

# Zechariah: a kingdom perspective



Allen J Browne

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Perth, Western Australia  
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About the author:

<https://allenbrowne.blog/about/>

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# Introduction

This is not a verse-by-verse exposition of Zechariah. Plenty of commentaries already do that. This one views Zechariah's visions from a particular angle, a kingdom perspective.

Why Zechariah? While studying Matthew's Gospel, I found Jesus repeatedly referring to Zechariah. Along with the Psalms and the major prophets, Zechariah was crucial to how Jesus understood his mission and message — what he was doing, and his good news of the kingdom. To understand the Christ, I needed to see what he saw in Zechariah.

We haven't always found Zechariah easy. Around AD 400, Jerome translated the Bible into Latin. He called Zechariah "the longest and most obscure of the Twelve Minor Prophets."

## Tips for understanding Zechariah

Begin by asking what God was saying to the returning exiles through Zechariah. Our first enquiry isn't about Jesus or ourselves. It's about God's message for a people whose world had fallen apart when Babylon invaded their city, cut off the worship of their God, terminated the reign of their kings, and swallowed their nation.

After hearing Zechariah as Hebrew Scripture, we can see what Jesus made of the book centuries later. The temple had been restored, but the kingdom had not. His people were still ruled by foreigners. Zechariah's vision of a victory parade with the peaceful king entering Jerusalem on a donkey remained unfulfilled. What Jesus made of Zechariah becomes a second level of enquiry, a fresh interpretation that assumes we've understood the first one.

Only then can we understand how to apply Zechariah today. Skip the first two stages, and the book will remain a puzzle. Pursue the three stages in order, and the book will unfold as one of the most magnificent visions anywhere in Scripture, the promise of God restoring his reign to a fallen creation.

## Zechariah's setting

Babylon had fallen to Persia, and the children of the exiles were beginning to return to Jerusalem to try to rebuild their broken identity as God's nation. Zechariah declares that God has not abandoned them: as they return, God will return to them (1:3).

Zechariah focuses on two markers of God's presence: the temple, and the kingship. Building the temple was their invitation for their heavenly sovereign to live among them and lead them. The kingship was the expression of God's reign on earth through his anointed leaders, the descendants of King David.

Along with Haggai, Zechariah encourages them to complete the second temple, the replacement for the one Babylon destroyed. Around 515 BC they complete this task and install a high priest named Joshua.

But they're unable to restore the Davidic kingship. The Persian rulers permitted them to build a temple to their God, but appointing a king would be an act of treason. Descendants of

King David such as Zerubbabel cannot be king at this stage. Zechariah declares that, one day, God will restore them as a nation under his reign.

But centuries rolled by and God's nation did not resurface. As new empires rose to swallow the old ones, the Jewish people found themselves in the stomachs of Babylon, Persia, and then Greece as Alexander conquered Persia around 334 BC.

Chapters 9-14 deal with this later time, the Greek invasion (9:13). These chapters are not described as messages given to Zechariah, unlike the earlier prophetic words (1:1, 7; 7:1, 8; and by implication 8:1).

These later chapters are a different kind of prophetic mediation (a *mās-šā* in 9:1; 12:1), a response to the reality that the kingdom has not been restored. In the face of failed leadership (shepherds), the restoration of the kingdom becomes the main focus of the book.

Unsurprisingly, these later chapters are the ones Jesus refers to:

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* (Zechariah 9:9).

### **How God fulfils these promises**

Zechariah expresses so much of Jesus' kingdom expectations, his *good news of the kingdom*, his prophetic acts and teaching of the people, his role as the shepherd, struck down, traded for 30 pieces of silver, his mission to restore the reign of God for the people of God and for the nations who mourn over the pierced king. All of this flows like a confluent stream from the kingdom promises of Zechariah 9-14.

Join me as we explore the message of Zechariah in its settings and examine how that message informed Jesus' identity and ministry. That's how Zechariah's message shapes the identity and ministry of those who are in Christ, participants in the reign of God's anointed leader for humanity.

Allen Browne  
October, 2021.

# **Part 1**

## **Return and I'll return to you (Zechariah 1-9)**

# Zechariah's hope of kingdom restoration (Zechariah 1–2)

*Prophets like Zechariah delivered God's promise to restore his kingdom after the exile. What they said informed Jesus' kingdom ministry.*

Jesus was not the first to proclaim the kingdom of God. That was already Israel's story when God anointed David to rule on earth, and when God established Israel as his nation at Sinai. It was the hope for the nations promised to Abraham. It was the covenant God made with all people through Noah. By design, humans exist as images of the heavenly sovereign in his earthly creation.

What was unique was Jesus' vision of how the kingdom of heaven would be restored to the earth. There was a whole history of getting off-track in the generations of Adam, Noah, Israel, and David. Then it completely fell apart when Babylon took the nation into captivity, destroying the symbols of God's kingship: the house of God (with the ark that represented his throne), and the house of David (the anointed kings who that represented his reign).

So, how did Jesus envision the restoration of God's reign? In part, his kingdom vision was shaped by the promises God gave through the prophets, particularly Zechariah.

## God's reign

Almost 70 years after the exile, people began returning to Jerusalem to rebuild. That's when Zechariah began declaring visions of the restored kingdom. He said that God had scattered them among the nations, but God would gather them and reign over them again. Jesus' kingdom vision is full of echoes, allusions, and quotations from Zechariah.

The returning exiles felt that God had rejected them, giving them over to foreign rule. But the word of the one who rules all (YHWH of hosts) was this: *Return to me, and I will return to you* (Zechariah 1:3). It was a call to literal return, and to behave differently to their ancestors (1:4-6).

Matthew says that Jesus was God returning to his people: *God with us* (Matthew 1:23). So, when God finally came to his people, did they respond better than their ancestors? They were worse, rejecting Jesus just as their ancestors had rejected the prophets, specifically Zechariah (Matthew 23:30-36).

## God's house

The LORD declared, *I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt* (Zechariah 1:16). God's house was the palace they built for their Sovereign to live among them and lead them (Exodus 26–40). When David offered to build God a more permanent house, God responded by establishing the house of David — his anointed rulers in perpetuity. Together, the temple (house of God) and the kingship (house of David) represented God's reign over his nation (2 Samuel 7).

The destruction of these twin symbols (temple and kingship) represented the loss of God's rule over his people. Zechariah's promise of the rebuilding of God's house is therefore a symbol of YHWH's return to reign over his people.

This temple was dedicated to YHWH around 515 BC. This second temple (with centuries of maintenance and refurbishment) was the one Jesus visited on his triumphal entry. But it had ceased to be God's house, where they could approach his throne for help. It was occupied by robbers ([Matthew 21:13](#)), and what these gangsters were about to do to him was worse than their ancestors. That's why God had left the house ([23:38](#)), guaranteeing that it would suffer the same fate as the first temple ([24:2](#)). That would be a time of great distress ([24:15-28](#)), but God's kingship would be restored in him ([24:30](#); [26:61](#); [27:40](#)).

## God's man gathering his scattered flock

The exile had decimated God's kingdom. As if wild animals had attacked and gored God's flock, they were now scattered among the kingdoms of the world (Zechariah 1:18-21). Zechariah was God's voice, proclaiming the sovereign's call to gather his people as a rebuilt kingdom under his governance ([2:1-5](#)). The God who *scattered you to the four winds of heaven* ([2:6](#)) was leading an Exodus-like escape from Babylon ([2:7](#)) through the Moses-like leader he would send to his people ([2:8-9](#), compare Deuteronomy 18:15).

Zechariah was proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom — the good news of God gathering his scattered people back into his kingship: *"Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD* (Zechariah 2:10).

And it's more! To release Israel from the nations, YHWH's reign must extend to managing the nations also, just as YHWH demonstrated his authority over Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21-22; 5:1-2; 6:13, 29-30; [8:1](#) etc). The new Moses therefore transforms the earth, bringing the nations under God's reign:

### **Zechariah 2:11-12 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup> Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. <sup>12</sup> The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem.

Matthew understands Jesus as this Moses-like figure, establishing God's kingdom as Moses did: resolving their captivity ([Matthew 1:17](#)), leading the promised exodus ([2:15](#)), bringing the kingdom near ([3:2](#)), overcoming the enemy in the wilderness ([4:1-11](#)), leading the exiles out of darkness ([4:12-17](#)), proclaiming and enacting the good news of the kingdom beyond the borders ([4:23-25](#)), leading the people to the mountain to hear the word of the Lord ([5:1](#)), fulfilling the Law for his people ([5:17](#)), calling them to enact God's heart for the benefit of nations ([5:43-48](#)). Like Moses delivering the Law of the Lord, Jesus declares that obedience to him is obedience to God ([7:24-29](#)). He has authority over uncleanness ([8:1-4](#)), foreign forces ([8:5-13](#)), diseases of his people ([8:14-17](#)). He has authority to release from everything that overwhelms us: natural disaster ([8:23-27](#)), spiritual enslavement ([8:28-34](#)), and the sin that cripples us ([9:1-8](#)).

Jesus leads as the new Moses. He warns the disobedient ([11:20-24](#)). He is lord of the Sabbath ([12:1-14](#)), the servant of YHWH ([12:15-36](#)). He provides bread in the wilderness ([14:13-21](#)). The new Moses redefines what defiles ([15:10-20](#)), the boundaries of the covenant ([15:21-39](#)),



the assembly that gathers around God (16:18-19), and the way to the kingdom (16:21-28). His face glowed as he met God on the mountain (17:1-3). He redefined life under God's reign (Matthew 18-19), setting up twelve leaders for God's people (19:28). He redefines Passover as the new covenant (26:17-29). The Torah concludes with Moses dying on the mountain (Deuteronomy 34), but Matthew concludes with Jesus alive on the mountain, commissioning the twelve to bring the nations into his enduring presence (28:16-20).

## Conclusion

Well, that's just the first two chapters of Zechariah's vision for kingdom restoration. I hope you can see that it's not a matter of Zechariah predicting what Jesus would do, but of Jesus being the fulfilment of God's enduring promise to gather his scattered flock from among the nations and bring the nations under God's reign.

To understand the gospel according to Jesus (the good news of the kingdom) we need to hear the kingdom announcements of the prophets like Zechariah. This is the foundation for what Jesus was doing, the story he was living, and the surprising way he expected to re-establish earth as a kingdom of heaven.

## What others are saying

Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 43-44:

While Haggai focuses on the physical restoration of the temple with a concluding hope for restoration of Davidic royal rule, Zechariah places priority on a covenantal renewal that will ensure an even broader restoration of the physical infrastructure (temple, city, province), material prosperity (city and province), communal leadership (priestly, royal, prophetic), and global impact (the nations). ...

The language and content of the book of Zechariah shaped the future vision of the early church, creating expectation of the ultimate destination of history and the role of God, his people, the nations, and all creation in the last days (e.g., Rev. 11:1-14; 22:1, 5). ...

The vision for restoration seen within the book reveals Yahweh's commitment to renewal that transcends material renewal and seeks for deep spiritual and relational renewal. All of this is only possible, as we discover in the New Testament, through the sacrifice of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

## Priest of the restored kingdom (Zechariah 3)

*How does Zechariah's story about a high priest in filthy rags relate to Jesus?*

The prophets inspired Jesus' kingdom vision. After God's nation disintegrated in the exile, prophets like Zechariah delivered God's promise to restore his kingdom. He said that God had scattered them among the nations because of their unfaithfulness, and God would gather them as his kingdom again because of his covenant faithfulness (Zechariah 1–2).

The two markers of God's kingship in Jerusalem were gone: the house of God (the palace for his throne), and the house of David (the anointed kingship representing his reign). Zechariah addresses these two problems in Chapters 3 and 4.

The temple was where the priests (intermediaries between the heavenly sovereign and his people) maintained the covenant relationship, as specified in his Law. Without the temple, they were unable to maintain this relationship.

The high priest was meant to be dressed in linen robes, bearing the symbols of the twelve tribes on his vest as he entered God's holy presence to make atonement between the sovereign and his people (Exodus 28). Without these temple rituals, he was unable to restore the covenant relationship, so they were stuck in exile. That's the accusation the *satan* brings: the high priest who represents the people to God is covered with their filth, their covenant unfaithfulness, the reason they went into exile in the first place. The accuser's point is that there is no way for this high priest, dressed in the filthy rags of the homeless people, to restore the nation into covenant relationship with their holy sovereign.

But that's a one-sided argument. The covenant has two sides. The people are incapable of restoring covenant relationship, but the LORD can rescue them (3:2). God can remove the filth of the people that the high priest is wearing, and gift him the garments he needs to function as mediator between God and his people (3:4-5). The high priest's name contains the message of who performs the covenant rescue: *Joshua* means "YHWH saves."

So, God's first step is to restore Joshua the high priest, appointing him to look after the courts of the heavenly king and his presence among his people (3:7). This enabled the second temple to function when it was dedicated in 515 BC.

But that's just the first step towards the restoration. For the kingdom of God to be restored, the kingship must be restored as well:

### ***Zechariah 3:8–10 (NIV)***

<sup>8</sup> *'Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. <sup>9</sup> See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. <sup>10</sup> In that day each of you will invite your neighbour to sit under your vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty.*

We recognize the Branch as a metaphor used by other prophets for the promised king. The exile felled David's family tree, but God promised a shoot from the stump, a son of David who would reign as God's anointed (e.g. Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5). The coronation of God's Anointed would signal the end of exile, that *the sin of the land* no longer isolated the nation from their sovereign in heaven.

The kingdom is restored by God restoring a) the servant who maintains relationship with God in his house and b) the servant who reigns in David's house as God's anointed. Zechariah has more to say about these two characters in Chapter 4.

## Relevance to Jesus

Matthew's Gospel opens by summarizing the story of the kingdom of God in three stages:

- the rise of the kingdom, from Abraham to David (Matthew 1:2-6)
- the demise of the kingdom, from David to the exile (1:7-11)
- the Davidic descendants who were unable to reign, due to captivity to foreign powers (1:12-16).

They desperately need God anointed ruler. Matthew effusively tells us he has come (1:1, 1:16, 1:17; 1:18; 2:4).

In fact, a messenger from heaven instructed Jesus' parents to give him the same name as the priest who established the second temple: *You are to give him the name Jesus [=Joshua in Hebrew], because he will save his people from their sins* (1:21).

That's the issue Zechariah 3 addresses: how could Joshua the high priest — dressed in the covenant failures of his people — take away the sin that held them in captivity?

Matthew says that God has sent a new *Joshua*, born into captivity. The temple restored in Zechariah's day was still standing, but the high priest (Caiaphas) wasn't helping. According to Jesus, all the blood of previous generations is coming on the temple gangsters who ordered the execution of the one God sent to save his people (21:13; 23:29-36; 26:65-66).

So how could the kingdom of God be restored when the temple servants were dressed in blood-soaked rags? That was Satan's accusation. The initiative would have to come from the other side of the covenant: *The LORD rebuke you, Satan! ... Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?* (Zechariah 3:2).

And that is precisely what God did: rescuing his man, the new Joshua, from destruction when the rulers put him to death, raising up out of death and giving him authority to *govern my house and have charge of my courts* (3:7).

That's how God saves his people. In saving his Anointed from the grave, God has also rescued the community that exists in him. In raising him from death to the throne — the Branch sprouting from David's dead stump — God has restored his people into covenant relationship as his kingdom, *removing the sin of the land in a single day* (Zechariah 3:9).

Zechariah saw the second temple in his day, but he did not see the restoration of the kingdom through the Branch from David's line. He recognized that what he was seeing was only *a sign of things to come* (3:8). We see more in the later visions of Zechariah: the king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey to proclaim peace to the nations in fulfilment of God's

covenant (Zechariah 9:9-11). This is how the world becomes the community at peace under God's providence (3:10).

This is the backstory for the promises Jesus proclaimed, the good news of God's kingship for the world, the good news of the kingdom of God.

## What others are saying

Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come*, BST (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 88:

*The Branch* by this time has become a technical term for the Messiah, the ideal future king of David's line. This brings us to an astonishing promise, which bridges the gap between what Zechariah has just seen in the vision and the massive problem that faces the whole community in the real world. It is a promise that sums up the good news of the gospel in a single sentence: *I will remove the sin of this land in a single day* (9b). That is, what Zechariah has just seen done symbolically for Joshua the high priest will one day be done actually for the whole *land* (the entire community).

## Rulers of the restored kingdom (Zechariah 4)

*Two olive trees supporting the menorah? How does this relate to Jesus?*

Matthew promotes Jesus' agenda — the kingdom of God — as the fulfilment of the promises God gave through the prophets, with numerous allusions to Zechariah. We're looking at how Zechariah's visions informed Jesus' agenda.

When the kingdom fell apart and the people were exiled to Babylon, Zechariah delivered God's call for the exiles to return (1:3), declaring that God would lead them home like a new exodus (2:6-12). He said they would see the twin signs of God's leadership over them: Joshua the cleansed high priest in God's house, and "the Branch" of David's house who would reign as God's anointed (3:8).

The first thing God asked his nation to do when he established the covenant was to build a house for their sovereign to live among them and lead them. The central furniture of this house was the ark, a throne set for God in the most holy chamber where he sat *enthroned between the cherubim* (1 Samuel 4:4 etc). But after the exile, they no longer had the ark (Jeremiah 3:16), so Zechariah's vision centres on another furnishing: the *mênôrāh*, the seven-branched lampstand bringing light in God's house (4:2).

Zechariah saw the light of God's presence powered by two living olive trees, two people who embody God's leadership for his people:

- Joshua the high priest, whom God restored for this role (3:1-7).
- Zerubbabel, governor of Judah (Haggai 1:14), descendant of Jehoiachin the captive king (1 Chronicles 3:17-19; 2 Kings 25:27-30).

### The regal promise

If the kingdom was restored, Zerubbabel might be king, so he has a role to play in the restoration. But Zerubbabel is not king. He has no chance of overpowering the Persian Empire that rules God's people. He has no army, no weapons, just some returning exiles rebuilding their homes among the rubble. How can he restore the kingdom of God?

#### ***Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)***

*This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.*

The kingdom was not restored in Zerubbabel's lifetime, nor in his son's or his grandson's time. Eleven generations later when Jesus was born into Zerubbabel's family, the kingdom had still not been restored (Matthew 1:13-17). Jesus believed that *the time had come*, that *the kingdom of God was close* (Mark 1:15). This was his calling.

So, why didn't Jesus do what the heroes of old had done, driving their enemies from the land like Joshua, fighting those who opposed him like his father David? Where on earth did Jesus get the idea he was to train his followers to love their enemies rather than kill them?

This is how Jesus understood the Prophets. The word passed down to him through the generations of Zerubbabel said, *Not by military might, nor by a leader enforcing his power.* God would restore his kingdom *by my Spirit.* And what would the Spirit lead God's anointed messiah to do? Jesus knew from the Prophets, from passages like Isaiah 61 (quoted in Luke 4:17-21).

## The regal task

So, what specifically was Zerubbabel being asked to do in his time? To cooperate with Joshua in building the temple, a house for their heavenly sovereign to live among them and lead his people, since the restoration comes from his Spirit and not human strength.

But, oh what a mess it was! The temple mount was a hill of heart-breaking ruins, burnt timber, and smashed stones. For the returning exiles, even levelling the site felt like an insurmountable task. The Spirit of the Lord continued with this word for Zerubbabel:

### **Zechariah 4:7-9**

<sup>7</sup>“What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’”

<sup>8</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>9</sup>“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it.”

And that's what happened in 515 BC. Joshua the cleansed high priest and Zerubbabel the Spirit-anointed son of David completed the second temple, inviting God to return to his returning people and reign over them as his kingdom. They cooperated like two olive trees supplying the menorah, the light of God's presence among his people in the house they built for him.

As the centuries ticked by, God's people waited for the kingship to be restored as the temple had been. Some at Qumran even hoped for two messiahs: an anointed king and an anointed priest, like the two olive trees supporting the light of God in Zechariah's vision (1QS ix:11).

## The regal conflict

But two leaders as God's anointed? Doesn't that have the potential for conflict? Couldn't that damage the temple rather than build it? That is what happened when God's Anointed king finally arrived.

The high priest (Caiaphas) refused to recognize Jesus' authority, accusing him of threatening the temple (Matthew 21:12-16; 26:55, 61; 27:40). The kingly Messiah said the temple had ceased to be God's house and become a gangster's den (21:13). The evidence that they were play-actors and not God's servants was that they planned to kill God's anointed king (21:38; 23:29-36). Jesus said that God had moved out of the temple (23:38), so the beautiful buildings on Mount Zion were no more than a pile of rubble interfering with God's reign, and that's what it would become (24:2).

Observe carefully how Jesus conducted that conflict. He confronted the temple and warned its leaders, but he made no attempt to overthrow it with his power. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit* — that was the word God had given the Davidic kingship.

But doesn't that leave him vulnerable if he doesn't kill his enemies, even in self-defense? Couldn't his enemies kill him, *the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law* (Matthew 16:16)? Won't it all end as one more disaster in the injustice of history, one more failure to restore God's reign?

That's not what Jesus believes. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.* Jesus believes that the life-giving Spirit of God will raise him from the dead if they kill him. The rubble on the temple mount was no obstacle to his kingship.

He asked his disciples to believe it too:

**Mark 11:22–23**

<sup>22</sup> *“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. <sup>23</sup> “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.”*

In the context of the short walk from Bethany to Jerusalem, there's only one significant candidate for *this mountain*.

Not even death — not even death originating from the temple mount — can stand as obstacle to the authority of God's anointed.

The promises God gave Zerubbabel are ultimately fulfilled in his descendant, eleven generations later:

**Zechariah 4:6–7**

<sup>6</sup> *This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.*

<sup>7</sup> *“What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’”*

Capstone? Jesus is building a different temple for God to live among his people? Yep! That's what he believes to be his role (Matthew 21:42 quoting Psalm 118), just as God commanded his ancestor.

## Conclusion

Temple. Priesthood. Kingship. Promised kingdom. All the promises of the prophets find fulfilment in God's anointed (the Christ) who fulfils both roles in God's kingdom: priestly mediator, and anointed king.

We see the *son of man* walking *among the lampstands* of God's house. He's *the beginning and the end* of the story, *the Living One* who *was dead* and is now *alive for ever and ever*, leading and empowering the assemblies that embody his reign on earth (Revelation 1:12-20).

## What others are saying

Craig A. Evans, *From Jesus to the Church: The First Christian Generation*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 50:

Jesus uses traditions from Daniel, Zechariah, and the second half of Isaiah. All three of these books play a major role in Jesus' theology; and all three reflect periods of exile in the life and history of Israel. Daniel reflects an exilic

perspective, ostensibly the Babylonian exile (sixth century BCE), but in reality the Seleucid period of oppression and terror (second century BCE). Zechariah stems from the exilic period and entertains hopes that Israel's kingdom will be restored under the leadership of the "two sons of oil" (4:14, lit.), Zerubbabel of Davidic descent and Joshua the high priest. Second Isaiah calls for a new exodus and a new Israel, which he dubs the Servant of the Lord. Jesus' utilization of these books, indeed his being informed and shaped by them, is very revealing. It strongly suggests that Jesus identifies himself and his mission with an oppressed Israel in need of redemption, and that he himself is the agent of redemption. He is the Danielic "Son of man" to whom kingdom and authority are entrusted. He is the humble Davidic king of Zechariah's vision who enters the temple precincts, offers himself to the high priest, and takes umbrage at temple polity. And he is the eschatological herald of Isaiah who proclaims the "gospel" of God's reign and the new exodus. All of this suggests that, among other things, Jesus understands his message and ministry as the beginning of the end of Israel's exile.



## Why exile? (Zechariah 5)

*As Zechariah calls the exiles home, he sees two explanations of why they went to Babylon.*

Zechariah began with God's promise that he would return to reign over his people if they returned to him from Babylon (1:3). Like a married couple getting together after a separation, it's important that they don't just repeat the mistakes of the past. They need to learn from their ancestors' mistakes (1:2-6).

God promised he would restore his leaders for the community, the high priest and the Davidic king. They would lead God's people to rebuild the temple where God would be present among them and lead his people (Zechariah 2-4).

But why did God send them into exile in the first place? That's what the two visions of Zechariah 5 address.

### Edict for exile (5:1-4)

Zechariah sees a scroll flying overhead. It's a completely unwieldy scroll: at 4.5 metres tall it's nearly double the ceiling height of your house, and unrolls to 9 metres long (10 x 20 cubits). There's a lot of writing (both sides), and it reads like a court document explaining the exile:

#### ***Zechariah 5:1-4 (NIV)***

<sup>1</sup> *I looked again, and there before me was a flying scroll.*

<sup>2</sup> *He asked me, "What do you see?"*

*I answered, "I see a flying scroll, twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide."*

<sup>3</sup> *And he said to me, "This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. <sup>4</sup>The LORD Almighty declares, 'I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in that house and destroy it completely, both its timbers and its stones.'"*

This document did not originate from an earthly court. Its declarations are from a higher court, the decrees of the ultimate sovereign over everything and everyone in heaven and on earth (YHWH of hosts). It addresses covenant violations.

The foundational Ten Words of the covenant Israel accepted when they became a nation under God's rule included, *You shall not steal* (Exodus 20:15), but there are thieves among God's people. They deserve to be sent into exile in accordance with the terms of the covenant that obedience would bring blessings while disobedience would bring curses such as banishment from God's kingdom to live under human rulers (Deuteronomy 28:36).

But there's more. The other side of the scroll alleges that Israel's courts were not dealing with these injustices. Others in the community were complicit in blocking justice by supporting the thief when his case came to court — bearing false witness. That's why God sent everyone in exile: the wider community supported the injustice.

The rot had spread through the whole house of Israel. For a house decaying like that, God's Law declared: *It must be torn down — its stones, timbers and all the plaster — and taken out of the town to an unclean place* (Leviticus 14:45). What a metaphor for exile to Babylon!

## Hidden unfaithfulness (5:5-11)

Zechariah sees a basket hanging over his head. Hidden in the measuring basket is something the people see but don't own up to. They pretend to be good upright citizens, but they have a hidden mistress, pushed down out of view, under a lead weight. The vision reveals another covenant violation: *You shall not commit adultery* (Exodus 20:14).

The hidden mistress represents the whole community: that's who was carted into exile. Instead of remaining devoted to the one LORD, the only sovereign ruler of the covenant people, they have been engaging with other rulers such as Egypt (Jeremiah 2; Isaiah 30–31, 36) and Babylon (Isaiah 39; Ezekiel 16:33-39), hoping God would not see how they'd gone behind his back. The most shocking descriptor for God's holy people is: *This is wickedness* (5:8).

Since they gave themselves as lovers of other rulers, there's no surprise that God sent them away in exile to the nations they gave themselves to. That's the reason for the exile.

What is surprising is that God provides a house for them as they join his rival:

### **Zechariah 5:10–11**

<sup>10</sup> "Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me.

<sup>11</sup> He replied, "To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When the house is ready, the basket will be set there in its place."

Why would God do such a thing? The house they built for him in Jerusalem is demolished because of their unfaithfulness, but he still builds a house for his unfaithful people in Babylon? That is beyond generous. Do you think he still hopes she will come back one day? Like, *Return to me, and I will return to you* (Zechariah 1:3)?

## Conclusion

Divine justice demanded God deal with his decaying house, the uncleanness of the nation that was supposed to be his Holy Place on earth — the flying-scroll vision.

Divine love demanded God face the hidden unfaithfulness of his partner — the hidden-mistress vision.

When he sent her away, it probably felt like a divorce. But as Isaiah put it, God never filled out the paperwork (Isaiah 50:1). He always hoped they would come back home, rebuild the house, restore the covenant with their sovereign, be the kingdom of God.

## Note: size of the flying scroll

People argue over what the 20 x 10 cubit dimensions of the scroll could have meant to Zechariah. For example, Carol and Eric Meyers identify some options from Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6): "the meeting place between priest and populace," or the combined "size of the two cherubim" (*Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, Anchor Yale Bible, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 280–281).

But if the prophet was calling the people back to the Torah rather than the fallen temple, there's another possibility. It's the size of the Holy Place in the Tabernacle.

The covenant had two sides (the heavenly sovereign, and his earthly people), so his house had two rooms: the Most Holy throne room reserved for God alone, and the Holy Place where his dedicated servants (priests) served God and mediated the covenant to the people. From God's perspective, he expects to see the Holy Place. But what he sees between himself and his people is a document of covenant violations, accusations against the people in the same vein as Satan's accusations against Joshua (3:1). The people's side of the covenant is no longer a Holy Place in union with their sovereign's side, the Most Holy Place. That's why they went into exile.

## Who wears the crown? (Zechariah 6)

*The two visions of Zechariah 6 answer these questions: Who's running the world, and who represents him on earth?*

We love to think we're shaping our own destinies, living the dream of being whatever we want. Truth is, none of us controls the world. Much bigger hands shape our history, our nation, our economy, our opportunities. Corporate takeovers can make me redundant. Disasters can destroy my environment.

So, who is in control? Conspiracy theorists promote all sorts of hidden groups, but none of them run the world. There is only one God, one sovereign.

That's how Israel thought until Babylon swept down from the north and captured God's nation. Nebuchadnezzar told them he was in charge of their destiny — him and his gods. But that didn't last. Persia swept in from the east, capturing the Babylonian Empire (including Israel), so who was controlling the world now? Their experience seemed as unstable as the wind.

The two visions of Zechariah 6 address the question of who is in charge.

### Who's in charge of the winds? (6:1-8)

The sight of four chariots emerging from a pass between the mountains would have been terrifying for the prophet, like a premonition of invasion (6:1). Over the centuries, Israel had experienced chariots invading from the south (Egypt) and the north (Assyria/Babylon). But the army in Zechariah's vision has different coloured horses (suggesting he's well supplied), and the horses are powerful: *all of them powerful* (6:2-3).

Surely there can't be another invasion after all they've been through? The returning exiles haven't even had a chance to rebuild yet. Zechariah doesn't know what army is coming. He asks, *What are these, my lord?* (6:4)

His guide says, *These are the four rû<sup>ah</sup> of the heavens* (6:5). *rû<sup>ah</sup>* is the Hebrew word for spirit, wind, or breath. Did the angel say these were "the four winds of the sky" or "the four spirits of Heaven"? It all depends on whether you relate it to our realm or God's. Both are possible from the context: *the presence of the Lord* suggests Heaven, but the four compass points suggest something like the winds on earth.

Maybe these two realms are not as separate as we think. Heaven is more engaged with what happens here on earth than we realize. From winds to wars, our world is God's world — governed by the spiritual realm. The point of the *four rû<sup>ah</sup>* is the connectedness of our world with God's: *they go out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world* (6:5).

The horses and chariots of Zechariah's vision are not another foreign power coming to invade God's people and force them to become part of their kingdom. God is the sovereign ruler who governs us, so the vision reveals earth is a kingdom of heaven.

Earth is not controlled by the superpowers of the day, whether Persia or Babylon, or the United States or China. God commands, *Go throughout the earth!* When he commands, they obey, *they went throughout the whole earth* (6:7).

God is in control. The whole earth is under his command, and his ultimate goal is peace: *rest* (6:8). One day we will see the earth at peace again: the kingdom of heaven, just as Jesus proclaimed.

## Who represents him on earth? (6:9-15)

But who represented the Lord's sovereign authority on earth in Zechariah's time?

Before the exile, that would have been the Davidic king — *the LORD and his anointed* (Psalm 2:2). God told Zechariah that the Branch from David's line would reign again one day (3:8), but in this moment Zerubbabel (David's descendant) was not king. So, who was representing God's reign?

Zechariah is given an extraordinary assignment. For now, Joshua the high priest will bear the regal responsibilities as well. Zechariah is to crown Joshua, and give him a title that won't offend the Persians but that will communicate the promise of God's reign.

*The Branch* is clearly a reference to the Davidic kingship, not only in Zechariah but in the other prophets as well (e.g. Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1). There are two people in view here, since *there will be harmony between the two* (6:13). So, it seems that Zerubbabel was okay with this arrangement, with Joshua the high priest receiving the regal role for this time. Realistically, Zerubbabel knew that there was no chance of his being king under Persian rule. He was willing to throw his entire weight behind the reconstruction of the temple now, and trust that the LORD will restore the kingship at the right time.

Zerubbabel watches as the prophet receives the silver and gold from the returning exiles to form a crown (6:10-11). They seem as willing to give the precious metals to create this symbol of God's reign as the original generation were willing to provide the materials to make a house for God to live among them (Exodus 25:3).

So, the high priest is crowned by the prophet, with the promise of harmony between the two of them. The two of them are symbols of things to come (3:8). One day, the king will come riding into Jerusalem to shouts of praise (9:9).

There might be a suggestion of that anticipated day in this chapter too. In 6:11 and 6:14, most modern English versions say that Zechariah was to make a *crown* (singular), but the Hebrew word is *crowns* (plural). Translators have struggled to make sense of this (see footnote *i* on page 387 of Mark Boda's translation in *Zechariah*, NICOT). One intriguing possibility is that they made two crowns, setting one aside for the day when the Branch from David's line could resume the regal responsibilities temporarily entrusted to the high priest. They might just about get away with something like that, without drawing the attention of their Persian overlords.

I don't imagine any of them — Zerubbabel, Joshua, Zechariah, or the returning exiles who donated the silver and gold for the crown — expected that it would be so long before a son of David was finally crowned as God's anointed ruler on earth. We're looking at half a millennium of foreign rule — over 500 years — before the son of David rode into Jerusalem as God's Anointed to receive his crown.

By that time, the high priest was so used to wearing it that he was not about to yield his crown to the one whose claim he treated as blasphemy. The Jesus described in Matthew's Gospel kept referring back to Zechariah to explain what was going on, as did Matthew himself. They understood Zechariah's prophecy as the story of God's kingship, the restoration of God's reign through his Anointed.

I think the book of Zechariah makes astoundingly good sense when we read it that way as well. What do you think?

## What others are saying

John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise, *Minor Prophets II*, UBCS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 241:

Zechariah's instructions from the Lord are somewhat like the commands to Samuel and to Elisha's unnamed colleague to anoint kings. There were long waiting periods after the anointing of David and Jehu (1 Sam. 16:1–13; 2 Kgs. 9:1–13) before these chosen men were able to take their thrones (2 Sam. 5:1–5; 2 Kgs. 10:18–36). The delay in Zechariah's case will be much longer. He crowns a proxy rather than the new king himself. The priests who worked with Joshua have been called “men symbolic of things to come,” of the coming of the Branch (3:8). In Zechariah's sign-act the high priest himself is the sign of the Branch and of the priest who will sit on the throne (6:13). The report of this prophetic sign-act and word from the Lord addresses the people's questions about unfulfilled hopes.

The people of Zechariah's audience were looking for the restoration of the king in David's line. When it did not occur in the sixth century B.C., questions remained — “How long?” and “Will God ever fulfill the promises?” Persistent questions are a way of maintaining faith.

## Fasting and justice (Zechariah 7)

*Is our faith expressed with spiritual disciplines like fasting, or with justice in the community? People have different answers. Zechariah's is revealing.*

How important is fasting? Is it crucial for refocusing our time and energy from material things to seeking God? Or does God want us focused on goals like seeking justice for those who are missing out? This almost feels like two streams of Christianity: one focused on a personal relationship with God; the other focused on justice for the world.

These were not separate topics for the OT prophets. People asked Zechariah, *Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?* (7:3) His response is explosive.

### Fasting

Some context for the question before we hear Zechariah's answer. It's 7 December 518 BC (7:1). People are returning from exile, building a temple to replace the one Babylon destroyed. God has already consecrated the high priest (4:1-10). For now, he's to wear the crown as well, since they're under Persian rule (6:9-15). They're in that in-between space: partially restored, but not fully so. They want to know whether to celebrate the restoration as it unfolds, or to keep fasting and mourning until they're restored as a kingdom of God.

The Torah doesn't help. It speaks only of feasting, never fasting. But there's been nowhere to hold the annual festivals for almost 70 years. That's why they began regular fasting: *the fifth month* was when the temple was destroyed (2 Kings 25:8-9).

They've been fasting in the seventh month as well (7:5). Initially they were permitted to have their own governor, but that didn't last: he was assassinated in the seventh month (2 Kings 25:25-26). That was the last remnant of local rule.

They'd lost God's presence (the temple) and God's governance (the kingdom). Zechariah asks them if this is what they were mourning with their regular fasts, or if they were just missing their own business opportunities and connections:

#### **Zechariah 7:4-7 (NIV)**

*<sup>4</sup>Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: <sup>5</sup>"Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?' <sup>6</sup>And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?' <sup>7</sup>Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?'"*

Earlier prophets said God sent his people into exile because they were unfaithful to the covenant, not living as their Sovereign directed. So, fasting isn't the issue. What God wants to know is whether they're ready to live as his people under his kingship, or if they're only after the benefits for themselves.

We make the same mistake if we market the gospel as personal benefits, some version of “Come to Jesus and your life will be so much better.” That’s not faith. The gospel calls for allegiance to God’s Anointed ruler, life under his kingship, a community where love births justice.

## Justice

Here’s what God expects:

### **Zechariah 7:8–10**

<sup>8</sup>And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: <sup>9</sup>“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. <sup>10</sup>Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’”

We keep hearing this message from the OT prophets, and from “kingdom warriors” today. But to whom is Zechariah speaking?

Not the Persian rulers. Zechariah did not say their godless rulers were the problem. The problem was the people of God not being the people of God. Protesting the godlessness and injustice of our rulers can yield only limited and temporary results. Expecting justice from them is misplaced faith.

The call to justice must be directed to the community that acknowledges God as king:

- **Listen to the prophets.** They called Israel to justice, for the benefit of the nations.
- **Listen to Jesus.** There were reasons to protest the injustice of Herod and Pilate, but he didn’t: he called God’s nation to justice under his leadership.
- **Listen to the NT letters.** Which one is a protest to Caesar, demanding justice? They’re all addressed to the communities of King Jesus, calling us to justice.

Expecting the rulers of this world to behave as the kingdom of God is a misguided gospel, just as not calling the people of God to live justly as his kingdom is a misguided gospel. Self-focused individualism (“You’ll do better with Jesus”) is not the gospel.

The good news is that God’s anointed is our leader. The gospel calls for allegiance to Christ as Lord, so that all who have been oppressed (widow, orphan, foreigner, ...) experience life as the kingdom of God.

## Fasting or justice?

“Should we fast?” they asked Zechariah. “Who cares?” was his answer.

God shows little interest in our spiritual disciplines:

- Abstaining from taking advantage of vulnerable people and plotting evil against each other — that’s more important than abstaining from food (7:10).
- God looks for justice, loyal love, and empathetic understanding — a community implementing his reign (7:9).

That good-news is credible, the community that transforms the world. Anything less leaves *the pleasant land desolate* (7:14).



## How Jesus fulfils the prophets (Zechariah 8)

*With a chapter never quoted in the NT, we see how Jesus fulfilled what God promised through the Prophets.*

The hope Jesus proclaimed was deeply rooted in the promises of the prophets. Matthew keeps telling us that Jesus fulfilled the prophets, using phrases from Zechariah far more than we do today.

Many of us struggle to make sense of how the NT writers used the prophets. Read Zechariah in context, and it may not sound like predictions. For example, *the blood of the covenant* in Zechariah 9:11 seems to refer back to the Sinai covenant (Exodus 24:8), yet Jesus used the phrase for his Last Supper (Matthew 26:28).

Maybe our understanding of “context” is too narrow. You probably know to check a few verses either side of a quotation, so as not to take it out of context. In a limited sense, that’s true. But for Jesus and the New Testament writers, context was much broader — their place in the story of God.

When Jesus announced *the good news of the kingdom*, his context was the Jewish world that had not been a kingdom since the exile. Most of them lived in other countries, scattered *like sheep without a shepherd*. That’s how Zechariah had described them 500 years earlier (Zechariah 10:2; 13:7 etc), and it still described their context in Jesus’ day (Matthew 9:36; 10:6; 15:24).

Jesus *fulfilled* the prophets not merely by doing some particular thing they predicted. That happened, but it was far more: *everything* God promised to restore was finally fulfilled in his Anointed. That’s the scope of what Jesus fulfilled: *All the promises of God find their Yes in him* (2 Corinthians 1:20).

So, let’s take a chapter the NT writers never quoted. How is Zechariah 8 fulfilled in Christ?

Our questions:

1. What was God saying to his people in Zechariah’s historical context?
2. Was this already resolved before Jesus’ time?
3. If not, how does Jesus resolve this, fulfilling what God promised?

### What was God saying in Zechariah 8?

God’s nation had been taken over by foreigners (Babylon, then Persia). The prophets insisted that this happened not just because the other kingdoms were stronger but because God’s people were unfaithful to the covenant, leaving them unprotected. Zechariah’s core message is that God is calling them back from exile, to restore them as his kingdom (1:3).

God’s passion for his people is so strong that he will not permit the empires to keep dominating them: *I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her* (8:2).

God will restore them as his people, his kingdom under his reign: *I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain* (8:3).

What a joyful image! The faithful sovereign reigns in the city that is faithful to his covenant, with peace enduring across the generations (8:4-5). For the people who've returned, this is a marvel; for the sovereign, it is merely the natural expression of his faithful character (8:6).

This is the heart of God's promise:

***Zechariah 8:7–8 (NIV)***

*<sup>7</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. <sup>8</sup>I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be **faithful** and **righteous** to them as their God."*

That's their sovereign's character. But what about the character of his people? Will they cooperate with their king and live as he directs, or do they still want to go their own way? That's what the rest of the chapter is about.

First, if they want God to dwell among them and lead them, they'll express it by building him a house among them. Wasn't that the first thing God asked for when he entered into covenant with them (Exodus 29:45-46)? The returning exiles know, and they've already laid the foundation. They need to complete it (8:9). God will respond to this invitation by moving in, leading them, and providing for his people as they live under his authority (8:10-15).

But there's another visible sign that God is living in the capital. More significant than the temple they raise up for him is the community he raises up under his leadership — the kingdom that reflects the character of its king:

***Zechariah 8:16–17***

*<sup>16</sup>"These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; <sup>17</sup>do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD.*

God is *faithful* (8:8), so the people under his leadership become *Faithful City* (8:3). God rendered *true and sound justice* when he sent them into exile, so they must render *true and sound justice*, never hiding evil under false testimony. God expects his kingdom to love sincerely, to hate the evil that people use to take advantage of each other, to hold on to what is good even when it's costly to do so (compare Romans 12:9). The kingdom is to be the visible embodiment of its king.

Such a community no longer needs the fasts they had (7:3). Instead of mourning for God's presence, they can joyfully celebrate his presence in the community that loves truth and peace (8:19).

And as they live as God's kingdom, the effect is global transformation. The embodied presence of God among the nations was the reason God chose Israel to represent him in the first place. Like the king of the north (1 Kings 5:7) and the Queen of the South (1 Kings 10:8-9), the nations will see the justice and righteousness of God in the community he leads.

The restored kingdom will be the community that makes God visible on earth. The astounding promise Zechariah receives from God is that people of other languages and nations will recognize the God who reigns in his people, joining them to entreat the heavenly

sovereign to resolve their issues too. Why would the nations do that? *'Because we have heard that God is with you'* (8:20-23).

## Was this fulfilled before Christ?

Some of it was. The admonition, *Let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built* (8:9) was fulfilled within 3 years. Those who returned to Jerusalem experienced the promise that they would grow old there watching their grandchildren grow up (8:4). Temple life resumed, including the joyous annual festivals (8:19).

What they did not see was their restoration as a kingdom, with God reigning over them through his anointed ruler (a son of David). Zechariah already warned them to expect only a partial restoration in his lifetime: Joshua (the high priest) was restored, but Zerubbabel (a son of David) was not. That's why he put a crown on the high priest's head, to act as the Davidic Branch for the interim (3:1-10).

Without being restored as God's kingdom, his people were unable to fulfil the promises of drawing the nations to recognize the LORD of hosts as their ruler too (8:20-23). This promise could not really be fulfilled until God's people were restored as his kingdom.

## Is this fulfilled in Christ?

When Jesus came *proclaiming the good news of the kingdom* (Matthew 4:23; 9:35), this is what people were yearning for (e.g. Luke 1:33; 2:25, 38). The promise was still unfulfilled. God's people were still ruled by foreigners. Only when they were restored into God's reign could the nations see what Zechariah had declared: *the LORD of hosts* reigning among his people, for the benefit of the world.

Matthew's opening volley proclaims Jesus as the anointed son of David (Matthew 1:1), the long-awaited answer to their captivity to foreign powers (1:17), the one who rescues his people from their failures (1:21), the restored presence of the heavenly sovereign among his people (1:23). The kingship that was not restored in Zerubbabel arrived eleven generations later in his descendant (1:13-16). This is the "context" for the New Testament claims that Jesus fulfils what the prophets promised.

We constantly see this context informing Jesus' understanding of the kingdom. When John's disciples ask, "Why aren't you teaching your disciples to fast?" Jesus answers that the days of fasting for the kingdom to be restored are over: the king is with his people, the bridegroom they've been waiting for their whole life (Matthew 9:15). Jesus' arrival signalled the fulfilment of Zechariah's declaration that the restoration of God's reign meant fasts turning into feasts (Zechariah 8:19).

Before Christ, the promise that God would *save his people from the countries of the east and west* (Zechariah 8:7) was not fulfilled. Jesus regularly alluded to this as his mission (e.g. Matthew 9:36 and 10:5-6). As their king, Jesus instructed his people to demonstrate God's character so the nations could see God (e.g. Matthew 5:13-16, 43-48). He knew that the promises of Zechariah 8:20 that the nations would come into the kingdom would have to be fulfilled in himself, since many of his own people would not fulfil that role (Matthew 8:11-12).

And that was his big beef with the temple and its leaders. As passionate as God is for his people and his dwelling among them (John 2:17 reflecting Psalm 69:9 and Zechariah 8:2), Jesus declared that the people in charge of the temple represented not God's power but their own. They were play-actors, pretending to be God's servants, with no interest in the anointed king God sent them. The temple completed in Zechariah's day was no longer God's house; it was staffed by criminals (Matthew 21:13). Whereas Zechariah 8:11 had been a promise of restoration, in Jesus' time the same words could be read as a threat of demolition (compare Matthew 23:35-38). That temple would fall. The Messiah himself would become the new temple where God lived among his people through his resurrection (John 2:17-22; Ephesians 2:20-21 etc).

## Conclusion

The way Jesus fulfilled the promises of the prophets is more holistic than a simple, "This is that."

All God's promises find their fulfilment in his Messiah. The Christ and the people who are in him (his kingdom) are the visible expression of the heavenly sovereign doing right by his people, remaining faithful to a world that has not been faithful to him.

God promised:

*I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God (Zechariah 8:8).*

God fulfilled that promise by raising up his anointed as our ruler:

*Now the righteousness of God has become a visible reality, as witnessed through the Law and the Prophets — the righteousness of God, through the faithfulness of Jesus his anointed ruler, expressed in all who trust him with their allegiance (Romans 3:21-22).*

## Excursus: Lord of hosts (Zechariah 8)

*Zechariah uses the same name for God 18 times in one chapter. What was he saying? How does this help us understand Christ and our life in him?*

What does it mean to call God *the LORD of hosts*? What are the hosts under his control? Angels? People? Armies? Israelites? Foreigners? How does this relate to Christ? And what is our role in relation to the LORD of hosts?

To find answers, we'll turn to Zechariah 8. Other prophets use this name for God too (especially Jeremiah), but not 18 times in a single chapter.

### Meaning of the name

Hosts (*ṣā·bā'*) was a Hebrew word for **multitudes**, a vast array. Someone in charge of hosts was a very powerful person, so NIV translates, *the LORD Almighty*.

**Military** forces were often described as *hosts*. You can frighten your enemies by saying you have hosts arrayed against them. Israel's armies were described as hosts (especially in Numbers), as were their enemies (e.g. Judges 4:2-7; 8:6; 9:29; 1 Samuel 12:9; 1 Samuel 28:1). So CSB translates, *the LORD of Armies*.

There are hosts of **stars** in the sky (Genesis 2:1). The nations worshipped them as gods, so God warned his people not to worship the starry hosts (Deuteronomy 4:19; 7:3). God does have hosts of spiritual beings under his command (angels), so NLT combines this idea with the previous one, translating *the LORD of heaven's armies*.

But here's the problem. In trying to find an adequate way to express *the LORD of hosts* in English, we might narrow down a phrase that's meant to be expansive. *Hosts* can be armies, but "armies" is too narrow. The *hosts* God rescued from Egypt were not armies or angels, just multitudes (Exodus 6:26; 7:4; 12:17, 41, 51).

And "heaven's armies" is even narrower. Sure, God has the hosts of heaven at his command, but that's only part of the story. The armies of Israel were also under his command: they were part of the LORD's *hosts* too. *The LORD of hosts* can be a parallel expression for *the God of the armies of Israel* (1 Samuel 17:45).

After the exile, Israel had little by way of armies since they were dominated by foreign powers. Yet prophets like Jeremiah, Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi insist that it is YHWH who rules the multitudes: he is *the LORD of hosts*. *LORD* is in block letters because the Hebrew is YHWH, the covenant name revealed by the heavenly sovereign to his covenant people at Sinai. YHWH is the God who delivered the *hosts* of Israel from Pharaoh because he remembered his covenant with Abraham (Exodus 2:24). And because of his covenant faithfulness, the prophets declared that YHWH would regather the scattered hosts of his people from among the nations.

The LORD of hosts is sovereign over everything and everyone. The scattered myriads of Israel seemed powerless before the waves of foreign invaders, oppressed under empire after empire, but YHWH is not powerless to bring them home. He is the LORD of hosts! He has all

authority — over the forces of heaven and the nations of earth. The LORD of hosts can and will redeem his people: he is **YHWH the all-ruler**.

That's why the NET Bible translates, *the LORD who rules over all*.

## Message in Zechariah 8

That is an outlandish claim. The prophets were saying that *YHWH*, the covenant God of Israel, rules over *the hosts* of heaven and earth — everyone and everything.

Observe what unfolds from that claim in Zechariah 8.

YHWH the all-ruler is too jealous to let the nations keep ruling his people (8:2). He will restore his city to his governance (8:3). This sounds incredible for the people who have no armies to save them from their captors, but it's not a big deal for YHWH the all-ruler (8:6).

All it takes is his decree (8:7). And that flows out of his character: faithful to the covenant, doing right by his people (8:8). It was his decree that sent them into exile (8:14), and they will return because YHWH the all-ruler decrees it (8:15).

But what about the problem of the nations who oppose his decrees and invade his nation?

Well, the whole point of establishing Israel as his nation was so the nations could see what life on earth was meant to be under God's reign (Exodus 19:6). As YHWH the all-ruler re-establishes his people after their exile, they can resume that task: embodying his character as a kingdom of truth, justice, genuine love, and peace (8:16-19).

When the nations see the reign of YHWH the all-ruler in his people, their people will begin to turn from their own power-schemes and begin to entreat YHWH the all-ruler for the kind of leadership they've heard he gives (8:20-23). This is Zechariah's prophetic vision of how the earth returns to the reign of *YHWH the all-ruler*.

## Messianic implications

Does this talk of YHWH the all-ruler remind you of how the New Testament writers speak of the authority given to Christ? The NT effusively presents Christ as the anointed ruler with the authority of the All-ruler. He has all authority in heaven and on earth, over all powers visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities. He is King over all kings, Lord over all lords, over every name that is named. The authority of *YHWH the all-ruler* returns to earth in his Anointed.

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek (the Septuagint), they translated *LORD of hosts* as *Pantocrator* — literally "all-ruler." It was the *Pantocrator* who decreed that David would represent his kingship on earth (2 Samuel 7:8, 14). Paul draws from those two verses to say that the *Pantocrator's* power is now present in Christ and the regathered kingdom that exists in him (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Revelation uses *Pantocrator* nine times. Caesar may imagine he runs the world, but he was a mere mortal. The *All-Ruler* is the king who has overcome death (Revelation 1:8; 4:8), whose reign has begun (11:17), the just and true king of the nations (15:3), the judge of the whole world (16:7, 14; 19:15) the sovereign who lives among his people (21:22).

It's not clear whether Revelation is saying that Jesus is the *Pantocrator* (YHWH of hosts), or whether the *Pantocrator* has given his power to his anointed (the Christ). What is clear is that this is the gospel, God's good news for the earth: *Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Pantocrator reigns* (Revelation 19:6).

The early church certainly applied the *Pantocrator* title to Christ. In the second century, Justin Martyr noticed that *the King of glory* was a parallel expression for *the LORD of hosts* in Psalm 24. He said these words could not have applied to earlier kings such as Hezekiah or Solomon:

They were spoken ... only of our Christ, who appeared without beauty or honor (as Isaias, David, and all the Scriptures testify); who is **Lord of hosts** by the will of the Father who bestowed that honor upon Him; who arose again from the dead and ascended into Heaven (as is stated in the Psalm and other Scriptural passages which also declared Him to be **Lord of hosts**).  
— Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 85.

During the Middle Ages, almost every Greek church had an image of the *Pantocrator*. The Greek-speakers understood the *Christ* to mean the divinely appointed ruler of all the earth.

## Missional implications

Zechariah proclaimed the good news that *YHWH the All-Ruler* reigns. He understood that a Branch from David's line would embody the reign of the LORD of hosts on earth (Zechariah 3:8; 4:6-14; 9:9-13). He understood the community restored into God's reign would embody his character, so the nations would seek *YHWH the All-ruler* and entreat him to solve their problems (8:20-23).

This is precisely what the Messiah expects of the community that embodies his reign (Matthew 5:13-16). He calls us to be the embodiment of our Father's character because that's how the nations can see the perfect Father of all (5:43-48).

It won't do to think of our mission as getting individuals to make personal decisions. That message puts the power in our hands, so it can never be the gospel. Our calling is to embody the reign of the *Pantocrator*, for the benefit of the world.

The *LORD of hosts* is the All-Ruler. His reign is embodied in Christ, embodied in the kingdom he rules. This is the gospel of the Lord.

## What others are saying

Tony S. L. Michael, "Lord of Hosts" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 820–821:

The most frequently used compound title for the Israelite deity in the OT (Heb. *YHWH šēbā'ôṭ*). A similar title is "Yahweh, God of hosts." These epithets describe Yahweh as both divine Warrior and divine King, with "hosts" referring to both earthly (e.g., the Israelites or their armies) and cosmic forces (celestial bodies or angels). It appears most often in the Prophets (esp. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Malachi) and not at all in the Pentateuch.

Francesco Pieri, "Pantocrator" in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 46:

The novelty of Revelation is that some of these texts place this title traditionally reserved for God in a christological backdrop, which serves as a prelude to the direct attribution of Pantocrator to Jesus Christ himself ... Already Clement of Alex. (e.g., *Paed.* 1,9, 84,1; 3,7,39,4), then, above all, Origen ... use the title Pantocrator in this christological sense and defend its relevance. Among the most ancient attestations of this usage, moreover, are Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autol.* 1,4 et passim) and Hippolytus (*Adv. Noetum* 6,18). Among the Latin Fathers, realizing that the current translation of Pantocrator with *omnipotens* was not completely satisfying, Augustine (*Tr. in Io.* 106,5) proposes as an alternative *omnitenens*.

Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, TOTC (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2012), 200:

This segment of Zechariah's message is the nearest thing 'to an active missionary concept of the mission of the Jews that occurs in the Old Testament, outside the book of Jonah'. Yet the difference between Jonah and Zechariah is striking, in that Jonah was commissioned to proclaim judgment for repentance to the Assyrians (Jon. 1:2). Here it appears that the reality of God's transforming presence among his people prompts the nations (to almost beg!) to join Israel in the worship of the Lord (v. 23).



**Part 2:**

**God's king will still come**

**(Zechariah 9–14)**

## The king is coming (Zechariah 9)

*How does Jesus fulfil the promises of Zechariah 9 about dealing with their enemies and restoring divine kingship?*

The humble king, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Zechariah 9:9 is an outstanding prophecy, worth exploring in context.

The previous eight verses say that God was opposed to their neighbours to the north (Syrians) and south (Philistines). How does that fit with Jesus? Didn't the previous chapter promise that the nations would come to seek the LORD? (8:20-23) As always, we need to appreciate the wider context.

The first eight chapters were *the word of the LORD* for those who had gone into exile, encouraging them to return and rebuild the temple, with the promise that their heavenly sovereign would return to them. Zechariah received these words in the Persian period, some dated to an exact day (1:7; 7:1).

But Chapters 9–14 are undated messages to an unnamed prophet. It's a different genre, another kind of prophetic oracle (*măš-šā'* 9:1; 12:1). It's a later time when the second temple is up and running, but the other promise God gave Zechariah remains unfulfilled.

There were two symbols of God's sovereignty over his nation, represented by two people: the high priest in God's house representing his presence, and the son of David on the throne representing his reign (4:1-14). Joshua the high priest had been restored to his duties (3:1-7), but Zerubbabel the governor was not crowned as king. In fact, the high priest had been crowned with the kingly responsibilities also, functioning as the Branch from David's line since they could not have a king (6:9-15).

But how long was this interim arrangement to last? The question became more urgent as time passed. Eventually Persia fell to Alexander the Great, so Judea came under Greek control (see 9:13). We're talking centuries of foreign rule — of not being restored as a kingdom of God.

When would God restore the Davidic kingship? How would God free his people from oppression? When would God reign over them again? Zechariah 9–14 addresses these questions. And these are the chapters that Jesus and the New Testament writers quote most.

### The king is coming

The big question is who rules: their enemies, or God's anointed king? Far from being separate issues, these are two sides of the same coin. God says he will deal with the problem of their enemies (9:1-8) so their king can return in peace (9:9-17).

The reason they wanted a king in the first place was that they kept getting hammered by their enemies (1 Samuel 8:20). King David subdued their enemies: Philistines to the south, Syrians to the north, and Edomites to the East. His son Solomon reigned in peace (the golden age of the kingdom), but then the kingdom split. Sometimes the two parts fought

each other. Eventually both parts fell to the bigger kingdoms to the south (Egypt) and north (Assyria / Babylon).

Now Alexander the Great's armies have conquered everything from Greece to Persia, so their enemy is Greece (9:13). Without a king to lead them they can never break free, and if they appoint a king he would probably die trying to save them. Chicken-and-egg problem.

The unnamed prophet of Zechariah 9 does not incite Judea to revolt against their enemies and install their own king. His oracle declares that YHWH will deal with their enemies and install his king:

### **Zechariah 9 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> *The oracle of the word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach and Damascus is its resting place. For the LORD has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel ...*

<sup>7</sup> *I [the LORD] will take away its blood from its [Philistia's] mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth ...*

<sup>8</sup> *Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that none shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again march over them, for now I see with my own eyes.*

<sup>9</sup> *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Hadrach and Damascus were in Syria. Ashkelon, Gaza, and Ashdod were Philistine towns. These were the enemies back in David's day. The implication is that God will deal with their current enemy (Greece) as he dealt with their enemies in the past, but saying it in a way that is less likely to get the prophet arrested.

## **The king comes in peace**

The answer to the chicken-and-egg problem is this: God will deal with their enemies, so his king will come in peace. He's not coming on a warhorse with a show of military might, but as a humble leader riding a donkey.

Even the civil conflict between the two houses of Israel (Ephraim vs Jerusalem) is over. God installing his king sends a peace message to the nations:

### **Zechariah 9 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> *I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

<sup>11</sup> *As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*

<sup>12</sup> *Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.*

<sup>13</sup> *For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.*

What guarantee could the prophet give that God would do this? He recalls the covenant God made with them at Sinai after rescuing them from slavery, YHWH's commitment that he would be their sovereign and they would be his nation, the covenant sealed by sprinkling them with blood and inviting them to a meal in his presence (Exodus 24:8-9).

Zechariah already declared that God would save his people again, sending a new Moses to lead them out of slavery and restore them as his people where he would live among them and lead them (2:7-13). Saving and leading his people is exactly how Jesus understood his kingdom responsibility. His last meal celebrated what was about to take place: covenant faithfulness expressed in his own blood (Matthew 26:28).

## Christ as king

When God's Christ finally arrived in Jerusalem on a donkey to bring the nations to peace under God's kingship (Matthew 21:1-9), Greece had fallen but the next superpower (Rome) had taken over. Didn't they still have the same problem addressed in Zechariah 9? Weren't they still crushed by their enemies, still waiting for God's anointed king?

Yes, but the problem was even more insidious. His own people were his enemies: his own nation, the Jerusalem leaders, even his own disciples (Matthew 21:14-16). We'll read more of this in Zechariah: the horror of the shepherd being struck down (10:2-3; 11:3-17; 13:7).

But first, the prophet wants to reassure them of God's faithfulness. Remember when the LORD committed himself to his nation at Sinai? His authoritative presence appeared like flashes of **lightning** and sounded like a **trumpet** (Exodus 20:18-19). That covenant was the basis for their trust that God would save them again:

### ***Zechariah 9:14-17 (ESV)***

*14 Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.*

*15 The LORD of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones, and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar.*

*16 On that day the LORD their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land.*

*17 For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.*

Jesus uses the same covenant imagery to describe God restoring the kingship in him. He knows his enemies are among his own people (Matthew 10:36; 13:57), the leaders in Jerusalem (16:21; 20:18; 21:15). To deal with the enemies, God must deal with Jerusalem (23:32 – 24:2) in what will be their worst time ever (24:15-22). But he is convinced that God will still raise up the Son of Man as he has promised — the visible presence of God like lightning (24:27) and a loud trumpet (24:31).

Zechariah's message was a trumpet call to *gather the scattered flock* (1:19-21; 2:6; 7:14; 10:8-10; 13:7) back into the leadership of their true *shepherd* (9:16; 11:3-17; 13:7). Jesus understood this as something God would do: raising him up, and calling the world back under divine kingship through angelic forces (i.e. not through the forces of Israel) (Matthew 24:31).

Isn't this exactly what David said when he defeated the Philistine with a mere slingstone? *I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts ... the LORD who saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand* (1 Samuel 17:45-47).

## Good news of peace

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, acclaimed as the son of David coming to save his people in fulfillment of Zechariah 9. The enemies blocking God's reign were not the Romans as much as the hypocrites acting as if they were God's leaders. Through them, the Romans stuck down the Shepherd, the King of the Jews.

But Jesus believed that God would fulfill what he had promised: raising him up, giving him the authority to regather humanity from the four winds back into God's reign, the king re-establishing earth as a kingdom of heaven through his own blood, God's covenant faithfulness.

Zechariah 9 gives us much more than the verse on the triumphal entry. Despite his enemies, God has established his covenant with humanity in his Christ, his commitment to bring peace to the earth through his reign.

The installation of God's anointed king means the end of the war against God's authority and against each other on earth. He is the end of the in-fighting among God's people (Ephraim vs Jerusalem). He is God's declaration of *peace to the nations*.

The proclamation of his reign is *the gospel of peace* (Isaiah 52:7; Nahum 1:15; Acts 10:36; Romans 10:15; Ephesians 2:17; 6:15). God solves the twin problems of enemies and kingship in his Messiah:

### ***Zechariah 9:10 (ESV)***

*10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

## What others are saying

Michael H. Floyd, "The MAŠŠĀ as a Type of Prophetic Book," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002), 422:

Prophetic books of the *māš-šā*' sort seem to be concerned with reinterpreting prophecies that have over time become problematic in some way. ... This presupposes a scribal setting in which prophecies were collected, recorded, and studied, not only in the postexilic but also in at least the late preexilic period. In this scribal setting, moreover, the study of prophecy was not just a matter of antiquarian interest. Reinterpretation of past prophecies served as a basis for making prophetic claims about Yahweh's present involvement in human affairs.

## Shepherds, good and bad (Zechariah 10)

*Zechariah provides the background for understanding Jesus as our shepherd.*

“The LORD is my Shepherd,” said King David. “I am the good shepherd,” said Jesus. Are there bad shepherds? What’s this shepherd imagery about?

*Shepherd* is a keyword in Zechariah 10–14, a passage Jesus and the Gospel writers kept alluding to. What was Zechariah saying about the *shepherd*? How does this help us understand Jesus?

### The shepherd metaphor

In the Ancient Near East, shepherds took care of sheep and goats, providing food and protection. This became an obvious image for how gods and kings took care of their people. Even before the Hebrews were a nation, we find this metaphor in Akkadian and Egyptian. The kings and Pharaohs claimed to be appointed by the gods for the task of shepherding their flock, ensuring their provision and safety.

In court style, “shepherd” thus becomes the distinctive title of the king, who, appointed to this office, feels called to reign over the land, its towns, and its people, and faithfully to fulfill this office. Finally, even the gods are described as perceiving this as their role: they are shepherds of the whole earth, the universe, the heavens, all nations.

— Gerhard Wallis, “*rā·āh*” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 13:548.

The shepherd metaphor in Scripture has the same two referents:

1. God is the Shepherd of his people. Israel (Jacob) described God like this from the beginning: *He has been my **shepherd** all my life* (Genesis 48:15). *The Mighty One of Jacob is the **Shepherd**, the Rock of Israel* (49:24).
2. Leaders are appointed by God to shepherd his people. Israel recognized David as the shepherd God chose for them: *The LORD said to you, ‘You will **shepherd** my people Israel, and you will become their ruler’* (2 Samuel 5:2, compare 7:7; 24:17).

The difference between good and bad shepherds is how they use the power God has given them:

- A good shepherd uses their power to care for the flock: *David **shepherded** them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them* (Psalm 78:72).
- A bad shepherd uses their power to benefit themselves: *Woe to you **shepherds** of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not **shepherds** take care of the flock?* (Ezekiel 34:2)

This is why God would say, *My anger burns against the **shepherds**, and I will punish the leaders* (Zechariah 10:3). Since God is the ultimate Shepherd, the under-shepherds answer to him (1 Peter 5:2-4).

These twin themes — ultimate Shepherd and under-shepherds — are deeply intertwined with each other, and with the well-being of the flock. The flock ends up in trouble if either side of the relationship isn't working, if:

- the shepherd misleads them or misuses them, or
- the flock doesn't follow the shepherd, or follows other shepherds.

Both these issues led to the downfall of Israel as a kingdom. God terminated the kingship because the shepherds were misrepresenting him. God's flock was scattered because they were seeking other shepherds (other gods, and alliance with the rulers "appointed" by those gods).

## The Shepherd's promise

It was tempting when their neighbours told you their gods made them prosperous. The Canaanites worshipped Baal (the storm god) in order to help him fight off Mot (the death/drought god). Zechariah insists that fake gods give no prosperity; they leave you wandering aimlessly:

**Zechariah 10** <sup>1</sup> *Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who sends the thunderstorms. He gives showers of rain to all people, and plants of the field to everyone.*  
<sup>2</sup> *The idols speak deceitfully, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd. (NIV)*

*Idols* (v.2) is an unusual word: *t'ērā·p'īm*. It refers to household gods like the ones Rachel tried to smuggle into the Promised Land (Genesis 31:19, 34-35). Jacob insisted foreign gods do not belong (35:2-3). Rachel's reliance on the *t'ērā·p'īm* contrasts with Jacob's reliance on the **Shepherd**, ... *who helps you ... who blesses you with the blessings of the skies above* (Genesis 49:24-25).

*Lack of a shepherd* can also refer to not having the human leader God appointed for them. At the end of his life, Moses asked God to *appoint someone over this community ... so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd* (Numbers 27:15).

Without a shepherd to follow, the sheep scatter (*wander*) and may end up under the wrong shepherds (*oppressed*). This requires an intervention from the true Shepherd, like God telling Pharaoh, *Let my people go*. Zechariah has already promised that God would call his people back from exile and give them a God-sent leader (Zechariah 2:6-9).

Now God promises to save his wandering, oppressed flock. This rescue has two sides: a) saving them from the bad shepherds who falsely claimed them as their flock, and b) restoring the Davidic dynasty (from Judah) to lead his flock:

**Zechariah 10** <sup>3</sup> *My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock, the people of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle.*

<sup>4</sup> *From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler.*

Remember the earlier promise of the Davidic king riding into the capital as the humble and victorious leader proclaiming peace to the nations, removing the chariots and warhorses

from Jerusalem and Ephraim ([Zechariah 9:9-10](#))? Deutero-Zechariah now unfolds that promise. This king is the *cornerstone* of God's global restoration project, the *peg* that raises the whole tent, the *bow* that delivers peace, the Christ who is the source of all kingdom authority.

## The recollected flock

The extent of his leadership is staggering! Through him, God provides strong leadership for Judah, the kingdom that fell to Babylon. But it's not only for Judah. God is also regathering the tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel that had previously fallen to Assyria. These tribes had not been under Davidic leadership since Solomon's time. They had their own kings in Samaria, a town in Ephraim (one of Joseph's tribes). God promises not only to rescue Judah, but the northern tribes of the divided kingdom as well:

**Zechariah 10** <sup>6</sup> *I will strengthen **Judah** and save the tribes of **Joseph**. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them.*

<sup>7</sup> *The **Ephraimites** will become like warriors, and their hearts will be glad as with wine. Their children will see it and be joyful; their hearts will rejoice in the LORD.*

Such good news! All Jacob's tribes are to be restored to their Shepherd through his anointed:

- This was Ezekiel's hope: *My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd* (Ezekiel 37:24).
- This was Jesus' hope, that under his kingship the twelve he appointed would *sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* ([Matthew 19:28](#)).
- This was the hope Paul declared to King Agrippa: *This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night* (Acts 26:7).

The LORD was their true Shepherd. The problem was not enemies that were too strong, but that he had scattered them into exile because they weren't following him. Now they need to follow their Shepherd as he calls them to return:

**Zechariah 10** <sup>9</sup> *Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return.*

<sup>10</sup> *I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them.*

This is the biggest rescue and regathering mission they'd ever seen. It included those exiled to Babylon, the northern tribes exiled to Assyria, and those scattered to the east (Gilead) and north (Lebanon). The kingdoms of this world have no power to hold them, just as Pharaoh's army could not block them at the Red Sea:

**Zechariah 10** <sup>11</sup> *"They will pass through the sea of trouble; the surging sea will be subdued and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down and Egypt's scepter will pass away.*

<sup>12</sup> *I will strengthen them in the LORD and in his name they will live securely," declares the LORD.*



## Conclusion

God's flock wandered away and became oppressed when they went after other shepherds. Their true Shepherd never gave up on them. He was calling them home.

He promised to save them, to rescue them from the fake shepherds, to restore them in the care of his appointed leader (the Christ). This is what Jesus called *the good news of the kingdom*.

It all comes down to who reigns. This is the essential background to understand what follows in Zechariah, including what we would not expect — the shepherd being struck.

## Is God a good Shepherd if we have bad shepherds? (Zechariah 11)

*Why are we living under leaders who fight each other (wars) and crush their people (injustice) if God is on the throne?*

*The LORD will be king over the whole earth* (Zechariah 14:9). That's the theme of Zechariah 10–14, and what an astounding promise! This is the gospel Jesus proclaimed, the good news we believe.

But some find it hard to believe there's a God taking care of us when there is so much injustice, so much evil in the world. Zechariah 11 faces that issue. God asks the prophet to role-play what our human shepherds do: acting out of self-interest rather for the justice of the eternal Shepherd.

We explained how the shepherd metaphor was used for gods and kings in the Ancient Near East. That makes it the perfect term for addressing the inconsistency between what the Shepherd wants versus what the shepherds are doing. All the wars of history — including the suffering of God's people at the hands of the nations — it all arises from the disconnect between the Shepherd and the shepherds.

In this chapter, the Shepherd has two staves he uses to care for his flock. One is named *Favour* — the generous benevolence of a good sovereign's providence for his people. The other is *Union* — the wise leadership that resolves injustice with mercy, holding the kingdom together. In particular, the Shepherd uses these skills for the benefit of those who are likely to be trodden down because they don't have the power or capacity to take care of themselves, *the oppressed of the flock* (11:7).

But these staves are not functioning as the Shepherd intends. *Favour* has not kept people under his care, and *Union* has not kept people together. The prophet enacts how the Shepherd's staves are broken:

- Breaking *Favour* symbolizes *breaking the covenant I had made with the nations* (11:10).
- Breaking *Union* symbolizes *breaking the family bond between Judah and Israel* (11:14).

The same problem exists in the wider world (the nations) as in God's nation (Judah/Israel). The prophet sees that these two problems are intertwined. Israel's disintegration is connected with the nations not following the true Shepherd:

- The nations are not living under God's leadership (his *Favour*).
- Jacob's tribes have also broken apart instead of living as a nation under God's leadership (his *Union*).

These two broken relationships are the disconnect between Shepherd and shepherds.

## The problem of the nations

Zechariah has already addressed the issue of the nations: the problem of their disobedience (1:15, 21; 2:8), and the hope of their ultimate inclusion under God's reign (2:11; 8:20-23; 9:10). The Old Testament doesn't begin with the patriarchs, as if God was the ruler of Jacob's clan; it begins with the astounding claim that the whole earth belongs to YHWH, that he is sovereign over all people (Genesis 1–11 [podcast](#)).

Long before God made covenants with Israel or Abraham, he made a covenant with all humanity, with all the creatures of the earth, with the earth itself ([Genesis 9:8-17](#)). In the flow of the Genesis story, it was only when God authorized human authority that nations could develop with leaders of their own. When God authorized the community to take the life of a murderer ([Genesis 9:6](#)), warriors realized they could use that power to build their kingdoms, and that was the origin of Israel's archenemies ([Genesis 10:8-12](#)).

That's why it seemed like God had withdrawn his Favour from the rest of humanity, *breaking the covenant I made with the nations* (Zechariah 11:10) by making the descendants of Jacob his favoured people. We know this was just a stepping-stone in God's longer-term project to bring all nations back under his reign through the good shepherd he appointed for us, his Anointed (e.g. [Matthew 28:19](#); [Romans 1:5](#); [16:26](#); [Ephesians 2:22](#); [3:1-14](#); [4:1-6](#)).

But the shocking truth is that human shepherds only keep flocks for their own benefit, to milk, fleece, and eat them. So, when God stepped back, refusing to force his leadership on the nations who went their own way and appointed their own leaders, God left the flock vulnerable to leaders who want power to benefit themselves — *the flock marked for slaughter* (11:7).

Early Genesis does describe God as the sovereign addressing the crimes of his people: in the garden ([Genesis 3:8-19](#)), when Cain killed Abel ([4:6-16](#)), and when the whole earth was corrupted ([6:5-22](#)). Even after launching the Abraham project, God still intervened at Sodom ([18:17-19:29](#)), and with Pharaoh ([Exodus 7-14](#)). But how much divine intervention would it take for him to resolve the abuse of authority that characterizes human leadership? How often should God sack the leaders of the nations who fail to care for the vulnerable people? Leaders are quickly corrupted by power, so in some cases God would be firing leaders almost every week, like *In one month I got rid of three shepherds* (11:8).

God doesn't do this because he isn't the kind of leader who forces himself on people. He was working on a longer-term solution that didn't involve rejecting his people but being rejected and crucified to save his people. But people in pain don't understand a God who doesn't resolve things in their lifetime: *the flock detested me* (11:8).

That's our problem. We don't seem to have a Shepherd who protects us from evil and ensures we get justice. Job's dilemma was not just the injustice of what happens, but the inability to place our case before the heavenly court to get things sorted out. To suffering people, it feels like God has grown weary of us and said, *I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh* (11:9).

It feels as if we are no longer living under divine favour (11:10).

## The problem of God's nation

God's answer to the nations who refused his leadership was to create a nation that would live under his Favour. In this way, the nations would desire what they were missing and return to their Shepherd: *I will bless you ... and you will be a blessing ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:2-3)*.

But the nation called to be God's prototype kingdom disintegrated. The shepherds God appointed were corrupted by power and used the flock for their own benefit. The taxing demands Solomon placed on Israel didn't end after 7 years when the temple was complete: he kept it up for another 13 years to build a palace for himself. "Ease the burden! Lighten the yoke!" Israel demanded of his son. Rehoboam refused. It split the kingdom. The northern tribes formed a separate nation with their own king in Samaria. Only Judah retained David's descendants as their king in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12).

The prophet's symbol for this breakdown is the breaking of the *staff called Union, breaking the family bond between Judah and Israel (11:14)*.

This was the beginning of the end. Once the Union failed, the two halves were less able to deal with their enemies. Sometimes they fought each other. Assyria swallowed Israel. Judah fell to Babylon. There was no longer any nation to represent God's reign to the world.

As the centuries progress, they remained captive to whatever power ruled the region. It was as if God had given them over to foolish shepherds who had no idea of what the Shepherd intended.

So that's what God asked the prophet to enact: foolish shepherds like Nebuchadnezzar and subsequent rulers who had no genuine interest in their wellbeing:

*Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hooves (11:15-16)*.

But the story doesn't end with God's world divided and dominated by worthless shepherds. The chapter concludes with the prophetic proclamation of the demise of *the worthless shepherd*, with a prayer for God to limit the power of his arm and the extent of his gaze (11:17). Earth will be restored to the worthy Shepherd, for *YHWH will be king over the whole earth (14:9)*.

## Conclusion

Zechariah 11 is a powerful theodicy: a prophetic depiction of how we can say that God is the reigning Shepherd caring for the world when we experience the agony of rulers who care nothing for the flock, worthless shepherds who care only about their own power.

The prophet recognized that this was not only the suffering of his own people (Judah), but also the suffering of the northern kingdom (Israel), and the suffering of the nations as well. What astounding insight into the salvation story, the rescue of the entire planet back from its present sufferings to the care of its true Shepherd!

Romans 1–3 follows a similar trajectory. Paul traces the rebellion of the nations against their true sovereign, followed by Israel's disobedience and failure, concluding that *the whole*

*world is held accountable to God.* In the face of this disaster he declares the good news: *the righteousness of God has now been made known* in his Anointed ruler (Romans 3:19, 21).

Now we've established this wider view of God's kingship over the disintegrated nation of Israel/Judah and over the nations who don't recognize him at all, we're ready to zoom in the most exciting part of the chapter, the bit most quoted in the New Testament. It's something about God's kingship being valued at 30 pieces of silver (11:12-13). That's out next post.

## What others are saying

Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come*, BST (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 147, 153-154:

But there is a deeper question lurking in the background. Why do bad shepherds exist at all, and why has suffering at the hands of such leaders been so much a part of Israel's experience? Surely it is not what one would expect for people whom God has rescued from slavery and with whom he has made a covenant? In order to deal with this deeper issue, Zechariah is commanded to deliver a lesson from history in the form of an enacted parable. ...

At the most general level the theme of these three chapters, as of the whole book, is the kingdom (rule) of God, from his triumphant progress to Jerusalem in 9:1-13, to the review of his dealings with Israel as their true shepherd (i.e. king) in 11:4-17. But within this framework there has been an extensive exploration of the role of human leaders, especially in God's administration of his covenant relationship with Israel. This theme is introduced with the appearance of the king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey in 9:9. As we saw when we looked at that passage, he is a human figure — God's perfect representative, the ideal leader of his people. The subsequent reference to the people of God as his 'flock' in 9:16 provides the link to the contrasting treatment of *bad* leadership in 10:1-11:3. The rapacious shepherds of this passage, who oppress and destroy the flock, are the complete antithesis of the ideal king, 'gentle', 'righteous' and 'having salvation', of chapter 9. The two sign-acts, which come at the end of the whole section, set all this once more in the context of the rule of God, the divine Shepherd, who brings down and raises up human leaders. So the 'oracle' of chapters 9-11, although complex, is not a disjointed jumble. It is held together by the consistent focus on the issue of leadership, which it explores from different, complementary angles. ...

Detesting the good shepherd led not just to the breaking of the brotherhood between Judah and Israel (the fracturing of the covenant community, 11:14); it led to a complete breakdown in the covenant relationship with God himself (11:10-11). In other words, it is impossible to be in relationship with God unless we are prepared to be ruled by him.

## Thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13)

*How the temple valued Jesus' leadership is no different to how they valued God's leadership in the past.*

### **Zechariah 11:12–13 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup> I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me **thirty pieces of silver**.

<sup>13</sup> And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter" — the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the **thirty pieces of silver** and threw them to the potter at the house of the LORD.

Thirty silver pieces? Isn't that the price Judas got for Jesus? Is there a connection? We'll need to see what this means in Zechariah first, to understand what Matthew 27:3-10 makes of it.

Zechariah was talking about Israel's Shepherd. *Shepherd* was a metaphor for both the LORD who leads them from heaven and the anointed king who leads his flock on earth. But because they weren't following their true Shepherd, the flock divided under two shepherds (Israel / Judah). The divided flock was then taken by the rulers of the nations, no longer under God's "favour" (11:10).

"Pay me whatever you think I'm worth." That's a statement you hear when there's been a falling out, when the job didn't work out, when there's a parting of the ways. The prophet makes this statement as God's spokesman. The Shepherd of Israel is being dismissed, as if he has provided bad leadership that ended with the flock scattered in exile.

The temple is supposed to promote the worship of God, but now we discover what they think he's worth. For all those centuries of leadership, they'll settle for thirty pieces of silver. It's an insult that God won't keep. They value God's leadership no more than a payment for an artisan.

If this is their termination payment for their Shepherd, and God throws it to a potter, what will he get for his people? Little wonder he handed them over to *foolish shepherds*, self-serving leaders who have no understanding of his wise Law (11:16).

But that's not how the chapter ends. He is not a worthless Shepherd. He commits to rescuing his flock from the *worthless shepherds* that rule them (11:17).

So, how does any of this relate to Judas? When God finally did send his Anointed — the son of David riding into the capital to save his people in fulfilment of God's promise through Zechariah (Matthew 21:4-9) — there were still people who despised him. One of the twelve he had chosen, who had seen all he had done, treated him as a worthless leader.

But Judas didn't set the price. Like a patron at a pawn shop with no idea of the value of what he had, Judas asked, "What will you give me in exchange for him?" It was the temple that set the price. The chief priests offered thirty pieces of silver to be rid of the one we know as their God-appointed shepherd, the king who would save his people from the worthless shepherds, restoring us into the reign of the true Shepherd (Matthew 26:15).

Then something tipped Judas over the edge. Something dawned on him — maybe the realization that the temple leaders he trusted were in league with the foolish shepherds that oppressed God’s flock, the power Pilate represented. That’s how Matthew tells it:

**Matthew 27:1–5 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. <sup>2</sup> So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

<sup>3</sup> When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. <sup>4</sup> “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

<sup>5</sup> So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

In a condemnation of their own actions, the temple leaders realize they cannot keep the money they have paid for his life (*blood money*, 27:6). Ironically, they give the money to a potter. Assuming the potter has removed the clay, his field would be suitable for little but burying people. So what they got in exchange for the anointed king God sent them was a field of death, a burial place where they could keep the unclean bones of foreigners like Roman soldiers.

That was the “handsome” price at which they valued God’s kingship over them (Zechariah 11:13). That’s the point Matthew makes: *the price set on him by the people of Israel* (Matthew 27:9).

It all comes down to what we think God’s leadership is worth. Would we trade the ruler God raised up for us for a burial plot, a post-apocalyptic patch of dried earth, a memorial to death? Or do we value him like no one else, as the one God has appointed to save his world into God’s reign, the only name given under heaven by which humanity can be rescued?

## What God decrees for his people (Zechariah 12:1-9)

*What God promised for his people is often frustrated by our unfaithfulness. The good news is that all the promises are fulfilled in Christ.*

We're looking at how Jesus fulfils the hope of the Old Testament prophets. The Gospel writers say this is how Jesus understood himself and his role, but it's often not a straight line from prophecy to fulfilment. Israel's history wasn't a straight line. They took many detours to reach what God intended them to be: his kingdom.

So, to make sense of how Jesus fulfils the prophets, we need to follow their journey. Without taking those steps, it may feel like the Gospel writers were cherry-picking texts to suit themselves.

Take the classic text from Zechariah 9 about the humble king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Matthew says, *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet.* Zechariah was talking about a son of David being recognized as king as he entered the capital to end the conflict and restore God's reign over them (9:9-10). In all the generations between Zechariah and Jesus, this had never happened. Some exiles had returned to rebuild Jerusalem, but they were still ruled by the nations. How would God restore his reign over them?

That question became more desperate with every passing century as they were ruled by Assyria, then Babylon, Persia, and Greece (the dominant power in Zechariah 9:13).

### Zechariah's vision of a restored world

That's the backdrop for Zechariah 12, a *măś·šā'* — an oracle on not-yet fulfilled promises. It's a meditation on the heavenly sovereign's decree (*dā·bār · yhw̄h*) for his nation (*āl-yiś·rā·'ēl*).

#### **Zechariah 12:1–3 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *A prophecy: The word of the LORD concerning Israel.*

*The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the human spirit within a person, declares: <sup>2</sup>“I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem.*

<sup>3</sup>*On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.”*

That's astounding! *Israel* had ceased to exist. Israel had been a separate nation from Judah, with their own king and capital (Samaria), not ruled from Jerusalem since Solomon's day. Israel had been destroyed by Assyria, leaving only Judah. Zechariah knows all this, yet he speaks of *Israel* being restored under Jerusalem's government. A son of David is to lead the tribes of Israel. (*David* is in 12:7, 8, 10, 12; 13:1).



But, how can God's nation be secure in the face of the empires? For that to work, God would need to be in control of the nations as well. And that is the claim of the Torah's opening chapters. Genesis 1–11 traces YHWH's authority over the heavens and earth, all humanity, including the nations.

Zechariah echoes these creational phrases. YHWH *stretched out the heavens*. He *established the earth*. He *shaped humanity* (literally the *Adam-breath*). Humanity was created to live *in his midst* (12:1 isn't merely about having a spirit in me.) Zechariah anticipated a coming day when God's promises in the beginning are fulfilled in the end.

*That day* — when God's reign on earth is fulfilled in his anointed Davidic ruler — *that day* is the essence of Zechariah's meditation. *On that day* is the key phrase of his final oracles (12:3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4; 14:4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 20, 21). Eight times he speaks of *how it will be on that day* (*w'hā-yāh' b'āy-yôm-hā-hū'*), the day when heaven's reign is restored to the earth through his anointed.

But Zechariah knows there's quite a journey to get there. The nations who banded together to take God's power into their own hands (Genesis 11) still gather against God's city (12:3). That had been Israel's entire history. For God to restore his reign through his fallen nation would take divine intervention. God would need to *make Jerusalem an immovable rock* so that any of *the nations who tried to move it would injure themselves instead* (12:3).

For God's nation to survive against the armies of the nations, God would need to *strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness* (12:4). God's people would need to find their strength in him (12:5). A little match can burn a pile of wood, but the miracle is that they themselves would not be consumed (12:6).

God promised to save his people, *restoring the honour of the house of David* (12:7), so *the feeblest among them will be like David*. The *house of David* will once again represent God's sovereign presence on earth — *like God*. The Davidic king will lead them to victory, just as *the angel of YHWH* led them out of Pharaoh's power and established them as God's nation at Sinai (12:8). God will bring justice on any nation that tries to destroy them (12:9).

## Jesus' vision of a restored world

*That day* had not yet come before Jesus' time, but John the Baptist proclaimed it: *The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near* (Mark 1:15). John declared that Jesus was the powerful leader anointed by God's Holy Spirit to cleanse his people and sort out all that was wrong (Matthew 3:10-12). God confirmed that this was indeed the Son appointed by heaven to lead the world (Matthew 3:17).

Jesus believed God's reign was being restored in him. Heaven's anointed ruler (*the Christ*) restores the reign of the eternal sovereign (*my Father in heaven*), so the earth is reclaimed as a *kingdom of heaven*. Jesus proclaimed and enacted this *good news* — heaven's reign arriving on earth in him.

Jesus believed the promises of the prophets were being fulfilled *in him*. That's why he reframed many of the promises about Israel around himself. What the prophets said regarding God's people is ultimately fulfilled in the one who leads them. That's why we hear unexpected echoes of the prophets in Jesus' statements about himself.

Jerusalem in Jesus' time was not a fulfilment of Zechariah's hope. It was not an *immovable rock* that the nations could not cast down, that they would *injure themselves* if they tried to dislodge. The leaders of Jerusalem were the enemies of God's ruler, determined to dislodge him! So, Jesus took the imagery of the rock, and applied it to himself. He, the chosen Son, was the immovable rock. He was the stone the builders tried to cast down, the stone that would injure those who attempt to remove it. That stone is the Davidic king (Matthew 21:42-45, compare Psalm 118:22-23).

So, the line from prophecy to fulfilment has more twists and turns than a Grisham novel. When God finally sent his Anointed to lead them, Jerusalem would not follow her king (Matthew 23:37). They were no different to their ancestors (Matthew 23:30-36). Without his leadership, they would not be *an immovable rock for all the nations* (verse 3), but they would be overrun by the nations, and it would be the greatest anguish they had ever known (Matthew 24:15-21).

Zechariah declared that *Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem* (verse 2), and so does Jesus: *then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains* (Matthew 24:16). But the outcomes are radically different. Zechariah speaks of the day when God leads his city to liberation, while Jesus speaks of the day when God's city wants to kill his Anointed. That's why Jesus declared that Jerusalem would fall to her enemies until they were ready to recognize his kingship (23:38 – 24:2).

That's why Jesus reframes the promises about Jerusalem around himself. God's promises for the kingdom arrive in the king. This promise is fulfilled in him:

**Zechariah 12** <sup>8</sup> *On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD going before them.*

The *feeblest* among them is the king whose throne is a cross, but this is their Davidic king doing battle for their release. Representing the house of David, he is *like God* present among his people in ways they could scarcely understand. He is *like the angel of YHWH* joining them in the wilderness to lead in the great exodus out of death and into nationhood under God, leading the earth back into heaven's reign.

All the promises for God's people find their fulfilment in him (12:7). The salvation and security of the people of God are fulfilled in God's anointed (12:9).

## Conclusion

To appreciate how the promises God made for his people are fulfilled in the leader he appointed, we need to understand how these promises were not fulfilled in the people themselves. Their disobedience kept detouring them from what God had promised. Despite their failures, God raised him up — even when they killed him — the Saviour for God's people *and* the nations.

We don't yet see the whole world under his kingship, but we see God's anointed, the person in whom all these promises are fulfilled. We see him *crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone*. In him God is *bringing many sons and daughters into the glory* of his reign (Hebrews 2:9-10).

## The one they pierced (Zechariah 12:10-14)

"They will look on me, the one they have pierced." What does this mean in its OT context? How does it relate to the Messiah?

How do you understand this astounding statement from the Old Testament?

*They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son (Zechariah 12:10).*

There's a strong temptation to simply read this through the lens of the cross: Jesus the Father's only Son, God pierced for us. That may be how the story plays out (compare John 19:37), but we miss the richness if we don't ask what it meant in Zechariah's context.

When Zechariah says, "*They will look on me*"

- **they** = "the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (12:10a).
- **me** = God, since Zechariah is speaking for God ("the word of the LORD" 12:1).

How could *they* pierce *me*?

And how can God's people piercing him be compared to grieving for *a firstborn son*?

Zechariah is unfolding a very specific story: the story of God's anointed (the Davidic king) representing heaven's authority (the kingdom of God) in a world where people (both the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the nations) resist God's reign.

### Old Testament background

Zechariah's message is about *David* (12:7, 8, 10, 12; 13:1). God gave the kingship to David forever (2 Samuel 7:16), but the nations had deposed God's king. There was no longer a kingdom ruled by *the LORD and his anointed* (Psalm 2:2), the *son* on earth leading on behalf of his *Father* in heaven (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7).

Zechariah promised the king would return in joy (9:9), but they were still mourning the loss of the kingship. *Mourn, grieve, and weep* are keywords (seven times in 12:10-12). Leading this mourning is David's dynasty and the prophet who proclaimed his dynasty (12:12).

Jerusalem's mourning is compared to *the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo* (12:11). While commentators argue over who or what *Hadad Rimmon* refers to, there's no question how *the plain of Megiddo* relates to the fall of the Davidic kingship.

**Josiah** was the last good king of Judah. He renewed the covenant relationship with God, removed the false gods, and taught his people to follow the LORD. They remembered him as the best king they ever had:

*Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did (2 Kings 23:25).*

And yet Josiah — their ideal king — was killed at the hands of the nations:

*While Josiah was king, Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went up to the Euphrates River to*

*help the king of Assyria. King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle, but Necho faced him and killed him at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29).*

The Former Prophets struggled to make sense of this tragedy. 1 & 2 Kings insist that each king received what he deserved, just as the Torah promised (blessing for obedience, curses for disobedience — Deuteronomy 28). But with Josiah, that fell apart. The best king suffered the worst fate. It was effectively the end of the Davidic kingship.

Four kings reigned after Josiah, but none represented God's kingship. They were all appointed or deposed by foreign powers:

- **Jehoahaz:** *Pharaoh Necho put him in chains at Riblah in the land of Hamath so that he might not reign in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:33).*
- **Jehoiakim:** *During Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and Jehoiakim became his vassal (2 Kings 24:1).*
- **Jehoiachin:** *Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:15).*
- **Zedekiah:** *He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. It was because of the LORD's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence (2 Kings 24:19-20).*

The divinely appointed kingship effectively ended with Josiah. That's why his death at Megiddo became the focal point for lamenting the fall of the kingdom (2 Chronicles 35:22-25).

The appointment of God's anointed in each generation had been a celebration of great joy. Now the loss of God's anointed was a memorial of great grief as they yearned for the joy of God's reign to return (Zechariah 9:9).

## Mourning for hurting God

Zechariah sees a softness of heart being poured out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, leading them to call out to God for the restoration of his gracious kingship over them. This outpouring of *a spirit of grace and supplication* reverses the reason the kingship failed (12:10).

Even before Josiah's reign, God had already decreed the end of Judah as his kingdom because previous sons of David (like Manasseh) had abused the power they held in God's name:

### **2 Kings 23:25–27 (NIV)**

<sup>25</sup> *Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did — with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.*

<sup>26</sup> *Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to arouse his anger. <sup>27</sup> So the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, 'My Name shall be there.'"*

King and kingdom had pierced God's heart.

Broken relationship cannot be mended while you're looking away. Reconciliation begins with looking at the person you've hurt. Zechariah sees that his people will need to turn back towards God, to look on the one they have pierced (12:10).

Reconciliation recognizes the other's pain as well as your own. Israel was suffering as a fallen nation, but God was suffering too. God was so invested in the Abrahamic project that the death of his nation felt like the death of his firstborn son. That's how God expressed it to Pharaoh: *Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may serve me."* (Exodus 4:22-23).

The death of Josiah was more than a lament in Israel. Each time a son of David was crowned in Jerusalem, he was installed by the heavenly sovereign's decree: *You are my son; today I have become your father* (Psalm 2:6-7). When the last God-appointed king died and there were no more because of the disobedience of the sons of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, God's heart was pierced: *mourning as one mourns for an only child, grieving as one grieves for a firstborn son.*

They had pierced God's heart. To be reconciled, they would need to look on his face and own the pain they caused him. To be reconciled, they would need a gracious spirit, a yearning to be restored into his family.

This was God's promise for his people through the prophet:

***Zechariah 12:10 (NIV)***

*<sup>10</sup> And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.*

The *weeping in Jerusalem* is so intense because they're grieving not only their own loss, but what they have done to God (12:11). It starts at the top (the house of David). It incorporates the prophets who speak for God (Nathan), the priests who seek atonement with God (Levi), the enemies of David (Shimei), all the people, both men and women:

***Zechariah 12:11–14 (NIV)***

*<sup>11</sup> On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be as great as the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. <sup>12</sup> The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, <sup>13</sup> the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, <sup>14</sup> and all the rest of the clans and their wives.*

This is Zechariah's vision of the people of God being restored as his kingdom.

## **Fulfilment in Christ**

When Jesus came announcing the good news that the kingdom of God was being restored in him, the Jerusalem leadership was still so preoccupied with their own power that they had no qualms over how they treated God's anointed leader.

When he rode into Jerusalem as the son of David fulfilling Zechariah 9:9, he found no *spirit of grace and supplication* at the temple. He found it occupied by robbers no different from Manasseh, actors pretending to be God's appointed leaders but ready to fill Jerusalem with

blood to keep their own power just like their ancestors. It was clear to him that they — and the city they controlled — must fall to make way for God’s reign. He was grieved, describing the most intense suffering of their entire history, yet declaring that God would give the kingship to the Son of Man. (That’s the logic of Matthew 21–24.)

Jesus was the Christ, God’s anointed ruler returning to Jerusalem. God finally overturned Josiah’s death, restoring the King of the Jews. But his own people (Judas, Caiaphas) handed him over to their enemies (Pilate, Herod) to put him to death.

The Josiah tragedy recurred. This generation was no better than their ancestors. They understood nothing of the grief they caused God. They saw nothing of God’s presence as they pierced him. They felt nothing of their Father’s tears for his only child, the firstborn Son he sent to lead them.

That was the moment in history when God overturned the Josiah tragedy, the death of his anointed. Raising his Son from death to the throne, Heaven declared Jesus to be the Son entrusted with all authority in heaven and on earth, above angels and people (Hebrews 1:5-8 echoing Psalms 2:7 and 45:6-7).

That’s the good news Peter proclaimed:

**Acts 2:36–38**

<sup>36</sup> *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

<sup>37</sup> *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

<sup>38</sup> *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Would you call that *a spirit of grace and supplication*? Not everyone, but 3000 on that day looked on the one they had pierced, realized their offence against Heaven, and recognized Jesus as the Christ, their Heaven-sent resurrected king.

Others joined them. One of those, Saul of Tarsus, described *a great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart*, a willingness to be *cut off from the Messiah for the sake of my people* (Romans 9:3). Does that qualify for what Zechariah described as *a spirit of grace and supplication*?

What changed Paul from persecutor to ambassador of Christ to the nations? Wasn’t it looking on the one we had pierced, hearing him say, *I am Jesus whom you are persecuting* (Acts 9:6; 26:15)?

## Conclusion

This is how our Heavenly Father restores his sovereign authority to the human family on earth. The love of power corrupts us. The power of love restores us.

It’s the grief in God’s heart that brings us home. Looking at him, the one we have pierced. Seeing the pain in his heart. Realizing his grief: a Father mourning for an only child, grieving as one grieves for a firstborn son.

We see the Father’s heart when we see Christ crucified.

## A cleansed, non-prophet kingdom? (Zechariah 13:1-6)

*Interested in seeing the gospel in the Old Testament? This example from Zechariah 13 shows how to (and how not to).*

The ideal kingdom is a wise king with a responsive community. Zechariah's hope is for Israel's failed kingdom to be restored after being exiled and dominated by foreign powers. He anticipates what life could be like *on that day* (13:1, 2, 4).

King and kingdom are reconciled as God gives them *a spirit of grace and supplication*, and they respond by seeing how they hurt him — *looking on the one they have pierced* (12:10). They stabbed God's heart by rejecting his kingship, giving themselves to other rulers and their gods. This has been Zechariah's core message: *Return to me, and I will return to you* (1:3).

So, *on that day* when they turn back to God's kingship, God cleanses *the house of David* — the kingship God sacked because they were self-serving. On that day, God cleanses *the inhabitants of Jerusalem* — the people who gave themselves to other rulers and their gods.

Based on the Torah, Israel was to be a nation under God's leadership. Their sovereign gave them his laws and defined how to remain ritually pure in his presence. Sin or impurity could make them unclean, so he provided cleansing rituals (e.g. *wash* occurs 35 times in Leviticus). So when they turn back to God, Zechariah declares that God will open a fountain to cleanse his people, so they're devoted to him alone:

### **Zechariah 13:1–2 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.*

<sup>2</sup> *“On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more,” declares the LORD Almighty. “I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land.”*

In returning to their true sovereign, they cannot serve other rulers. They cannot call on the gods of those rulers to support them. When no one even remembers the names of these false powers, the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem are the kingdom of God.

Back when Israel/Judah was God's kingdom (1000 – 586 BC), prophets such as Elijah regularly confronted the kings for acting in self-serving ways instead of serving the LORD. Imagine a kingdom where that kind of prophetic correction was no longer needed! Here's how Zechariah saw it:

### **Zechariah 13:3–6**

<sup>3</sup> *And if anyone still prophesies, their father and mother, to whom they were born, will say to them, ‘You must die, because you have told lies in the LORD’s name.’ Then their own parents will stab the one who prophesies.*

<sup>4</sup> *On that day every prophet will be ashamed of their prophetic vision. They will not put on a prophet’s garment of hair in order to deceive. <sup>5</sup> Each will say, ‘I am not a prophet. I am a*

*farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.’<sup>6</sup> If someone asks, ‘What are these wounds on your body?’ they will answer, ‘The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.’*

In summary:

- **Verse 3:** Parents are often ardent supporters of their children, but not even parents will tolerate someone who falsely claims to speak for the LORD (compare Deuteronomy 13:6-10.)
- **Verse 4:** No one will dress up like a prophet (compare 2 Kings 1:8) in order to deceive people.
- **Verse 5:** No one will seek the power or rewards attached to being viewed as a prophet. (Compare Amos 7:14.)
- **Verse 6:** Sometimes prophets were beaten and imprisoned by the kings they were sent to correct. But on that day, no one will present their scars as evidence of prophetic status. (Compare Jeremiah 20:2; 37:15; Proverbs 27:6.)

What does any of this have to do with the kingdom restored in Christ?

## Misapplying Zechariah’s message

It’s so easy to grab a phrase and bend it to what we want. *On that day a fountain will be opened ... to cleanse them from sin and impurity.* We could write a hymn about that:

There is a fountain filled with blood  
drawn from Immanuel's veins  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
lose all their guilty stains.

To make that application, you need to ignore the bit that says the fountain will be opened to *the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

There’s another stream of Christianity that doesn’t ignore that bit. Dispensationalists expect the mass conversion of Jews to Christianity in the future. They believe these Old Testament texts have not been fulfilled, so they interpret them as relating to his second coming to reign as a literal king on a throne in Jerusalem for 1000 years.

Another group believes prophecy has ceased. God said, *I will remove the prophets* (13:4). Was Zechariah a cessationist? Did he say prophetic gifts would cease when the complete revelation of God arrived in Christ (as enshrined in the New Testament)?

These interpretations warn us of some basic hermeneutical flaws:

1. Don’t cherry-pick phrases to support what you want, ignoring the bits that don’t fit.
2. Don’t bypass the crucial step of understanding the message in its setting, how Zechariah and his audience would have understood it.

If we haven’t considered what Leviticus says about *cleansing from sin and impurity* through ritual washing, we cannot understand *the fountain* of verse 1. If we haven’t understood the role of the prophets who confronted the kings for abusing their power and misrepresenting God, we won’t understand why that role is not needed when the house of David has been



cleansed. If we haven't understood Jesus as the divinely appointed king who draws humanity back under divine sovereignty (the gospel of Christ our Lord), we won't understand the kingdom promises as fulfilled in him.

Taking these basic steps leads us to a more nuanced understanding of Zechariah's message:

- The reason God needed to open a fountain to cleanse the Davidic king and his people from sin and impurity was that his Torah called them to obedience and ritual purity as a way of living in recognition of his presence (Leviticus 19:2, 26). But it's a mistake to equate the requirements of that covenant with God's expectations for the global kingdom established in Christ. (Galatians addresses that mistake.)
- It's a mistake to argue that prophecy has ceased now that we have a perfect king who needs no prophet to correct him. The first act of our anointed king after his enthronement was to share his anointing with his servants (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit does not lead us to correct our king; he empowers us to speak and act in concert with him, as his kingdom (corporate entity, *body*) fulfilling the purposes of the king (*head*). (That's 1 Corinthians 12.)
- The mistake of failing to see how Jesus has fulfilled the kingdom promises of the OT prophets is something we'll discuss in a future post (on Zechariah 14).

## Conclusion

In Christ, God has restored the fallen Davidic kingship (*the house of David*) and extended citizenship beyond Judea (*the inhabitants of Jerusalem*). Christ is cleansing the world from rebellion against God's sovereignty, restoring the earth as God's holy place.

Christ overturns the division of the world under conflicting powers (with their idols) through the gospel: the good news that God appointed Christ as king, reunifying the earth in his leadership ([Ephesians 2:14-22](#)).

Our king needs no prophetic correction, but when he ascended he gave gifts to his people, empowering us prophetically (and in other ways) to equip the people of his kingdom for works of service until the whole of humanity is corporately under his leadership, developing into the whole measure of the fullness of our anointed king ([Ephesians 4:8-13](#)).

This gospel is so much more than the message of individual guilt we often hear today. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened to see the richness of God's gospel proclamation, the elevation of his Son from death to the throne, the authority we represent as his kingdom ([Ephesians 1:18-23](#)).

This is what Zechariah anticipated *on that day*. The prophets glimpsed what God would do. The kingdom of God restored in Christ is so much more than they envisioned.

## Strike the shepherd (Zechariah 13:7-9)

*Why was the shepherd of God's people struck? Why did Jesus relate Zechariah's message to himself and the scattering of his little flock?*

The night he was arrested, Jesus expected his friends to abandon him. He knew they would because the prophets said so.

**Matthew 26:31** *Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"* (NIV)

Reading Zechariah 13, it's not immediately obvious why Jesus would apply this to himself. To make sense of how Jesus understood the text, we need to read the prophets in the context of the story they were telling.

### Who was "my shepherd" in Zechariah 13:7?

Zechariah speaks of the shepherd (*rā·'āh*) fourteen times in chapters 10–13. They were God's flock (9:16), but they'd been scattered in exile under foreign rulers, *wandering like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd* (10:2). God intended the Davidic kings to shepherd his flock, but he had dismissed them as self-serving (11:3-8), worthless shepherds (11:15-17, compare Ezekiel 34:7-10).

This is how Zechariah explains the fact that no Davidic shepherd had returned to manage God's people, even though some of the flock had returned from exile and built a temple for God. They were still under foreign rule because God had dismissed the Davidic kings from shepherding his flock:

**Zechariah 13:7** *"Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."*

The focus is on what a tragedy this is for the flock. Without a shepherd to protect them, they were vulnerable and exposed. The greater part (two-thirds) of them were *struck down and perished* (13:8). Those who survived felt like they had been *put into the fire* (13:9).

Had God abandoned them? Could God's flock survive? They probably felt like Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace. God promised to rescue those who called on his name, recognized his authority, and identified as his covenant people:

**Zechariah 13:9** *This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, "They are my people," and they will say, "The LORD is our God."*

### Jesus as God's shepherd

When Jesus arrived centuries later, God's flock was still *harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd* (Matthew 9:36). The leaders they did have (at the temple) were not

shepherds appointed by God but thieves and robbers who climbed in some other way — to steal, kill, and destroy the sheep (John 10:1, 10).

That was their intent with Jesus. The robbers saw the good shepherd as a threat to their power. Once again, the abusive and violent attitudes of the leaders led to the death of the shepherd God sent them. Jesus has been explaining this to his followers ever since they recognized him as the Christ, the anointed Son appointed by the heavenly sovereign to lead his people (Matthew 16:16, 21, 28).

Jesus expects to enter into the failure of God's people, the shepherd struck down because of their disobedience. The shepherd bears in his own body the sins of his people.

The shepherd had a *little flock*, the foundation of his Father's kingdom (Luke 12:32). But as they watched their shepherd being struck, this little flock felt as if God's hand had turned against them (Zechariah 13:7).

Jesus was the Christ, the anointed shepherd for his people. He would carry in himself the failures of his people, the rebellion of humanity against our heavenly sovereign, the sin of the world.

Hear the empathy of the shepherd's heart. With all that he would face that night, his heart went out to his little flock:

**Matthew 26** <sup>31</sup> *Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*  
<sup>32</sup> *But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."*

Jesus faced the temptation to climb in some other way as the self-serving thieves and robbers did (Matthew 4:8-10), but he chose to die for his people, struck down as their shepherd. He went through the fire on behalf of his people, re-establishing humanity as God's kingdom, the community that finds its identity in him.

Our response to this good news? Returning to live under his authority:

**Zechariah 13:9** *They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'*

## What others are saying

Barry Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come*, BST (Nottingham: IVP, 2003), 169–170:

We have already seen God portrayed as the true shepherd of Israel in 11:4–14, and God himself as the 'pierced one' in 12:10. But the stricken shepherd here cannot be God, because he is expressly distinguished from him. God refers to him as the *man who is close to me* (7). He is clearly a 'good' shepherd, approved by God, and is someone intimately connected with God — but he cannot simply be equated with God. The book of Zechariah has provided us with only one person who fits this description, namely the ideal king of 9:9, whose coming was anticipated in the promises concerning 'the Branch' in 3:8 and 6:12. In other words, the stricken shepherd is the Messiah. ...

In Zechariah's inspired prophecy the suffering of God and the suffering of his shepherd go hand in hand. ... We can (indeed *must*) say that in the striking of

the shepherd God himself is struck. Or to put it in the timeless words of the apostle Paul, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.'

R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 998–999:

Zech 13:7–9 is one of a sequence of passages in Zech 9–14 which appear to present a messianic figure who is nonetheless rejected, wounded and killed, a model which seems to have been important for Jesus in understanding his own messianic suffering, and which Matthew draws on several times in his account of Jesus in Jerusalem (cf. 21:4–5 [Zech 9:9–10]; 24:30 [Zech 12:10–14]; 27:3–10 [Zech 11:12–13]). The shepherd in Zech 13:7 is described as *God's* shepherd, the man who is God's "associate" ("who is close to me," NJB, TNIV). That so exalted a figure should nonetheless be struck down, and indeed by the sword of God himself, expresses in a remarkable way the paradox of a Messiah who is to be killed in accordance with the will of God declared in the scriptures. The sheep in the prophecy are the people of God (as in Ezekiel 34), scattered when they lose their leader, but destined to be refined and restored, even if only one third of them (Zech 13:8–9). So for Jesus his disciples form the nucleus of the new people of God under the leadership of the Messiah. The fact that the following clause in Zech 13:7 refers to them as "the little ones" may have appealed especially to Matthew (cf. 10:42; 18:6–14).

## Divine sovereignty and human suffering (Zechariah 14:1-5)

*Puzzled over how to understand God's sovereignty? It's the hope of a suffering world.*

Zechariah's final chapter extends astounding hope in a puzzling framework.

The book started with a call and a promise: *Return to me, and I will return to you* (1:3). Some exiles returned to keep faith. They built a house for their heavenly sovereign to live among them. Priests resumed their work of serving God, and Zechariah promised the return of the God-appointed king, *lowly and riding on a donkey* (9:9).

But centuries rolled by, and they remained oppressed, under empire after empire. Were the nations too strong for God's people? Would their king never be restored? Zechariah offers a counter-narrative: the reason why the Davidic kingship failed was that God had sacked the shepherds (13:7, as in Chapter 11).

The kingship had failed, not God's sovereign authority. Restoration required only the two components of 1:3, but now they're reversed as God takes the initiative and they respond: *I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'* (13:9).

That introduces the final chapter. Zechariah isn't looking back to the day of King David. He's looking forward to *the day of the LORD* (14:1), the day when YHWH reigns. That's the core of his final vision: *The LORD will be king over the whole earth* (14:9).

But Zechariah's vision is not yet the end of all war and peace for all nations. YHWH leads, but the struggle is not over. To understand his impressionistic image, we must stand where he stood, appreciating the role God gave his people in the Old Testament story:

### **Zechariah 14:1-2 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *A day of the LORD is coming, Jerusalem, when your possessions will be plundered and divided up within your very walls. <sup>2</sup> I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.*

How can this be? If God is all-loving and all-powerful, can't he arrange it so his people don't suffer? Doesn't an all-loving father know his children's agony? Can't an all-powerful sovereign deal with injustice and prevent our pain?

Zechariah offers no solution for this conundrum. He never minimizes the horror of their suffering: city captured, houses ransacked, women raped. He declares that God is leading history anyway, even when it makes no sense to us.

We expect God to *gather* his *scattered* flock (1:19, 21; 2:6; 7:14; 10:8-10; 13:7). We don't expect God to gather the nations against his people!

Zechariah embraces the incongruity, affirming God's sovereignty. He's been doing this all book long: it was God who *struck the shepherd* and *scattered the sheep* (13:7).

The problem is how God deals with the nations, the peoples in rebellion against his authority. They build kingdoms by making war (Genesis 10:8-12), trying to take God's power (Genesis 11). That's the reason God established a nation to represent his reign (Genesis 12).

In typical Old Testament fashion, Zechariah addresses the incongruity of the rebellion against divine sovereignty by attributing inviolable authority to God. If the nations were gathering against Jerusalem, God must have gathered them to fight against his authority.

The puzzle of divine authority is that God does not eliminate his enemies. He confronts them to draw them under his authority. That's how God explained his mighty acts to Pharaoh: *By now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth* (Exodus 9:15-16).

God saved his people from Pharaoh by splitting the sea, leading his people through (Exodus 14). Zechariah declares that God will provide the same mighty emancipation for the people of Jerusalem — splitting the land! It's the same word (*bā·qā'*) as splitting the sea in Exodus 14:16, 21.

That's how the Warrior God (Exodus 15:3) fights those who oppose him. His goal is not to kill his enemies but open up a way to life under his kingship where *the LORD reigns for ever and ever* (Exodus 15:18).

The Rea Sea was an east-west crossing, with the waters raised up to the north and the south as God led his people through. Zechariah envisions the Warrior God providing that deliverance for the land-locked city of Jerusalem, leading his besieged people to safety:

***Zechariah 14:3–5 (NIV)***

<sup>3</sup> *Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle.*

<sup>4</sup> *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. <sup>5</sup> You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.*

When God's king finally did arrive in Jerusalem on a donkey to save his people, he did not expect his feet to literally split the Mount of Olives, as if he was called to reorder Jerusalem's topography. That's not how he understood the imagery of moving mountains (Matthew 21:21).

Jesus made so many allusions to Zechariah that we'll need to cover that as a separate post. What's crucial is that Jesus had Zechariah's understanding of divine sovereignty in the face of suffering.

In the city surrounded by the nations for centuries, heaven's anointed king (the Christ) came to take on the suffering of his people — *the king of the Jews*, rejected in refusal of divine sovereignty. He submitted to the divine decree, Strike the shepherd (Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 26:31). He drank the cup his Father gave him (Matthew 26:39, 42). He expected God to split the rocks and open the tomb for God's holy people (Matthew 27:51). He expected God to open a way through the grave to life in God's reign (Acts 1:3). This is how he ushered in *the great and glorious day of the Lord, ... for all whom the Lord our God will call* (Acts 2:20-39).

If you're feeling fatigued, struggling to keep a grip on life, focus your thoughts on the one who endured such hostility from the rebels. He established what we believe (God's sovereignty over the earth), and he will bring it to completion (Hebrews 12:3).

The resurrected king is the embodiment of divine sovereignty in the face of suffering.

*Open [Zechariah 14:1-5](#).*

## Zechariah's vision of God's reign (Zechariah 14:4-21)

*The Lord will be king over the whole earth (Zechariah 14:9).*

A restructure is common when a new leader takes office. Zechariah's final chapter envisions a restructure of creation as it comes under divine sovereignty. The heart of the chapter is this: *The LORD will be king over the whole earth* (14:9). And changing the king changes the kingdom.

In an alien world, Star Trek's Spock would say, "It's life, Jim, but not as we know it." Zechariah is not seeing an alien planet; he's seeing the removal of everything alien to God's intentions for life on earth, the terraforming of our planet.

With impressionistic brushstrokes, Zechariah paints an image of God's reign transforming everything:

- It's **topological**. God's footprint makes a path through the mountains (14:4-5).
- It's **cosmological**. God's glory changes night to day (14:6-7).
- It's **horticultural**. God's life is life-giving water for creation (14:8).
- It's **structural**. God's exaltation gives everything its place beneath him (14:10).
- It's **political**. God's sovereignty gives the nations their place in relation to him (14:12-19).
- It's **everyday**. Devotion to him transforms everything, from how we decorate our animals, to how we prepare our food (14:20-21).

We won't go through all of these in detail, but here's the first one:

### **Zechariah 14:4-5, 10 (NIV)**

*<sup>4</sup>On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. <sup>5</sup>You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. ...*

*<sup>10</sup>The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up ...*

The Arabah was the rift valley that included the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth. But verse 10 is not asking us to redraw contour lines on our maps. Zechariah sees God's Mountain rising to prominence above every other place. No other proud mountain raises itself against God's reign. Divine order is restored to the earth. It's a familiar metaphor in the prophets (e.g. Isaiah 2, Micah 4).

The nation of Israel was born when God delivered them by splitting the Sea and establishing his reign over them in the Sinai covenant. But that nation no longer existed. The kingdoms of the world had overpowered them. They needed a new exodus, to have God reigning over them again.



Zechariah pictures God splitting the land, as he had split the sea. His footstep creates a way of escape where there was not way, deliverance for his people, re-establishing his nation under his reign. Prominent mountains are no obstacle: they quake and fume at his presence, melting away like wax before the ruler who endures (Psalms 18:7; 46:2-3; 104:32; 97:5). The God who had split the sea to remove the obstacle blocking his people could also bring down the proud mountains and rescue his people out of oppression, into this reign.

Jesus believed he was called to lead his people in this new exodus, deliverance from the reign of evil, re-establishing the kingdom of God. Facing the temple mount, he spoke of God moving mountains (Mark 11:23). On the Mount of Olives he taught about the reign of God being re-established through him, even quoting the latter chapters of Zechariah (Matthew 24:30).

Some commentators have limited Zechariah's words to Jesus' second coming, a future time when the whole earth is under divine kingship. I think they've missed the point that Jesus has already re-established God's reign. It isn't fully here yet, but it is here.

Jesus is the Christ, the God-appointed ruler for the earth. He led the new exodus, out of the reign of sin and death, into the kingdom of the Son. He split the earth open, rising from the grave to the throne — the great salvation for God's people. He brought the world that was BC (*Before Christ*) into the years of our Lord's reign (*Anno Domini*). He calls the nations to obedience under his reign, and he will reign until all his enemies are under his feet.

So picture the world that is being reborn in the reign of our Lord:

- The proud mountains move aside, quaking at his footsteps as he leads the great rescue of humanity (14:4-5).
- The days of light and darkness are overpowered by his presence, as he leads us into the unending day of the LORD (14:6-7).
- Like the waters flowing from the divine presence in Eden to water creation, he is the life-giving water restoring the people of the east and the west (14:8).
- What has been in high places is being brought low, so everything finds its place beneath his exalted throne (14:10).
- The nations are no longer able to dominate the reign of God (14:12-15).
- The nations will ultimately honour *the king, the LORD Almighty*, celebrating the feast of the Creator/Deliverer, for creation won't support them if they don't (14:16-19).
- No aspect of life will be outside his reign. From how we decorate the animals to how we prepare our daily meals, every aspect of life is *devoted to the LORD*, with nothing unclean in his presence (14:20-21).

All of this because *the LORD reigns* (14:9). That's what Christ is restoring to the earth.

## What others are saying

John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise, *Minor Prophets II*, UBCS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 310–311:

**14:9** / The prophet succinctly states two core beliefs about God that are central and pervasive in the OT; the Lord is king, and the Lord is one. The

consummation will come, as the prophets have declared, because these things are true. And when it comes, these truths will be known everywhere. **The LORD will be king over the whole earth is an assertion that** repeats a theme from prophecy and the book of Psalms (e.g., Jer. 3:17; Pss. 93; 96; 97; 99). The nations of the earth will respond with worship and serve the king (Zech. 14:16). **On that day, furthermore, there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.** The emphasis on the Lord as one and only is most familiar from Deuteronomy 6:4. The names of the idols will have to be removed (Zech. 13:2), and the peoples of the earth will acknowledge the Lord alone as God.

Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 223–224:

Using symbolic language still the prophet is depicting 'Utopia'. For him the essential is that God should be King, not only in the life of the individual, but of the whole human race. When that condition is fulfilled everyday life will be 'holy to the Lord', and all human problems solved.

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