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**ZECHARIAH 1-8**

Introduction to Zechariah 1-8

There are 14 chapters in the Zechariah scroll as it has come down to us in the Bible. Scholars are unanimous in seeing chapters 9-14 as a collection of material with no direct connection to the prophet Zechariah. We will limit our attention here to the first 8 chapters of the scroll. For the historical context for these chapters see the Introduction pages 12-13.

Ezra 5:1-2 and 6:14 link Zechariah with the prophet Haggai. This is reinforced by the chronological framework provided in the text. Chapter 1 verses 1 and 7 are dated in the second year of Darius (520-519), the year of Haggai's oracles. Chapter 7 verse 1 is dated two years later, in 518.

The first group of exiles returned to Judah (Yehud) in 538. The Judah to which they returned was a small area of about 1,500 square kilometres (see map page 14). It was a small and relatively insignificant province of the huge Persian satrapy which took in everything west of the Euphrates. The population was drastically reduced by pestilence and starvation associated with the sieges, the war casualties, and the exiles, in the early years of the 6th century. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had little to show for twenty years of hard work. As we know from Haggai, the temple was still in ruins, as was the economy generally.

Zechariah is confident that the dire situation in Jerusalem and Judah will be reversed when YHWH returns. Like Haggai, Zechariah is confident that YHWH will bring in a new order, for YHWH is 'YHWH of hosts'(1:3), the 'lord of the whole earth'(4:14). Unlike Haggai who looks to Zerubbabel to restore the Davidic dynasty, Zechariah speaks more vaguely of a coming 'Branch'(3:8; 6:12) of the Davidic line, who will be YHWH's instrument in reconstructing the temple. His vision is more expansive than Haggai's in that he sees other nations as joining Judah in YHWH's new order (2:11; 8:20-23).

The most obvious characteristic of the Zechariah scroll is its visions. Zechariah has three visions that reveal the transformation that YHWH is intent on bringing about for the whole earth. In the first vision (1:8-17), Zechariah sees horses and riders patrolling the earth: YHWH is returning to Jerusalem. This is followed by a second vision of four horns and four blacksmiths (1:18-21), and a third in which Jerusalem is wondrously expanded and is attracting foreign nations (2:1-5). There are two visions in which Zechariah sees the restoration brought about by the divine presence: one focuses on the high priest Joshua (3:1-10); the other on the governor Zerubbabel (4:1-14). Finally there is another set of three visions (5:1 - 6:8). In the last vision (6:1-8), the prophet once again sees horses and chariots patrolling the earth.

Inspired by Zechariah?

God respects our freedom. Return of communion is always a divine initiative (1:17; 2:5, 8; 8:3, 8), but it depends on our turning to God (1:3).

Zechariah offers us a powerful image of forgiveness: the filthy clothing of the high priest is replaced by festive apparel (3:1-10). He holds out the prospect of the nations coming to Jerusalem to know YHWH (2:11; 8:22-23).

The opening verse is dated in 520, the same year as Haggai's oracles. This 'word' from YHWH and the people's response is presented here at the beginning of the scroll to sum up the essence of Zechariah's message. Zechariah, throughout, keeps the focus upon what YHWH, their all-powerful, warrior God ('YHWH of hosts') will do when he returns. Only here at the beginning does he speak of what they must do: they must repent: 'Return to me and I will return to you' (verse 3). God desires that his people enjoy divine communion, but for this to happen they must experience a profound change of mind, heart and behaviour. Verse 6 assures us that they listened and repented.

A key theme here and in the longer concluding appeal of chapters 7-8 is the link Zechariah makes with the experience of their 'ancestors' (verses 4, 5 and 6) and how their ancestors failed to respond to the appeal of 'the former prophets' (verse 4; see verse 6). Verse 4 is a quotation from Jeremiah:

Turn now, everyone of you, from your evil way and wicked doings.

– Jeremiah 25:5

Their ancestors did not heed 'my servants the prophets'. Jeremiah makes the same complaint:

The word of YHWH has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. And though YHWH persistently sent you all his servants the prophets, you have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear.

– Jeremiah 25:3-4

Zechariah's contemporaries have experienced YHWH's 'anger' (verse 2). What they need now is hope. We are being told that Zechariah's contemporaries acknowledged the failings of their ancestors as their own failings (note the use of 'our' in verse 6), and the justice of the punishment they have received. They have learned from their mistakes. They heeded Zechariah's words and so opened the way to receive YHWH's blessings (verse 6).

**<sup>1</sup>In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of YHWH came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, saying:**

**<sup>2</sup>YHWH was very angry with your ancestors.**

**<sup>3</sup>Therefore say to them, Thus says YHWH of hosts: Return to me, says YHWH of hosts, and I will return to you, says YHWH of hosts.**

**<sup>4</sup>Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, "Thus says YHWH of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds." But they did not hear or heed me, says YHWH.**

**<sup>5</sup>Your ancestors, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? <sup>6</sup>But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your ancestors?**

**So they repented and said, "YHWH of hosts has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he planned to do."**

**<sup>7</sup>On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of YHWH came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo; and Zechariah said,**

**<sup>8</sup>In the night I saw a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the Deep; and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.**

**<sup>9</sup>Then I said, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they are."**

**<sup>10</sup>So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, "They are those whom YHWH has sent to patrol the earth."**

**<sup>11</sup>Then they spoke to the angel of YHWH who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have patrolled the earth, and lo, the whole earth remains at peace."**

**<sup>12</sup>Then the angel of YHWH said, "YHWH of hosts, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been angry these seventy years?" <sup>13</sup>Then YHWH replied with gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.**

We are in the year 519, five months after the construction of the temple had begun (see Haggai 1:15).

In this first vision (verses 8-13) it is revealed to Zechariah that the time of suffering for 'Jerusalem and the cities of Judah' (verse 12) is coming to an end. YHWH has 'gracious and comforting words' (verse 13) for them.

Zechariah keeps God's transcendence intact. His communication with God is mediated through a mysterious figure who speaks with God, and who interprets Zechariah's vision for him.

The vision takes place at the limits of the inhabited world: the 'Deep' (הַדְּפָא, m<sup>e</sup>šulâ). The myrtle trees are suggestive of the garden of Eden. It is night. Everything is shrouded in mystery. Emerging from the darkness is a mysterious figure on a red horse, with red, sorrel and white horses behind. They represent the 'host' of 'YHWH of hosts'. This mysterious figure is identified as 'an angel' (verse 9), 'the angel of YHWH' (verse 11).

Zechariah wants to know what the horses of his vision represent. The mysterious angel explains that they have been sent by YHWH 'to patrol the earth' (verse 11). The horses are presumed to have riders, who report to YHWH's angel that 'the whole earth remains at peace' (verse 11).

If this is so, then why are things going so badly in Jerusalem? The angel from the mysterious heavenly world asks God how long it will be before he shows mercy to Jerusalem and Judah. It has been seventy years since the city and countryside were destroyed (verse 12; see Jeremiah 27:6-7).

YHWH's response is 'gracious and comforting'. There are echoes here of the opening words of the Isaiah School in exile: 'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God' (Isaiah 40:1).

Zechariah is instructed to proclaim two oracles. Firstly (verses 14-16), he is to declare that ‘YHWH of hosts’, the ruler of the whole earth, is passionately concerned for Jerusalem and will act on her behalf (verse 14). The Persian Empire is enjoying peace now that Darius has solidified his reign. But the people of Judah are not to interpret this as God’s blessing. God is ‘extremely angry with the nations that are at ease’(verse 15; see verse 11). God was angry with his people, but ‘only a little angry’. These nations were God’s instruments in punishing sin, but they have gone well beyond their commission and have ‘made the disaster worse’(verse 15). So God is now angry with the nations – which means that they must be punished.

Zechariah is to assure Jerusalem that YHWH has come back home to Jerusalem ‘with compassion’(verse 16; see verse 13). He is going to see that the temple (‘my house’) will be reconstructed. Moreover the city itself will expand and they will witness a re-building (verse 16).

Zechariah is given a second message to deliver (verse 17). The cities of Judah, currently experiencing economic depression and drought (see Haggai) ‘will again flow with prosperity’.

YHWH’s rejection of Jerusalem and Judah found expression in the Deuteronomic history in the following words:

YHWH said, “I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.”

– 2Kings 23:27

Zechariah is to declare that this rejection was only temporary. YHWH ‘will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem’(verse 17).

Zechariah is asking his contemporaries to dare to believe in the restoration that God is determined for them to enjoy, in spite of the fact that nothing in their present experience points to such a restoration. He is calling the community to put their faith in the power and fidelity of their God.

**<sup>14</sup>So the angel who talked with me said to me, Proclaim this message: Thus says YHWH of hosts; I am very zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. <sup>15</sup>And I am extremely angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they made the disaster worse.**

**<sup>16</sup>Therefore, thus says YHWH, I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says YHWH of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.**

**<sup>17</sup>Proclaim further: Thus says YHWH of hosts: My cities will again overflow with prosperity; YHWH will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.**

**<sup>18</sup>And I looked up and saw four horns. <sup>19</sup>I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these?" And he answered me, "These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."**

**<sup>20</sup>Then YHWH showed me four blacksmiths. <sup>21</sup>And I asked, "What are they coming to do?" He answered, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no head could be raised; but these have come to terrify them, to strike down the horns of the nations that lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people."**

The numbering of the verses here follows the Latin Vulgate and many English Versions. The Hebrew and Greek number these verses as Chapter 2:1-4.

This second vision stays with the catastrophe that has scattered YHWH's people throughout the world. This time Zechariah sees 'four horns'. Once again there is a heavenly intermediary to interpret the vision for him. He is told that the horns (a symbol of power) represent the nations that were responsible for the scattering of the people of Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem.

We need to remember that the 'seer' ('visionary') looks at the world at two levels. There is the level of human decision and indecision. On this level the oppressive nations, especially Assyria and Babylon, are responsible for the dreadful treatment meted out to Israel and Judah. We have already heard that God is angry with them (see 1:15). There is also the transcendent level: the level of divine will. On that level the scattering of God's people is recognised as divine punishment for their sin.

Here, Zechariah is looking at things on the level of international politics. The focus therefore is on the guilt of the nations who must be punished for their cruelty.

Inspired by God, Zechariah has a vision of four blacksmiths. Zechariah is told that they have come to 'strike down' those who have treated Israel and Judah so badly. They will cut off their horns, take away their power.

There is nothing in this second vision that speaks against Judah's present overlord, Persia, for Persia was not responsible for scattering Judah. In fact Persia had seen that the scattered exiles were free to return to their land.

The key image we are left with is YHWH's power. From all four points of the compass, he will destroy the nations responsible for oppression. This destruction will issue in world peace.

In this third vision Zechariah sees a surveyor, who responds to Zechariah's inquiry by telling him that he is going 'to measure Jerusalem', as was promised earlier (see 1:16). His intention is to construct a wall around the city to defend it.

However, a messenger from heaven, comes to tell the surveyor (and is overheard by Zechariah) not to bother building a defensive wall. The population of the city will be so huge that it will be neither possible nor necessary to have a wall to defend it.

YHWH's glory and power will dwell within the city, and YHWH promises to be 'a wall of fire around it' (verse 5).

**<sup>1</sup>I looked up and saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. <sup>2</sup>Then I asked, "Where are you going?" He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length."**

**<sup>3</sup>Then the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him, <sup>4</sup>and said to him, "Run, say to that young man: Jerusalem shall be inhabited like villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and animals in it."**

**<sup>5</sup>For I will be a wall of fire all around it, says YHWH, and I will be the glory within it."**

**6Up, up! Flee from the land of the north, says YHWH; for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven, says YHWH.**

**7Up! Escape to Zion, you that live with daughter Babylon.**

**8For thus said YHWH of hosts (who sent me for his glory) regarding the nations that plundered you: Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye. 9See now, I am going to raise my hand against them, and they shall become plunder for their own slaves. Then you will know that YHWH of hosts has sent me.**

**10Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says YHWH.**

**11Many nations will join themselves to YHWH on that day, and will be my people; and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that YHWH of hosts has sent me to you. 12YHWH will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.**

**13Be silent, all people, before YHWH; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.**

The verse numbering in the Hebrew is 2:10-17. Verse 6 begins with a repeated call for urgent attention (הִיָּי, hôy!). YHWH is calling his people to flee from the lands of exile (even Babylon is considered north, because people cannot cross the Arabian desert, but must go up the rivers and enter Judah from the north). Not all the exiles left Babylon when they were free to do so. In verse 7 they are being summoned to leave (compare Isaiah 52:11).

In verses 8-9 Zechariah begins and ends by claiming that he is a true prophet – sent to the people by YHWH ‘for his glory’ (verse 8). Judah and its people have been ‘plundered’, and this has affected God intimately, for they are ‘the apple of YHWH’s eye’ (verse 8). These plundering nations will suffer the fate they inflicted on Judah (see 1:20-21).

Jerusalem is to ‘sing and rejoice’, for YHWH declares: ‘I will come and dwell in your midst’ (verses 10 and 11; see 1:16 and 2:5).

There follows an extraordinary, ‘catholic’, promise: ‘Many nations will join themselves to YHWH on that day, and will be my people’ (verse 11). This is the covenant formula. Nowhere else in the Bible is it applied explicitly to a nation outside Israel. The people of Judah remain YHWH’s special inheritance. The nations will come to YHWH who dwells in Zion. Judah, which has been desecrated, will once again be ‘holy’ (verse 12), made holy by the presence of the Holy One.

In verse 13, the whole world is hushed into silence. YHWH is already stirring from his heavenly dwelling. This awesome God is preparing to enter into the Jerusalem temple, to make his land once again holy, and to attract all the world. The inclusion of all nations is a key feature of Zechariah’s vision.

Zechariah has a vision of the heavenly court. We should imagine YHWH seated on a throne surrounded by his angelic retinue. One of these is 'the Satan' (שָׂטָן, *hasśātan*), God's prosecuting attorney, who challenges Joshua's fitness to be high priest. YHWH (presumably speaking through 'the angel of YHWH', another member of the court) comes to Joshua's defence. Significantly, YHWH is described as the one who 'has chosen Jerusalem' (verse 2; see 1:17).

In an expression that echoes Amos 4:11, Joshua is described as 'a brand plucked from the fire' (verse 2). His grandfather, Seraiah, was executed by Nebuchadrezzar (see 2Kings 25:18-21), and his father, Jehozadak, was exiled in Babylon. Furthermore, as a priest, he belonged to a group that was judged largely responsible for the catastrophe that overwhelmed Judah.

This priestly guilt is symbolised in the 'filthy clothes' Joshua is wearing. These are removed and he is clothed in festive apparel. In his vision Zechariah asks that Joshua be given 'a clean turban' (verse 5). All this is in preparation for a special commission that YHWH is to give Joshua (verses 6-10).

While there was a king on the throne of Judah, the priest was the king's minister, responsible for the cult. The king himself exercised considerable control over the temple (see 2Kings 16:10-16; 21:5; 23:11-12). After the exile, with no king, the role of the priest changed significantly. This paralleled the change in the role of the temple, which was no longer an adjunct to the king's palace, but was now the temple of the people, the centre of their social and economic, as well as their religious, life. It functioned under the authority of the high priest.

**<sup>1</sup>Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of YHWH, and the Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. <sup>2</sup>And YHWH said to Satan, "YHWH rebuke you, O Satan! YHWH who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?"**

**<sup>3</sup>Now Joshua was dressed with filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.**

**<sup>4</sup>The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." And to him he said, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel."**

**<sup>5</sup>And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with the apparel; and the angel of YHWH was standing by.**

The Davidic dynasty will be restored

**<sup>6</sup>Then the angel of YHWH assured Joshua, saying  
<sup>7</sup>“Thus says YHWH of hosts:  
If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.**

**<sup>8</sup>Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are an omen of things to come: I am going to bring my servant the Branch.**

**<sup>9</sup>For on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says YHWH of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day.**

**<sup>10</sup>On that day, says YHWH of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree.”**

Verses 6-7 speak of the expanded sphere of responsibility that now falls to the high priest. In the absence of a king, he is to ‘rule my house and have charge of my courts’. Since he will have ‘right of access’ to the presence of YHWH, his behaviour must be impeccable.

In verse 8 YHWH, through the mediation of the angel, addresses Joshua along with his colleagues. They are to be ‘an omen of things to come’(verse 8).

Firstly he is ‘going to bring my servant Branch’(verse 8). Since nothing more is said of this in this passage we must turn to Jeremiah:

The days are surely coming, says YHWH, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

– Jeremiah 23:5 (also 33:15)

We might recall Isaiah:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

– Isaiah 11:1

Zechariah is led to expect a renewal of the Davidic dynasty. The language is cryptic, possibly to not appear to be challenging Persia.

The royal insignia consisted in a crown, adorned with precious stones. By placing the stone in front of the high priest (verse 9), YHWH is giving him the authority to crown the future ‘Branch’ when the time comes. In the meantime, the high priest and his colleagues are an assurance (an omen) that the Davidic dynasty will be restored. That day will mark the dawn of a new creation, the removal of all impurity from the land, and complete harmony and prosperity, as expressed in the simple imagery of verse 10.

Zechariah's fifth vision is of a lampstand and two olive trees (verses 1-5). Once again the symbol is interpreted by the angel (verses 4-5 and 10-14).

What is unusual in this scene is that before the angel interprets the vision, he delivers an oracle to Zerubbabel (verses 6-10).

Zerubbabel cannot wield kingly power. He is appointed as governor, responsible to the king of Persia, Darius. But he is not powerless, for YHWH, Judah's warrior God (YHWH of hosts) is giving him 'my spirit' (verse 6).

Zerubbabel could easily be daunted by the 'great mountain' (verse 7) of rubble where the temple once stood. He is to put his faith in the divine spirit, and he will succeed in completing the reconstruction. The cynics who 'despised the day of small things' (verse 10; compare Haggai 2:3) – they could see that it was not possible to build a temple to equal that of Solomon – will rejoice when Zerubbabel sets about the task ('the plumb line', verse 10), and completes the reconstruction. This is the significance of his bringing out 'the capstone' (verse 7).

The two olive trees are interpreted as 'sons of oil' (verse 14). The word used here for 'oil' (יִשְׁחָר, *yishār*), is not used for anointing oil. The idea seems to be that together they will bring prosperity ('oil') to Judah. In context, the reference appears to be to Joshua and Zerubbabel.

**<sup>1</sup>The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. <sup>2</sup>He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. <sup>3</sup>And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." <sup>4</sup>I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" <sup>5</sup>Then the angel who talked with me answered me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord."**

**<sup>6</sup>He said to me, "This is the word of YHWH to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says YHWH of hosts. <sup>7</sup>What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the capstone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" <sup>8</sup>Moreover the word of YHWH came to me, saying, <sup>9</sup>"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that YHWH of hosts has sent me to you. <sup>10</sup>For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.**

**"These seven are the eyes of YHWH, which range through the whole earth." <sup>11</sup>Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?"**

**<sup>12</sup>And a second time I said to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which pour out the oil through the two golden pipes?" <sup>13</sup>He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." <sup>14</sup>Then he said, "These are the two sons of oil who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."**

**<sup>1</sup>Again I looked up and saw a flying scroll. <sup>2</sup>And he said to me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits."**

**<sup>3</sup>Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for everyone who steals shall be acquitted according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be acquitted according to the writing on the other side.**

**<sup>4</sup>I have sent it out, says YHWH of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in that house and consume it, both timber and stones."**

Zechariah's sixth vision is of an immense scroll, a little less than 10 metres by 5 metres. It is interpreted as a 'curse that goes out over the face of the whole land'(verse 3).

Since it declares that thieves are acquitted, as are those who take an oath but still lie, it is revealing to the whole world that testimony is worthless and so justice is corrupted. The scroll casts a shadow over the light, so that evil is not seen.

In verse 4 we have an oracle from YHWH, who will see that attempts to thwart justice and cover up crime will fail.

The early years of return from exile would have provided numerous opportunities for law suits, especially in view of the fact that returning exiles would have laid claim to property, which the occupiers would not have wanted to hand over. The scroll represents YHWH's promise to eliminate from the community the lies that were corrupting the administration of justice.

Zechariah can't make out the object he sees in his seventh vision. The angel tells him it is 'a basket'. The Hebrew word is **סֹדֵם**, 'ēypâ), a unit for measuring flour.

2Kings 23:6-7 mention that there were women in the temple 'weaving for Asherah'. Josiah put a stop to this and reduced the image of the goddess Asherah to dust. What we seem to have here is a basket containing a figurine of the goddess, for use in household shrines. In speaking of it as 'their eye in all the land', the text seems to stating that the ancient superstition that Josiah attempted to stamp out was still going on in Zechariah's time. People were looking to the goddess in the hope that she would ensure a good harvest.

The other feature in the vision is the lead disk that covers the basket. A lead disk was used to weigh money. It may represent the huge tax that Judah was required to send to Persian king (see Nehemiah 9:36-37).

The complex image clarifies somewhat in verses 9-11. Shinar (verse 11) is Babylon (see Genesis 11:2).

To attempt to destroy foreign idols as Josiah did would have caused problems for the powerless and subject state of Judah. They were forced to respect these 'gods'. Zechariah sees the angels close the basket. Mysterious heavenly women figures take the image of the goddess (along with the taxes?) and fly it away to Babylon, where they respectfully construct a shrine for it and set it on its base.

Let the Babylonians worship it, but it has no place in the restored Judah, who are not to have their eyes looking for prosperity to Asherah. Their concern must be 'the eyes of YHWH, which range through the whole earth'(4:10). They are, after all, 'the apple of his eye'(2:8).

**<sup>5</sup>Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, "Look up and see what this is that is coming out."**

**<sup>6</sup>I said, "What is it?" He said, "This is a basket coming out." And he said, "This is their eye in all the land." <sup>7</sup>Then a leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket! <sup>8</sup>And he said, "This is Wickedness." So he thrust her back into the basket, and pressed the leaden weight down on its mouth.**

**<sup>9</sup>Then I looked up and saw two women coming forward. The wind was in their wings; they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and sky. <sup>10</sup>Then I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they taking the basket?" <sup>11</sup>He said to me, "To the land of Shinar, to build a house for it; and when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base."**

**<sup>1</sup>And again I looked up and saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains—mountains of bronze.**

**<sup>2</sup>The first chariot had red horses, the second chariot black horses, <sup>3</sup>the third chariot white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled gray horses.**

**<sup>4</sup>Then I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" <sup>5</sup>The angel answered me, "These are the four winds of heaven going out, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth.**

**<sup>6</sup>The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go toward the west country, and the dappled ones go toward the south country."**

**<sup>7</sup>When the steeds came out, they were impatient to get off and patrol the earth. And he said, "Go, patrol the earth." So they patrolled the earth. <sup>8</sup>Then he cried out to me, "See, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country."**

This is Zechariah's eighth and final vision. There are links here with the first vision. Once again horses are central. In the first vision they were stationary, having returned from patrolling the earth, where they found 'the whole world at peace'(1:11). Here the horses burst out from between two bronze mountains (verse 1). This time they are drawing chariots. They are heading off on a mission from YHWH, 'the Lord of all the earth'(verse 5). They come from the east (the rising sun), and head off north, west and south (verse 6). They complete their journey (verse 7), and the angel assures Zechariah that YHWH's spirit is 'at rest in the north country'(verse 8; compare 1:11).

The world is at peace in the first vision. It is at peace in the final vision. In the meantime everything has changed. God is creating a new order, with Jerusalem at its centre. He has returned to his city and his glory will radiate out to all the world, attracting every nation to Jerusalem the holy centre of the earth.

The angel's final instruction to Zechariah is to 'see'(verse 8). As things were in 520 in Yehud, the people needed Zechariah's vision to sustain their hope. Everything they saw left them despondent. The 'seer', Zechariah, is graced to see things from a divine perspective that invites faith and hope.

This is not a vision, but an oracle: ‘the word of YHWH’ that ‘came to Zechariah’(compare 1:1, 7). He is to collect offerings of precious metals from three exiles (גֹּלָאֵי, gôlâ) who have come from Babylon. By the middle of the following century those who were descended from the gôlâ were an elite group in the community (see Ezra 10:8). They probably saw themselves in this way from the beginning.

There is a connection between Joshua and the Josiah who is to make the crown for him. Josiah’s father, Zephaniah, was the assistant priest to Joshua’s grandfather, Seraiah. Both Zephaniah and Seraiah were executed by Nebuchadrezzar in 586.

In 3:4-5, Joshua was given a turban. Here he is given a crown.

For the second time we hear of the ‘Branch’(verse 12; see 3:8). The text implies that ‘the Branch’ is present with Zechariah and Joshua, and it is stated that he, and he alone, will build the temple of YHWH. This connects back with 4:6-10, where Zerubbabel is told that he will complete the reconstruction. Why is Zerubbabel not mentioned here? And why is it that he simply disappears from the historical record? We can only surmise that things did not work out as expected, and so the Messianic figure who would in fact complete the temple is left undetermined in the text. While they are awaiting this promised leader, it is the high priest who is in charge (hence the crown).

The crown intended for ‘the Branch’ is to be kept in the temple. When Ezra refers to the completion of the temple, he does not mention either Joshua or Zerubbabel, but ‘the elders of the Jews’(Ezra 6:14-15).

Typical of Zechariah’s universal vision is his assurance that ‘those who are far off’(presumably non-Jews) will help build the temple. He states his authority to speak and exhorts his listeners to ‘diligently obey the voice of YHWH your God’(verse 15).

**<sup>9</sup>The word of YHWH came to me:**

**<sup>10</sup>Collect silver and gold from the exiles—from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah—who have arrived from Babylon; and go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah.**

**<sup>11</sup>Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak;**

**<sup>12</sup>say to him: Thus says YHWH of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he will build the temple of YHWH. <sup>13</sup>It is he that shall build the temple of YHWH; he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them.**

**<sup>14</sup>And the crown shall be in the care of Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Josiah son of Zephaniah, as a memorial in the temple of YHWH.**

**<sup>15</sup>Those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of YHWH; and you shall know that YHWH of hosts has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the voice of YHWH your God.**

**<sup>1</sup>In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of YHWH came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev.**

**<sup>2</sup>Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men, to entreat the favour of YHWH, <sup>3</sup>and to ask the priests of the house of YHWH of hosts and the prophets, "Should I mourn and practise dedication in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"**

**<sup>4</sup>Then the word of YHWH of hosts came to me: <sup>5</sup>Say to all the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? <sup>6</sup>And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink only for yourselves?**

Zechariah received this revelation in prayer in December 518. This is two years after Zerubbabel began the task of rebuilding the temple (see Haggai 2:10, 18; see Zechariah 8:9). The building was completed in March 215 (see Ezra 6:15).

Zechariah does not focus on encouraging the people to continue the reconstruction. Rather he wants to assure them of what YHWH is doing.

The rites of 'mourning' (בָּכָה, *bākkâ*) and 'dedication' (נִזְר, *nizr*) commemorated the destruction of the temple in 587 (see 2Kings 25:8). The priests and prophets are asked for a ruling as to whether this mourning is to continue.

Zechariah is inspired by YHWH to speak of the fasting and lamenting that they have been practising since the fall of the city ('for these seventy years'). Coinciding with the prophecy of Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10), Zedekiah agrees that the time has come for change (see 1:14-17). Their fasting over those seventy years was their way of pleading with YHWH to better their situation (verse 5). God does not need their fasting; neither does God need their feasting. So they can suit themselves. Now is the time for eating and drinking (verse 6).

Once again Zechariah reminds his audience of the teaching of the 'former prophets' (7:7, 12; see 1:4). He reminds them of the time when Judah was prosperous, and when it included the Negeb to the south, and the Shephelah to the west. Judah after the exile was much reduced (see map page 14).

In summarising the teaching of the former prophets, Zechariah goes to the heart of the religion of Yahwism: concern for the marginalised, the widows and orphans the foreigners residing among them, who are living without the support of their extended families, and generally the poor. These are the ones who know their need and who cry out to God. The God of Judah, YHWH, is the God who hears the cry of the poor.

The problem was that their ancestors did not listen to the prophets, thereby cutting themselves off from God's words and God's blessing. That is why they went through such terrible suffering (verses 11-12).

God cannot force his love upon people. In cutting themselves off from God, they would not listen to God's word, and so God could not hear theirs.

The point Zechariah is making is that if the behaviour of their ancestors in refusing to hear and heed God's words brought about the change from prosperity to adversity, so Zechariah's contemporaries, if they heed and follow God's word coming to them through him (YHWH's prophet), will see a change from adversity to prosperity.

**<sup>7</sup>Were not these the words that YHWH proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, along with the towns around it, and when the Negeb and the Shephelah were inhabited?**

**<sup>8</sup>The word of YHWH came to Zechariah, saying: <sup>9</sup>Thus says YHWH of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; <sup>10</sup>do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.**

**<sup>11</sup>But they refused to listen, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears in order not to hear. <sup>12</sup>They made their hearts adamant in order not to hear the law and the words that YHWH of hosts had sent by his spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great wrath came from YHWH of hosts.**

**<sup>13</sup>Just as, when I called, they would not hear, so, when they called, I would not hear, says YHWH of hosts, <sup>14</sup>and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and a pleasant land was made desolate.**

Nothing is impossible for God

**<sup>1</sup>The word of YHWH of hosts came to me, saying: <sup>2</sup>Thus says YHWH of hosts: I am zealous for Zion with great zeal, and I am zealous for her with great wrath.**

**<sup>3</sup>Thus says YHWH: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of YHWH of hosts shall be called the holy mountain.**

**<sup>4</sup>Thus says YHWH of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age.**

**<sup>5</sup>And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.**

**<sup>6</sup>Thus says YHWH of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says YHWH of hosts?**

**<sup>7</sup>Thus says YHWH of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; <sup>8</sup>and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They will be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.**

YHWH declares his zeal for Zion, his holy mountain. Zion means so much to God that he will do anything for her. He will also punish her for her iniquity, for it matters to him how the people live. He will also punish anyone who acts against her (verse 2; see 1:14-15)..

Once again YHWH promises to return to his city and dwell in her midst (verse 3; see 1:3; 1:16; 2:10-11). Because YHWH will be in her midst, Jerusalem will be 'faithful', and Mount Zion will be 'holy'(see 2:12).

Verses 4-5 paint a picture of ordinary people enjoying a life that is harmonious and peaceful.

Zechariah refers to the 'remnant'(verse 6 and verses 11-12; compare Haggai 1:12, 14; 2:2). These are the ones who have survived the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile. What has just been promised may appear to them at the moment to be impossible. Yes, it is beyond the capacities of the community, but it is not beyond the capacity of their God, 'YHWH of hosts'(verse 6; compare Jeremiah 32:17).

YHWH will save his still scattered people, and Jerusalem will be re-populated, for he will 'bring them to live in Jerusalem'(verse 8).

Then comes the traditional covenant formula: 'They will be my people, and I will be their God'(verse 8). YHWH is faithful and righteous. He will live in the midst of his people and they will share in his faithfulness and righteousness.

Zechariah refers back to the recent laying of the foundation for the reconstructed temple (see Haggai 2:18). Haggai is surely one of the prophets to whom he is referring. Unlike their ancestors who did not hear the former prophets (see 7:7, 13), those whom Zechariah is addressing are hearing.

In verses 10-12 he draws the people's attention to how hard things were before they started to rebuild the temple, and how much improved things have been since they started. YHWH promises even more in the future.

Verse 13 holds out the hope that the northern kingdom, too, will be restored. Earlier, people would look at the desolation of Israel and Judah and think of them as cursed by God. Now, all this is changing. They will be a blessing. But there is work to be done, so they must 'let your hands be strong' (verses 9 and 13).

Verses 14-15 pick up where verse 8 left off. In the past their ancestors brought upon themselves divine punishment. Now all this has changed. God is determined 'to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah'. They have nothing to fear.

**<sup>9</sup>Thus says YHWH of hosts: Let your hands be strong – you that have recently been hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of YHWH of hosts.**

**<sup>10</sup>For before those days there were no wages for people or for animals, nor was there any safety from the foe for those who went out or came in, and I set them all against one other. <sup>11</sup>But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says YHWH of hosts.**

**<sup>12</sup>For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.**

**<sup>13</sup>Just as you have been a cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.**

**<sup>14</sup>For thus says YHWH of hosts: Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says YHWH of hosts, <sup>15</sup>so again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid.**

All are attracted to Zion

**<sup>16</sup>These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, <sup>17</sup>do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says YHWH.**

**<sup>18</sup>The word of YHWH of hosts came to me, saying: <sup>19</sup>Thus say YHWH of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace.**

**<sup>20</sup>Thus says YHWH of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities; <sup>21</sup>the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Come, let us go to entreat the favour of YHWH, and to seek YHWH of hosts; I myself am going."**

**<sup>22</sup>Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek YHWH of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of YHWH. <sup>23</sup>Thus says YHWH of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."**

In verses 16-17 Zechariah sets out the kind of behaviour YHWH expects from the community. Like 7:9-10, the admonitions are traditional.

This is the second time fasting has featured (see 7:4-6). Zechariah is stating that fasting is not now to be because of sin, divine punishment, and suffering, but rather as a reminded of the wonderful things God is doing for them. He exhorts them to choose 'truth' (אֱמֶת, *emet*) and 'peace' (שָׁלוֹם, *šālôm*).

This magnificent conclusion reiterates one of Zechariah's main themes: the universal mission that YHWH entrusts to Israel. They are to be a people in the midst of whom the Holy One can dwell, and from which YHWH can attract the whole world to come to worship him (compare 2:11; 6:15).