sounds pretty strange and cryptic to the modern ear, and it has flummoxed translators for centuries, causing many to think that perhaps the original Hebrew is corrupted. That conclusion has been arrived at very regularly by translators when they have no good answer to the meaning of a passage... but this conclusion isn't necessary. Within the last several years, some language scholars have taken a different approach and realize that there is nothing corrupted about the vast bulk of the Hebrew words of these ancient copies of Scripture (although a small amount is). Rather, it must begin by admitting that it ought to be more about attempting to discover what those strange terms and descriptions seemed to have meant to the ancient people of that era... because for certain the Prophet knew what he was saying, and the people who heard him understood it as well. We all, as do Bible translators, tend to read those words and take them as though they were spoken in modern times, in the Western world, and then assume the meaning must always be more or less the same now as then. And, while that is true much of the time, it is now acknowledged that what the ancients meant by those terms and phrases held a different meaning with many of them being nothing more than common idioms and expressions of the day... idioms that arose and then died out in time... so, they were idioms and expressions that we don't quite get. Further, some Hebrew words that have been translated to other languages have been nothing more than best guesses. The good news is, some of these are finally beginning to be understood through some great research and the incorporation of what those

words meant in cognate languages (that is, ancient languages similar to Hebrew). So, we're going to tear this first verse and a few others down and see if we can figure out what it is that is being communicated. Be patient as we do and I think you'll be rewarded.

We've heard the word "oracle" in our study of Zechariah quite a number of times, and for good reason. Here, for example, it is the opening word of chapter 9. However, in Hebrew the word is *massa* and it literally means to lift up or to carry. However, when used in prophetic literature, it more means "**that** which is lifted up", which is an expression that usually means something that is holy to, or given from, God. This unique meaning that the people of that time well understood made it clear to the Prophet's audience that the words that follow are Yehoveh's command, not the Prophet's; he is merely passing it along. And so, the common word we employ in English to get this idea across tends to be oracle or pronouncement, which correctly gets the correct idea across at least to English speakers.

Therefore, even though the additional words "the word of Yehoveh" are literally there, they are sort of redundant, but are used this way by the Hebrew author for the purpose of emphasis. By definition an oracle comes from God, and the Hebrew God is Yehoveh. The wording, then highlights that no other god was involved.

The next part of verse 1 speaks of *Hadrach*. Being a geographical term, it is referring to a district in Syria. While it can't be confirmed, many archaeologists believe that Hadrach is a city that sits on the Orontes River and today is represented by the settlement of Umm-esh-Shershuh. We know this place was a real city, as we also find mention of it in a stele that was meant to celebrate the victory of the Assyrian King Sargon II in 720 B.C. What is the important point, however, for prophetic purposes is that it lies well beyond the northernmost reach of the kingdom that David and then Solomon ruled over. Their kingdom represents the greatest extant of Israel's territory ever achieved in history. So Hadrach is legitimately foreign soil, meaning they ought to be worshipping foreign gods and no doubt were. However, for whatever reason, they are envisioned in the future as accepting Yehoveh as their God.

The next geographical place mentioned is Damascus; yes, that Damascus. This large Aramean city that still exists to this day, is located on the edge of the Syrian desert and is a little closer to Israel than Hadrach. As used here it also means Damascus in the sense of being the region that surrounds the city. Like Hadrach, even though Damascus is outside of the borders of the greatest extent of land that the Kingdom of Israel ever occupied... and by ancient thinking outside of the area of influence of Israel's God... still these foreign places accept the God of Israel as their God. Therefore, the oracle of God is said to be the resting places of Hadrach and Damascus; that is, these two non-Israelite cities that nonetheless for whatever reason have declared loyalty to Yehoveh and accept His Word.

The phrases "the resting place" and "the eye of the people" are rather strange and difficult to understand what this meant to folks in the 6th century B.C., yet they are the key to interpreting this verse. The resting place seems to essentially mean where God's presence exists or is accepted (in this case, it points towards God's word, and therefore God, being accepted at those 2 places). But what is "the eye of the people"? Taking it fully literally it is even more strange as it says "the eye of the man". Here's what seems to be happening: the Hebrew **adam** means man (singular), but it is regularly used in the Bible as a plural... or more correctly as a collective term. We even use "man" in English that same way; for instance, we like to speak of the "history of man" or "the age of man" and so on. We certainly don't mean it as about the history of one person but rather as a collective of people.. the whole group of humans... so "eye of the people" is the proper sense of it for our Western minds. As awkward a phrase as it is, what it is speaking of in this instance is the foreign inhabitants of Hadrach and Damascus who have leaned-into making the Israelite God Yehoveh, their God. But, this is not something that had already happened or was happening in Zechariah's day.

In the end, what this strange sounding word salad is expressing is something that happens in a prophetic future. And it is explaining that at some point well beyond Zechariah's day, even though these places were traditional gentile enemies of Israel and God, they are representative of all former enemies of Israel and God turning themselves towards Israel and towards Yehoveh. And,

this of course is something that modern Believers have the greatest hope for in the End Times, and here that thought is expressed 2500 years ago.

The final words of the 1st verse are: "as are those of the tribes of Israel". What this shows us is yet again the division of humanity into two groups: Israel, and everybody else. Thus, the fullest scope of what Hadrach and Damascus represent are the entire gentile part of the human race. And, now, at the end of the verse, we find that other part of the human race, the tribes of Israel. So, the terms Israel and people are opposed to one another. And, yet, in the End Times there will come a moment when both will accept Yehoveh and His Word. Or as Kiel and Delitzsch put it: "His (God's) providence stretches over the heathen world as well as over Israel".

Now, by no means does this prophecy indicate that God will save Hadrach, Damascus or Israel from destruction. At different points in history, and leading up to the final resolution of the War of Armageddon, all these places will be horribly damaged and many people killed. But, there will be survivors and it is those survivors that are being spoken about as turning to God from whatever they worshipped before. Some of this prophecy will be fulfilled when Alexander the Great bulldozes his way across Asia and the Middle East, and the destructive wake left behind him is enormous. But, this was not the final, nor widest scope, of its fulfillment. That will come in the End Times.

Verse 2 brings up more prominent cities or regions of that era: Hamath, Tzor and Sidon. Often in the Bible we'll read of Hamath, and usually in the form of "leading up to Hamath", or "the entrance to Hamath", or "Lebo-Hamath". These are all referring to a region that is at the northernmost boundary of Israel-proper. Before anyone pulls out a map and corrects me, I'm well aware that geographically Hamath actually lies in between Hadrach and Damascus. But the point of the Prophet's words is not geography but rather it is that these are places that typify what the Aramean states (like Syria) did to Israel and how they as gentile nations were all opposed to God and Israel.

Tzor (also known as Tyre) and Sidon are Phoenician cities that are on the Sea coast (currently, this is Lebanon). The long and short of it is that these 2 cities represented all of Phoenicia when spoken of in the Bible. It would be like New

York and Los Angeles as representing all of the USA. And, this verse says that "she" (singular) is wise (thus confirming this is speaking of Phoenicia as a whole).

Chakam is the Hebrew word that is often translated as "wise". However, because "wise" is a good and positive thing to the modern Western mind, we need to know that **chakam** had a number of different nuances to its meaning. Indeed, it could be a good positive wisdom, or it could mean shrewdness (that could even involve successful lying), it also sometimes referred to the craft skills of an artisan, or even simply pragmatism in decision making. Tyre and Sidon are often referred to as "wise" in the Bible, but it was all about acquiring wealth. Very probably because Phoenicia was so wealthy and successful because of trade, this means that they were shrewd and pragmatic in deal making. That is the sense of it here in Zechariah.

This wisdom Phoenicia used showed itself in what verse 3 says: they built themselves a bulwark. A bulwark is a fortification for a city's defense. And, in addition, through their business acumen they heaped up gold and silver (money in its treasury); so much that it was like dust and dirt in the streets. So, it was defensively strong and wealthy. Naturally, to any city or nation, this was admirable and something to aspire to. It made them seem impregnable to attack or to economic setbacks. The great historian Diodorus Siculus once wrote: "Tyre had the greatest confidence, owing to her insular position and fortifications, and the abundant stores she had prepared". In fact, there would be a huge confrontation between Tyre and the Greek armies of Alexander in the 4th century B.C., and the city (and Phoenicia) would fall to the onslaught. Oddly enough, because this seems to be an accurate fulfillment of this prophecy, many Bible scholars then re-date Second Zechariah to a time AFTER that confrontation. Why? Because they don't believe in the legitimacy of prophecy (which is quite common in modern Theologians). They see it as but a disguised after-the-fact report to make it look like fulfilled prophecy.

As we move to verse 4, and grasp that ancient Phoenicia is largely modern-day Lebanon, this prophecy is yet to reach its fullest outcome and scope. Lebanon is going to fall in an even more disastrous invasion, in the End Times. It is fascinating what verse 4 prophesies about Lebanon (that it will become

impoverished despite its access to sea ports and trade routes, and eventually the major city destroyed), and to look at Lebanon today in late 2024. Due to Lebanon allowing an arch enemy of Israel... Hezbollah... to have free reign there to strike Israel with rockets and missiles, Israel as struck back and caused enormous damage to Beirut and other others of Lebanon. Lebanon is nearly a defunct nation. They have little money, and the government has no power to control the various Islamic factions and terror groups there. Leaders that attempt to guide the nation back to sanity don't last long... typically they are assassinated.

Lebanon is beautiful, wonderfully situated and ought to be wealthy. Are we getting a taste of what is going to happen... or maybe is even in process of happening, and we are eye witnesses to fulfillment of this prophecy? Time will tell.

Ashkelon is the beginning of the subject territory of verse 5. The Ashkelon of modern Israel is exactly what is being described, since it is adjacent to the ancient Ashkelon. Ashkelon is representative of Philistia, the 3rd group or region that chapter 9 addresses. Philistia consisted of 5 major cities: Gaza, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon and Ashdod. Only 4 of these 5 cities are mentioned in this passage (Gath is left out). Interestingly, we find this same oddity in Amos, Zephania, and Jeremiah when they speak prophetically about Philistine territory. Not only that, they all speak of them in the same order as we find it here in Zechariah. Therefore, surely this is a case of intertextuality... the use of older Scriptures by a later author. Put another way, the author of Second Zechariah is probably simply following what he sees a prophetic tradition.

Why is Gath not mentioned? Admittedly it can only be conjectured, but when we read 2Samuel and other mentions of Gath where David is involved, we find that Israel had developed a relationship with Gath, but not so much with the other Philistine cities. After the split of Israel into 2 separate kingdoms, we read that Rehoboam (King of Judah) actually considered Gath as one of Judah's cities. So, it seems that prophetically, Gath may get special treatment. How that is to happen I don't know, because today there is no Gath and no one is even certain where the ancient Gath was located.

We're told that Ashkelon will see and be afraid. It must be that they see the fate of Lebanon and fear the same for themselves. Once again I want to draw our attention to what is happening today concerning the Gaza strip (former Philistia) and Lebanon. Because Hezbollah of Lebanon has been subdued, and they have sued for peace (a ceasefire actually, with the terms of if much in Israel's favor), suddenly the reluctant Hamas that has controlled Gaza for almost 20 years is trying to work out a ceasefire with Israel and have agreed to a couple of conditions that even a few weeks ago would have ended negotiations. Clearly the leaders of Gaza (and by association, all of former Philistia) "see and are afraid" of what happened to Tyre and Sidon (Lebanon). Might what is happening at this moment be a fulfillment of this prophecy? Or a beginning of it? Or, perhaps is *like* it, but isn't actually *the* fulfillment just yet? There is no way to know until some more time passes.

The CJB does a bit better job of characterizing the fear of Ashkelon when it says Ashkelon is "terrified"; whereas most Bible versions say "fear". The Hebrew says Ashkelon sees (**tere**) and fears (**tira**). Obviously this is poetic and so the words chosen sound alike. The Prophet no doubt chose these words to highlight the level of fear and concern. Next we read that Gaza, too, is deeply affected. The verb that characterized Gaza's level of concern is **chuwl**. Literally, it means twist, curl, or dance. But, when using it in the sense of being fearful, it means to writhe or to tremble, perhaps to agonize. Tyre's fate (Lebanon) is so awful that it is causing Gaza (Philistia) to be in a condition of anguish. One must ask why they see Lebanon's fate so connected to their own? It can only be because there is an interdependency between Philistia and Lebanon, just we see happening currently.

Ekron is mentioned next. Ekron is an interesting case. They were historically the northernmost Philistine city, located only about 20 miles from Jerusalem. What made them sort of unique was that they held territory that was supposed to belong to the Tribe of Dan (as assigned to Dan in Joshua 19:43). But, because Dan never could take it from the Philistines, Dan was forced to abandon it and they move north to claim other territory. This meant that instead of Ekron and most of the Philistines being Dan's assignment to deal with, then it fell to Judah to have to contend with them.

We read that as a result of what is happening to Lebanon and to the territory of the Philistines in general, Ekron shall have her hopes confounded. That is, Philistia was looking forward to something good to happen for them; something they wanted to happen. Ekron assumed her allies would come to help her; but they disappointed her and was left more or less alone. Therefore, Philistia has lost all confidence in herself. Where this help was to come from we're not told, but since the fate of Lebanon is clearly tied to their own, no doubt this means Lebanon was to be that rescuing ally. Again, think about the situation in the former Philistia (Gaza) and Lebanon (the former Phoenicia) today. Gaza's hopes of defeating and destroying Israel once and for all depended on their allies: Iran and Iran's military proxy, Hezbollah. But, Israel defeated Hezbollah (Lebanon) and now Gaza stands alone and already is decimated.

Thus, as concerns Philistia, their king (meaning their political leader) will be killed (Sinwar, the head of Hamas in Gaza was killed by Israel a few weeks ago), and Ashkelon will go uninhabited. The reality is that many years ago Israel took Ashkelon, and it has been part of Israel ever since. So, whatever hope Hamas had of getting it back, has vanished.

I think that's enough to chew on for today. We'll pause here and begin with verse 6 next time.