

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 1, Introduction and Chapter 1

Today we open the Book of Zechariah with an introduction to prepare us to more thoroughly study it. This introduction will be less extensive than is my typical because reading the introduction to the Torah Class study of the Book of Haggai essentially covers the same historical period, so there is no need to repeat it. Even more, the books of Haggai, Zechariah, and then Malachi are very nearly a united trilogy about the return of the exiled Judeans to their former homeland, the rebuilding of the Temple, the reinstatement of the Levitical priesthood, and then a look forward to future times involving a Messiah. So, I cannot recommend strongly enough that if you have not already studied the Book of Haggai with us, that you pause and do that now before you study Zechariah. Otherwise, you will be proceeding with much needed context missing.

Assuming you have studied Haggai, then I can begin with the 30,000-foot view of Zechariah by saying that it is a blend of immediate encouragement to the returned Jewish exiles from Babylon, and then its forward-looking End Times visions. It reassures God's people of His ongoing presence with them, and faithfulness to them, in the form of honoring all of His previous covenants that He has made with the Hebrew people beginning with the Abrahamic Covenant and onward to the Mosaic Covenant established at Mt. Sinai. Yehoveh, through His Prophet Zechariah, also points to a future hope and greater glory for all Israel that transcends their immediate circumstances.

As we move along in the book, and especially in the later chapters, the messianic prophecies appear, and history proves the lasting impact this has had on Jewish and Christian thought over the centuries. Zechariah has had enormous impact on the theological implications and expectations about a coming deliverer who would establish God's reign on earth, forever.

Zechariah is one of a group of prophetic books in the Bible called the Minor Prophets, of which there are 12. The term "minor" does not mean less substantial or important than some of the others we find in the Old Testament. Rather it means that these 12 books are simply shorter in length than that of others like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the granddaddy of them all, Isaiah with its 66 chapters.

Zechariah's name means "Yehoveh has remembered". This was a fairly common name and we find about 30 men in the Old Testament with it. He was born into a priestly family, probably in Babylon. When we look at his entire name as given to us in the first verse of his book, we find it is Zechariah ben-Berechiah ben-Iddo. That is, this particular Zechariah is the son of Berechiah, and the grandson of Iddo. Therefore, because Iddo was known to be a priest of high ranking, not only was he a prophet he was also a priest... although up in Babylon, priests had no real function there because the only place they could use their position as priests was the Temple in Jerusalem, which lay in ruins. As a priest, it helps us all the more to understand his passion for getting that Temple rebuilt.

An interesting Jewish Tradition concerning him says that he was part of what was called the Great Synagogue in Babylon. This was said to be a group of men who gathered in order to protect and preserve the written Torah and other ancient Hebrew writings. Whether there was actually such a group, or it is just legend, is impossible to know.

Generally speaking, the Book of Zechariah has been divided by Christian scholars into two large sections: chapters 1 – 8, and then 9 – 14. In fact, there is a strong movement in Bible scholarship to see the Book of Haggai along with the first 8 chapters of Zechariah as but one single work, written either by 1 author (Zechariah) or as a collaborative effort by 2 authors (Haggai and Zechariah). However, this propensity to divide Zechariah into two large sections is less because of its content than it is of its style. And, for this reason, there is a belief among many Bible scholars that an entirely different and separate author wrote what we today call Zechariah chapters 9 – 14. Such a belief did not exist until perhaps the 19th century, and there is no such thought expressed in ancient Jewish scholarship.

This notion of claiming different authors of a Bible than the book itself claims is due to the way Bible study methodology has progressed within Christianity over time. There are several types of what is called critical Bible study... or sometimes called Bible criticism... that have developed. The term "criticism" doesn't mean what it sounds like. That is, it is not an approach to Bible study for the express purpose of making negative claims about the Holy Scriptures. From the academic

viewpoint, it is more about analyzing the Bible from different points of view, using various techniques and disciplines. The methods called literary criticism and source criticism are 2 of those several critical methods used to study God's Word. Source criticism is a method used in biblical studies to evaluate the authenticity and credibility of the sources used in a text. It involves analyzing the integrity of the text to determine the sources used by the authors and later editors, and to identify any signs of modifications that may have occurred during the transmission of the biblical texts over the many centuries from the original writing of them. Literary criticism attempts to establish the literary genres (types or categories) of the various biblical documents and to reach conclusions about their structure, date, and authorship. The problem is that this is more art than science, more opinion than evidence. This doesn't mean those scholars who use these 2 study methods are always incorrect, but they can mislead. And often this is because those who use these 2 methodologies are atheists or Bible skeptics.

The German Bible commentators C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch were (to my thinking) the premier commentators of their era....the mid-1800's. I still hold them in great regard and refer regularly to their commentaries as a wonderful research tool. It was slightly before or early into their period of scholarship that the literary and source criticism study methods appeared (even if they had yet to gain names), and claims started to appear about the Bible that had never before existed concerning everything from authenticity to authorship of the many Bible books. While Keil and Delitzsch didn't dismiss it all out-of-hand, they tended to throw cold water on much of it as (and I quote) "...the dogmatic assumption of the rationalistic and naturalistic critics that the biblical prophecies are nothing more than the productions of natural divination..." That is, they are saying that the academics that make such claims are typically those who don't believe that the Bible is the Word of God, do not believe in divine inspiration and often not the existence of the divine at all, nor do they believe that such a thing as actual prophecy exists. Rather, they view these biblical authors as frauds who spoke only well **after** the fact of the events they prophesied, but wrote as though they were predicting them long before they actually happened.

I, too, do not dismiss out-of-hand the claims and scholarship of the literary and source critical Bible commentators. However, we must all begin with the knowledge of their mindset and what they intend to prove. And, that because

proof is much too high of a hurdle for them to jump over, they simply use their academic status to insist that they must be correct. And, yet, clearly there have been redactions, editing, and more than 1 hand involved over the centuries as these precious Bible books have been transmitted down to us through the centuries. Because the printing press never existed until a mere 500 years ago, the Bible was hand copied. So, most of the "editing" has been little more than a generally minor copyist error (in the Hebrew alphabet there are pairs of letters that are nearly identical looking and so they are often accidentally transposed), and at other times some ancient place names were removed and replaced with their current names as city and village names regularly changed over the centuries.

But, there is also the looming reality that some of these books, or part of them, are indeed compendiums of letters and smaller works that were woven into a more coherent whole. This might sound alarming, but it should not. This merely means that a prophet might write something and then speak it as ordered, but then some time passes...perhaps more than a decade... and the prophet receives another oracle from God, which he also writes down and then speaks. Later, an editor comes along to combine them into a single work rather than two separate works. Again, nothing wrong with that nor does that water down or modify the truth. It is simply the standard process by which nearly all ancient literary works are dealt with over the centuries. The New Testament Gospel accounts work that same way. These are accounts of Yeshua's life that have been stitched together, massaged and re-worked, to fit the length of a completed work that the patron of that Gospel writer hired him to do.

Therefore, it is my position that the traditional, historical, and biblical evidence concerning the writing of Haggai and Zechariah is that these two prophets not only knew of one another but most likely collaborated on those two books in order to give them a most fulfilling unity. And, yes, we can see a notable change of approach between Zechariah chapters 1-8 versus chapters 9 – 14, but that is because several years elapsed between the writing of the first part of the book versus the writing of the second part, and the subject matter evolved as God gave Zechariah additional information especially about a more distant future. While I cannot "prove" my position with certainty any more than the literary and source critics can prove theirs, mine is far more tenable than theirs because for

well over the first 2000 years after these books were written, no one... Jew or Christian... seriously questioned their authorship or authenticity. And that is something that ought to give us comfort and confidence about what we will be studying.

The Book of Zechariah was written during a pivotal time in Israelite history. The Babylonian Empire had conquered Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and took many Judean residents into exile in 586 B.C. However, by 539 B.C., the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great defeated Babylon, taking their empire away from them. Cyrus issued a decree allowing the exiled Judeans to return to their homeland and to rebuild their Temple. A first wave of Judeans left Babylon, followed by a second wave around 15 years later. Key to grasp is the relatively few Judeans that ever returned, the vast bulk of them choosing to stay in Babylon. Why? Because most of those Judeans taken when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah who were adults at the time died of old age up in Babylon and so it was their children and grandchildren who migrated back to Yehud. Babylon was the only home they knew and so for them Yehud (the former Judah) was foreign. Further, it is important to know that despite what Jewish Tradition is, only a sparse handful of those former residents of the Kingdom of Ephraim (the so-called Northern Kingdom)...better known as the 10 lost tribes of Israel... joined their Judean brothers. Only in the modern times have members of those 10 tribes begun their return to what is now the Jewish State of Israel.

As we read these several chapters in Zechariah, we need to keep in mind that while the Judeans returned to the area they used to live in, it was no longer an independent Jewish nation. Rather it was now but a Persian province that went by its new name Yehud. And, while they did have an ethnically Judean governor over them (Zerubbabel), he was certainly not a king. Basically, he was a Persian civil servant that was quite loyal to Persia. This issue of the returned exiles no longer being governed under a Jewish monarch was a most significant background factor in their thinking, and in what the Prophets wrote.

The primary focus of the earliest chapters of Zechariah is on rebuilding the Second Temple. This effort began under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, but opposition from the new residents that had moved in after the Judeans were deported to Babylon... mostly the Samaritans... rather quickly brought the

reconstruction project to a halt. He was replaced by Zerubbabel who got the ball rolling again. However, the work still faced significant headwinds of both resistance and lack of funding. God stressed the crucial importance of finishing the Temple because, to Him, it represented the most visible symbol of the Mosaic Covenant, and thus had a tremendous effect upon the Judeans relationship with Him. God even expressed that the befuddling lack of production of food from their fields and orchards that these returnees were facing was because of their foot dragging on rebuilding the Temple. That is, God was the cause behind the poor harvests they had been suffering, and this situation would only be relieved when the Judeans got serious about rebuilding God's House.

When it comes to the nature of the material Zechariah has left us with, we can say a few things. First, although the Prophets prior to Zechariah (and Haggai) were decidedly against Assyria and then Babylon, Zechariah was pro-Persia. He clearly views Persia as beneficially carrying out God's will, and particularly His will as concerns Israel. Therefore, Zechariah did not seek for the Judeans to escape from Persia's rule and all it meant, but rather to help the people transition to Persian leadership rather than expecting or even hoping for Judean leadership. Second, this also meant convincing the people that since Persian rule was God's will, then they should not be thinking much in terms of working towards, or praying to Yehoveh to, restore an Israelite monarchy to rule over them. It would be a go-along-to-get-alone approach; simply accepting and living in a new reality. On the other hand, as the book progresses there is a warning not to get too entangled in Persian culture and especially not in Persian religion for fear of going astray and angering Yehoveh... a delicate balance for sure. And third, Zechariah operates substantially on symbolism. Symbolism is the language of apocalyptic prophecy because there is no other way to paint an understandable word picture of something that is far into the future, and of things that don't yet exist. That said, Zechariah's prophetic symbolism is generally considered the most difficult to decipher in the Bible, and I certainly agree with that.

What separates Zechariah's symbolism from that of other prophetic books isn't only the amount of it, it is that the symbolism can be hard to discern because is not contained in just one word or one object. Rather, we must look very closely at the entire sentence structure of the verse where the symbolism appears. The tiniest details of the sentence can be important. It is the structure and the details

that then must be examined within the context of what it meant to people living during that same time period and hearing Zechariah's message. Otherwise, we wind up with the quagmire we encounter today in which nearly every commentary on Zechariah disagrees with the others on the meaning of the symbolism. Because the backdrop of Zechariah's words is not often known, typically because it is generally not sought after, then the all-important context for determining the proper interpretation for each symbolic message goes missing and all interpretation is based on the conditions and the world issues in our time...or in whatever time the commentator wrote his thoughts. Bottom line: Zechariah is the most challenging book I've ever chosen to comment on. And, it is also one of the most poignant and applicable to our lives. So, this study is going to get necessarily complicated at times, and occasionally more than one possible interpretation of a symbol will be presented. Time and the playing out of history have solved some of the symbolic meanings, but since there is more to play out before the End, then some it will remain a mystery for now. With that, open your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 1.

READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 1 all

The first prophetic oracle from God to Zechariah occurred during the 2nd year of King Darius of Persia's reign. Although dates in years in those ancient times generally were given according to the time a particular king was reigning...which means each time a new king took over, the year was reset... it also means that every nation, which by definition has its own king, was therefore in a different year from all other nations... however, the month was given to us according to the unique biblical Hebrew calendar. So, saying it was the 8th month is not counting months as way to tell us how far into a year of the king's reign it was. This only means that this oracle to Zechariah happened in the Hebrew month of Heshvan, which correlates to our modern November/December timeframe. Interestingly, the form this date is given to us allows us to know that the prophecy given to Zechariah came only 2 months after the first prophetic oracle was given to Haggai. Even more, it also means that Zechariah's first prophetic oracle was received a full month *before* the final prophetic oracle that was given to Haggai. In other words, chronologically speaking, it was Haggai's first oracle, then Zechariah's first oracle, then Haggai's final oracle. So, this helps us to immediately notice how tightly woven together the books of Haggai and

Zechariah are, and by giving these dates in the manner they are presented it makes it nearly certain that these two Prophets worked together.

Staying within the first verse, most literally after the giving of the prophet's name and the date, we read **"the word of Yehoveh came"**. It is important that this is read literally (as I just gave it to you) according to the original Hebrew for the full meaning to take hold. I have much to say about this, but first, depending on your Bible, nearly every English Bible (or other foreign language version) will NOT use the word "Yehoveh" but rather it will say "The Lord". This is, quite simply, a well understood and conscious mistranslation that is nearly universally repeated literally thousands of times in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for "lord" is **adonai**, but that is not the Hebrew word we find here. "Yehoveh" is what we find, and it is the formal name of God that was revealed to Moses. I want to pause and take a detour about this matter because of the profound intent of Constantinian Christianity to obscure God's biblical name, and the equally profound consequences it has caused by doing so.

Before I explain, for those who have yet to catch on to what I mean by the term Constantinian Christianity it is this: it is the founding religious structure that all of what is typically today called "the church" owes its existence to. It was not established in its formative stage until the 4th century A.D. and was championed by the Roman Emperor Constantine and his mother who, together with some powerful Bishops primarily based in Rome, formed and ran this new faith based on a set of principles and doctrines that evolved over the next 300 years. The basic premise of this newly formed faith was a belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the needed Savior of mankind. Yet, immediately, this took a terrible turn by stating this was to be a gentiles-only religion, presented in a familiar Greek cultural backdrop, and for that to happen every element of Jewishness was to be removed from its practice. Thus, the prime institutional directive (in time) became: if the Jews practice it, we don't. If the Jews worship it, we don't. Therefore, Jews are to be directly excluded from being part of this new religion.

What is historically true, but less than comfortable for us to contend with, is that despite the implications and claims of the terms Church and Christianity, it has only *some* relationship to the faith Yeshua commanded and His disciples taught. This departure happened in order to make this new faith popular within the Greek-based Roman culture. So, Jesus necessarily had to be separated from His

inherent Jewishness and instead He had to don a more familiar Greek nature and appearance. In fact, in the last 3 or 4 decades, a few academic studies and books seeking to unearth what is often called "The Historical Jesus" have been published to confront what has been wrongly presented to us about Yeshua. But, what was to be done about which God this new religion was to worship? The Jews worshiped God the Father; yet to emphasize that particular God would have kept this new gentiles-only religion tied a little too closely to ancient Jewish religious and worship practices. So, some fundamental changes had to occur. One of the most important had to be to somewhat diminish the place of God the Father, and at the same time to elevate the place of God the Son. This primarily revolved around the exchange of names and redefining some terms. With this much too brief explanation of the origins of Christianity as we know it, let's get back to why even though we find the name "Yehoveh" 6800 times in the original Hebrew Old Testament, in the Christian Bible it has been changed to "The Lord" nearly all of those times (the amount varying only slightly from version to version).

In Exodus chapter 3 we read this:

CJB Exodus 3:15 *God said further to Moshe, "Say this to the people of Isra'el: 'Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [ADONAI], the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitz'chak and the God of Ya'akov, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever; this is how I am to be remembered generation after generation.*

This CJB translation was created by David Stearns and was meant for a Jewish splinter group generally labeled as Messianic Jews. Thus, he needed to be sensitive to some Jewish cultural traditions or an only moderately religious Jew would have vehemently rejected His Bible version. A standard Jewish cultural taboo that began in the late 300's B.C. was that God's name should not be spoken or written. Therefore, they substituted for Yehoveh with the terms adonai, hashem, and a couple of others. The Young's Literal Translation puts this same verse in Exodus 3, this way:

YLT Exodus 3:15 *And God saith again unto Moses, 'Thus dost thou say unto the sons of Israel, Jehovah, God of your fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you; this is My name -- to the age, and this My memorial, to generation -- generation.*

In the original Hebrew God's name is given to us using the Hebrew letters Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh. These all are consonants (the Hebrew language uses an all-consonant alphabet), which means vowel sounds have to be supplied in order to speak it. Most modern commentators say that when spoken the word sounds like Yah-weh; but I think it is a 3-syllable word (not 2) and it sounds something like Yehoveh or Yehovah. Long ago, when this name was converted to English, for some reason the Y sound was dropped and the J sound was substituted for it, even though in Hebrew there is no such thing as a letter that gives us the J sound. The result was the familiar Jehovah. But do notice that Jehovah is 3 syllables because this follows the Latin, which was a very early form of the Christian Bible, and so it likely shows at least how many syllables the name of God consists of, as well as more or less how it was pronounced at least by gentiles of the Roman Empire in the early Constantinian Church age, and immediately thereafter.

But then, we get to other Bible translations and we see this:

KJV Exodus 3:15 And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.

Notice how in the KJV, God's name is dropped entirely, and instead the term "the Lord" is inserted. It is this way today in nearly all Bible versions. Why? Why drop God's name? Do not think it is in sympathy or respect for the Jews because Constantinian Christianity had, and has, little but contempt for Jews. The original Hebrew is not at all difficult to recognize or translate. No one with even a basic understanding of Hebrew can accidentally mistake the Hebrew **Yehoveh** for the Hebrew **adonai**. So, again I pose the question: why do nearly all Christian Bibles use the word Lord (**adonai**) in place of what is clearly written in the original Hebrew Old Testament?

I have been told by more than a few that this must be a pet peeve of mine because I certainly bring it up with enough regularity. I suppose that is true; but only because I grew up in the Church, and found salvation there, but never at any time had any idea that God's name was actually peppered throughout the

Old Testament, giving it tremendous importance, but it had been removed. It occurred to me that when we see something in our Bibles that is grossly mistranslated and it is done over 6000 times, there has to be a reason for it...and, there is. It is because Constantinian Christianity from Catholicism to Protestantism to Orthodox wants to minimize the image and idea of God the Father in the Bible and to replace it with the image and idea of God the Son. Why? Because the intended implication of Constantinian Christianity is that God the Father is the God of the Jews, while God the Son is the God of gentile Christians. And since Constantinian Christianity was created in the 4th century to be a new and strictly gentiles-only religion, then it can only be that from the view of the Roman Bishops who founded it, the Hebrew name Yehoveh applies ONLY to the God of the Old Testament, while the Greek-based name Jesus applies ONLY to the God of the New Testament. It is a terrible distortion of the truth and it must be exposed for all its consequential reasons. It misleads in so many ways...which it was intended to do... and we'll see in the final chapter of Zechariah how that reality plays a most significant role. I want to continue a bit longer with this because of its supreme importance to all of us who worship God and His Son, Yeshua.

Yeshua, in Matthew chapter 6, told His followers that there is a pattern after which we are to pray. If you are a Believer (and even if you're not) you already know it, but perhaps you've never given the words of this prayer model much thought and therefore what Christ is telling us to.

^{KJV} Matthew 6:9 *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

Think on those words. Yeshua told us to always direct our prayers to...who? The Father. And what was to be set apart as holy? His name. The Christian Bible says that God's name is "The Lord". The original Hebrew Bible says God's name is Yehoveh. Which then leads us to this question: to whom are we to pray, today? The Church says we are to pray to Jesus (the Catholic Church would add Mary to that). But, is that even what the New Testament actually says?

Folks, if we misname God The Father, or we mischaracterize Him, or we try to substitute His Son for Him, then we are committing a terrible error at the least,

or really we have no idea who or what we are actually worshipping at worst. Listen to this Bible passage, which is another one we're all familiar with:

KJV Exodus 20:7 *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

This is the way we have all grown up hearing and learning this commandment. But now let's listen to this verse literally translated from the original Hebrew.

YLT Exodus 20:7 *'Thou dost not take up the name of Jehovah thy God for a vain thing, for Jehovah acquitteth not him who taketh up His name for a vain thing.*

Did you hear the difference? Virtually all English Bibles mistranslate this verse. This verse is from the 10 Commandments and it is traditionally called the 3rd commandment; it is all about the use of God's name. But, our English Bibles have removed God's name and substituted it with "The Lord". I can say no other than this a grievous thing that has been done, and it amounts to nothing less than, itself, taking the name of God in vain.

Virtually the entire Bible, and the essence of our faith, is dependent upon knowing and calling out to God using His name. Our prayers are dependent about calling out to Our Father. We are indeed to rely on Yeshua as our Mediator and our divine Savior, and therefore it is in Yeshua's name we are to pray to The Father. But always, it is to The Father that our prayers are to be directed, and His name is Yehoveh.

For many of you...maybe most... this may be startling, unsettling, and maybe make you a bit angry that I explained it; yet, it is true and I am far from the first to speak of it. Now that you have heard this, however, I have done you no favor. It likely means you have to consider forming an entirely new mental image in your prayer life by picturing yourself beseeching Yeshua's Father, Yehoveh, and not The Son, Yeshua, to hear you. But, I have no qualms about asking you to do this because all you would be doing is following Our Savior's directive and His Father's command to do exactly that. This is just one more reason why each of us is responsible to very carefully examine where we place our faith loyalties; with the biblical truth or with our denomination's doctrines and traditions. Never think

that the line between those two choices is only a line's width; it is a chasm larger than the Grand Canyon. No man is able to straddle it and so, you, me...all of us... must make a decision and a choice.

Therefore, I want to conclude today's Torah Class lesson with this Bible passage and ask you to contemplate it, and to pray to your Father and mine about how you are to apply it to your life and to your faith practices and relationships.

CJB Revelation 18:4-5 ***⁴ Then I heard another voice out of heaven say: "My people, come out of her! so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not be infected by her plagues, ⁵ for her sins are a sticky mass piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.***

We will continue with the Book of Zechariah next time.