

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: ZECHARIAH

ZECHARIAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

Duncan Heaster

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 1

Zechariah Chapter 1

Zechariah 1:1 *In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying-* The immediate context of Zechariah is that he and Haggai prophesied to the dejected Jews who had returned from Babylon. Their indolence had led to God reflecting this by making the Persian king decree that they cease building the temple. But Zechariah and Haggai prophesy to the people and they resume. Whilst Haggai very directly criticizes the Jews for having other agendas for the return apart from rebuilding the temple, Zechariah takes the tack that events on earth are reflective of massive Divine activity. The people should not think that the time for rebuilding hasn't come, nor should they imagine their God as somehow dormant, disinterested and distant. There is a huge amount of Angelic work going on and they could be a part of it on earth. In this sense, Zechariah is similar to Ezekiel, who encourages the exiles that there is a vast system of cherubic-angelic activity going on as it were over their heads. But like Haggai, Zechariah insists that the restored kingdom of God in Israel could still come about- if they, despite their failures, worked with Him.

See on :7. The many restoration prophecies had stated that the Jews would return from Babylon after Babylon had fallen and restore God's Kingdom in Judah under a Messianic

ruler. Ez. 40-48 contains commands more than predictions of how a temple system would be rebuilt, with a "Prince" who was also a priest as the Messianic leader. They would repent and enter a new covenant which would replace the old covenant. Tragically, most of the Jews preferred the soft life of Babylon, and those who did return were impenitent and are revealed by Haggai, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah as seeking their own personal gain from emigration to Judah. And so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied. There is an element to which they will come literally true in the last days when latter day Babylon falls, a remnant of Judah repent, and the Lord Jesus returns to earth to re-establish God's Kingdom on earth based in Israel. But they are also reinterpreted in many New Testament passages which allude to the restoration prophecies, being reapplied to Christian believers entering the new covenant and coming out of 'Babylon' in a more spiritual sense.

Some exiles did return and began rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. But they were several times interrupted by seemingly invincible opposition from the local peoples and the king of Persia. But through the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the exiles were encouraged to keep on keeping on, and against all odds, a temple was rebuilt (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). So we should not read Haggai and Zechariah as merely droning on against the Jews and not getting very far. It was due to their inspired words that the discouraged, spiritually weak people of God were inspired to rise up and do the work of God's Kingdom, and succeed with every man's hand against them. In this is their abiding value to us. There is however the repeated theme of wasted potential- so much could have happened at that time, even the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in the form of the kingdom of Israel, replete with a Messianic ruler. But it didn't, because of short termist, self-satisficing attitudes, a failure to look beyond the immediate and personal to a far bigger picture.

Zechariah 1:2 *Yahweh was very displeased with your fathers*- That may sound obvious; but as Ez. 18 explains, the mentality amongst the exiles was the fathers had been punished too severely, and they their children were unfairly suffering the results. "Very displeased" translates a Hebrew phrase meaning 'with intense, fiery anger'. And yet even that is described in :15 as God being only "a little angry" compared to the anger He felt against the nations combining to attack Zion (:15 LXX). The comparison is intentional. God is indeed very angry with His people when they turn from Him; but that anger must be seen in context. The fact Judah had so sinned and incurred God's wrath didn't mean that He was therefore insensitive to their abusers; His anger with their enemies was so much greater. And so in a strange way, "the wrath of God is [or reflects] the love of God". Who would a man be more angry with? His wife because she cheated on him repeatedly and is exposed; or a bunch of hoods who rape her after her infidelity has been exposed? The man who truly loved his wife would be more angry with the rapists, and so it was with God.

Zechariah 1:3 *Therefore tell them: Thus says Yahweh of Armies: 'Return to me', says Yahweh of Armies, 'and I will return to you', says Yahweh of Armies*- The triple repetition of "Yahweh of Armies" / "Lord of Hosts" clearly points towards the Angels, through whom God was practically manifest in Judah's history. 'Turning' back to God has the implication of patching up a marriage: "If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again?... yet return again unto Me, saith the Lord" (Jer. 3:1). This is similar to Jer. 31:32 and Mal. 2:14, where again God, through the Angel, implies He would be justified in divorcing Israel. Mal. 3:7 seems a parallel passage: "Even from the days of your fathers (cp. Zech. 1:2,4,5) ye re gone away from Mine ordinances (given by an Angel), and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Angels).

Judah thought they had returned to God by having literally returned to Judah. But here we see the difference between the external and true spirituality. The literal return was to be

part and parcel of the return to God which He so earnestly sought. But they had only externally returned, but not internally. Hence this appeal to "return". So easily we can think we have repented when in fact we simply went through a motion of so doing.

Time and again in the context of the restoration it is emphasized that God would return to His people if they returned to Him (also Mal. 3:7). And they didn't return to Him- most chose not to return to the land, and those who did for the most part did not return to their God in their hearts. The whole basis of Israel's covenant relationship with God was that if they were exiled from the land for their sins, they must repent and *then* God would return to them (Dt. 30:1-10). Yet God graciously states to the exiles: "I am returned unto you" (Zech. 1:16; 8:3). Here was grace indeed. Passages like Ez. 36:24-31 therefore speak as if God's grace to the exiles was effectively a new covenant- which has in essence been extended to us. Having stated the conditionality of His 'returning' to His people, and recognizing they hadn't fulfilled their part of the conditions- God all the same returns to them, such was and is His almost desperate desire for relationship with His beloved people. This is a lesson for us in our relationships with others- to continue our acceptance and 'return' to them, even if they don't fulfill their part of the deal. For this, day by day, is how our God deals not only with us but with His weak and wayward people as a whole.

The implication of Hag. 2:17 is that they had not totally turned to Yahweh. They had responded to Haggai's call to resume work in Hag. 1:12,13 and God had been as it were much enthused by it. But after a month's work they needed more appeal. They still hadn't turned completely and permanently to Him, with a 'repentance not to be repented of' as Paul would say. Zechariah's prophecy came two months after Haggai (Zech. 1:1). And he appeals again for the people to turn to God (Zech. 1:3). I discuss on Zech. 8:19 the insincere penitence of the Jews, fasting from a sense of nationalism and ritual rather than from repentance. And even after Zechariah's time, the people still didn't really return to Yahweh in repentance, despite their focus on legalism and xenophobic hatred of Gentiles: "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'" (Mal. 3:7). Clearly their turning to Him had been only temporary. But still God was enthusiastic over their even very temporal response. Despite surely foreknowing how they would very quickly flag. He so wanted the Kingdom to be restored and His people to live in all joy and peace of relationship with Him. And that desire is unabated to this day, despite having been frustrated by His people so often, so deeply and for so long.

Zechariah 1:4 *Don't you be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying: Thus says Yahweh of Armies, 'Return now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings'* - This appeal to repent in the eighth month follows on the appeal to repent made in the seventh month (Hag. 2:1). But as noted on Hag. 2:18-20, by the ninth month it was apparent that the apparent response to Zechariah's appeal in :6 was only nominal. The "fathers" in view may have been the generation before them in exile in Babylon, who had refused to repent. Or they could be those of previous generations who had refused the multiple appeals for repentance (2 Chron. 36:15). The appeal was to repent of ways and doings- individual acts of sin as well as a general direction of life and thought.

But they did not hear, nor listen to me, says Yahweh- There seems no semantic difference between the terms "hear... listen" (also in Zech. 7:11). Just as returning to God was more than physically returning to the land, so hearing God was and is far more than literally hearing or reading His word.

Zechariah 1:5 *Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?*- The reference may be to the false prophets, in the spirit of Jer. 37:19: "Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?". They would contrast with the prophets who were "My servants" (:6).

Their fathers died, many of them in the Babylonian invasion. The words of judgment had come true upon them; and now Zechariah's generation were tempted to think that such judgment could not overtake the returned exiles. But they and the false prophets who appeared at the return from exile were just as liable to judgment as the generation who went into exile. We have a human tendency to assume that 'this shall not happen to *me*'. But it shall, unless we repent.

Zechariah 1:6 But My words and My decrees, which I commanded My servants the prophets, didn't they influence your fathers? Then they repented and said, 'Just as Yahweh of Armies determined to do to us, according to our ways, and according to our practices, so He has done with us' - We can read this as saying that the prophetic words to their fathers were responded to in repentance. But this would contradict the argument of :5; and in any case, it was historically not the case. The opposite was true. "Influence" is also "overtake (AVmg.), as if the threatened judgments did indeed come upon their fathers. For all their token repentances, they did not really repent, and so the Babylonian judgment had come. So I suggest the rhetorical question is asked as to whether their fathers really repented; with the expected negative answer, as to the questions in :5.

The remained of the verse would then be a statement about the response of the people to Zechariah's words. "They repented", but they go on to state what was merely axiomatic, that God had done to them what He had planned to do. This again hints at a lack of total repentance. This was all in the eighth month (:1). But as noted on Hag. 2:18-20, by the ninth month it was apparent that the apparent response to Zechariah's appeal in :6 was only nominal.

However, given the fact their fathers didn't repent, we can also consider the NET translation: "But have my words and statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, not outlived your fathers? Then they paid attention and confessed, 'The LORD of Heaven's Armies has indeed done what he said he would do to us, because of our sinful ways'". This implies the audience of Zechariah repented; "then they... confessed" would be the comment of the inspired narrator concerning Zechariah's audience. Although this would then be just one of many repentances, each of which was clearly just temporary- repentances that were repented of, as Paul would say.

Zechariah 1:7 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying- As noted on :6, the repentance of the exiles was at best tokenistic. But God's response was to assure them of the huge potential power available to them, and His purpose to all the same bring about the restoration of His Kingdom. It was over to them as to whether they wanted to be a part of that, both then and eternally. "Shebat" is Chaldee, reflecting how the Jews had very quickly assimilated with Babylonian language and ways in their exile. But the Hebrew equivalent means "shoot", the month of the shoot. And the shoot was intended to be Zerubbabel, the potential Messiah, whose name meant 'shoot of God'. Allusion may also be intended to how the mountains of Israel were to "shoot forth" (Ez. 36:8) when the exiles returned; rather than suffering the drought of God's displeasure which existed now the exiles had actually returned, as we see reflected in Haggai who was contemporary with Zechariah. The same allusion to the potentials possible is found in the meanings of the names Berechiah ['knee of Yah', i.e. His blessing] and Iddo ['timely']. The time for Yahweh's blessing had come, if Judah responded to the message of 'Zechariah', 'Yah has remembered'. He had not forgotten His plan to restore His Kingdom in Judah with a Messianic ruler, as might have appeared through the years of

exile. He was now 'remembering' it, but Judah needed to do their part in bringing about what was potentially possible.

Zechariah 1:8 I had a vision in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in a ravine- The man is defined in :10,11 as an Angel. The red, speckled and white horses behind him (1:8; Zech. 6:2-7) would therefore also appear to be ridden by Angels- indeed they are called "the four spirits (Angels; Ps. 104:4) of the Heavens" in Zech. 6:5 (see note there). The visions in this chapter serve the same function as the cherubim visions of Ezekiel- to assure the returning exiles that there had been and still was a huge system of careful, attentive Divine operation going on in the land and people of Judah, orchestrated by God's Spirit through the Angels.

Myrtle trees were associated with the feast of booths, at the time of harvest. The harvest that year had been very bad, as Haggai explains. The vision was received in the 11th month, literally 'shoot month', when harvest should have been forthcoming (:7).

The valley could refer to the Euphrates valley where Babylon and other cities of the exiles was situated. On this reading, we would interpret the situation as one of peace, with the lesson that the various marauding enemies of Judah had been Angelically controlled, and were now at rest, so that the exiles could rebuild the Kingdom.

"Myrtle trees" is "the [two] mountains" in the LXX, connecting with the later prophesy of Zech. 6:1, where again horses and chariots appear from between two mountains. This is all the language of theophany and the cherubim of Ezekiel's visions, which speak of God's potential activity at the time of the captivity and restoration. Zechariah sees the same Angel chariots emerging from between two bronze mountains (Zech. 1:7-11 LXX, AV "myrtle trees"; Zech. 6:1), perhaps designed to recall the bronze pillars of the temple (1 Kings 7:15-22). The rebuilt temple was intended to be the point from which the Angel chariots would go forth; but that didn't happen at the very limited restoration from Babylon, and so the first four seals of Rev. 6 are full of allusion to this Zechariah vision- it was not left unfulfilled because of Israel's indolence, but rather was reapplied to the latter day events of which Revelation speaks.

And behind him there were red, brown, and white horses- Zechariah 1 opens the prophecy with a vision of three kinds of horses- red, white and speckled. These represented the powers which had subdued the land of Judah and left it in the desolate state it was at the time of Zechariah. It's tempting to interpret them as Assyria, Babylon and Medo-Persia; or perhaps Babylon, Media and Persia. Or it could refer to the surrounding nations- Straight away, we read of *four* horns, representing the powers who had desolated God's people; and how they would be destroyed by the carpenters, surely looking forward to the carpenter Messiah. And the vision of Zech. 6 has *four* and not *three* kinds of horses- red, black, white and speckled. This may be Zechariah's way of saying that because of Israel's inability to fulfil the required spiritual preconditions, the longer version of the prophetic program was going to come into play. Although as always, there is the distinct message of hope, that finally God's triumphant purpose with Israel shall come to realization. However we should note that the LXX here has four groups of horses: "behind him were red horses, and grey, and piebald, and white".

The first four seals and the four coloured horsemen of Rev. 6, are based upon the horsemen of judgment in Zechariah 1, which vision is repeated in Zechariah 6 but with the difference that the four horsemen go out to judge the nations who have performed these judgments upon Israel, e.g. "the north country". The four horsemen of Rev. 6 inflict punishments and judgments which are full of Old Testament allusions to prophecies concerning how God would judge His people, and Zech. 1 and Zech. 6 are obvious source

passages. The focus of the four horsemen is upon God's people in their land, and especially the city of Jerusalem, in the last days; and this is the focus of Revelation also.

Zechariah 1:9 *Then I asked, 'My lord, what are these?'. The angel who talked with me said to me, I will show you what these are-* An Angel is called *adon*, demonstrating that *adon* or "Lord" doesn't mean 'God Himself'. The Lord Jesus is indeed Lord, but is not God Himself; for the term is used about others who were not God, such as this Angel here. If Zechariah had not wanted to understand, would the explanation have been given? It is a desire to understand God's word which is so critical, rather than intellectual or exegetical prowess and background knowledge of languages and history.

Zechariah 1:10 *The man who stood among the myrtle trees answered-* LXX: "The man that stood between the mountains", i.e. those of Zech. 6:1; see on :8. The Angel who rides the red horse followed by others was the one speaking with Zechariah.

They are the ones Yahweh has sent to go back and forth through the earth- The horses represented the Angels who had controlled the various nations who had devastated the *eretz* promised to Abraham. It is Yahweh's "eyes" who go back and forth in that earth (Zech. 4:10); it is through them that He 'sees' what happens there (Gen. 18:21; 2 Chron. 16:9; Dan. 4:17). Similar language is used by the Satan-angel in the book of Job; see on Job 1:7; Dt. 11:12. Job was a real enough story, but I suggest it was re-written under inspiration in the exilic period, as encouragement that the adversaries of God's suffering people [Job] were under Angelic control. And despite personal failure and lack of help from the accepted religious leadership [the friends], Job as the people of God would be fully restored in the end. The various waves of invaders and desolators had been used to bring the *eretz* to a position of peace, so that Judah could rebuild God's temple and Kingdom in Israel (:11).

Zechariah 1:11 *They reported to the angel of Yahweh who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked back and forth through the earth, and behold, all the earth is at rest and in peace-* Myrtle trees have been seen as a symbol of peace. The idea was that there was peace in the Persian empire and in Judah at this time. As noted on :10, the various waves of invaders and desolators (represented by the horses of various colours and significance) had been used to bring the *eretz* to a position of peace, so that Judah could rebuild God's temple and Kingdom in Israel.

The horses of Zechariah 1 are those nations who have trampled up and down the earth / land of Israel, subduing it until it is quiet. The chariots / horses of Zechariah 6 are the Angel cherubim representatives of those nations, who are sent out against them in judgment. Such judgment is portended in Zech. 1 also, where straight after the vision of the horses we read of the four horns who have abused Israel being cut off by the carpenter Messiah of Israel. There is an Angel stationed with the horses in the valley from which they emerge, as if to show that the judgments upon the land were Angelically controlled; Israel was not at the hands of chance human evil, indeed the horses report back to the Angel. This sets the scene for the horses / chariots of chapter 6 going out in judgment against those nations. The land lying still and at rest is explained further in Zech. 1:11,12- it was because the cities of Judah were lying in ruins after the horse powers had trampled over them. This all looks forward to how Jerusalem shall be trodden down in the last days, after the pattern of how the Babylonians trod it down (Is. 5:5; 28:18; 63:18; Lk. 21:24)- which is when this prophecy will have its final fulfilment. We can look, therefore, for the three or four entities which trod down the land and people of Israel to have their latter day equivalent, and a like judgment from Heaven. And this is what Revelation 6 is explaining in more detail- in a latter day context. The immediate message in Zechariah's time was therefore that a future treading down of the land and Jerusalem was to happen, but the silver lining of that cloud was that this would finally lead to

the eternal restoration of Israel. This is exactly the same style as in Ezekiel 38; we noted in studying the context of that prophecy that it was given at the time when news of Jerusalem's fall had come to the rebellious captives in Babylon amongst whom Ezekiel was sitting. They were being told that another even worse desolation was to happen, patterned after the events they were now hearing of, and yet from this would come the eternal restoration of Israel in God's Kingdom on earth. But not immediately.

Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel "found grace in the wilderness" before, and they would do again, "When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest" (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would "cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". This is why Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11). Jer. 31:2 had prophesied of the returning Jews: "The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him *to rest*"- just as Zech. 1:11 describes the land being "at rest" when they returned to rebuild Zion. My point is that Yahweh didn't give up with His people because many chose to remain in Babylon, and those who did make the journey didn't believe His promises of protection very strongly. He zealously worked with whatever they could present Him with. And the conditions for Judah to enter the new covenant of Jer. 31 had been prepared by the work of the Angels; the land was now at rest and in peace. But the exiles sadly wasted all this Divine potential, so that the offer of a new covenant was recalculated and offered to the Gentiles through the work of the Lord Jesus. The prophecy will come true in the last days, when after the desolation of the *eretz* by Angelically permitted and controlled invaders [as explained in Revelation], the *eretz* will again be cleansed, at peace and the Kingdom can be eternally established upon it.

The land was "at rest and in peace" in the sense that it was ready for the Kingdom of Israel to be restored; LXX "is inhabited". The people of God were now inhabiting the entire area promised to Abraham, those still in exile by the Euphrates and those now returned to Palestine. The land was in fact in disarray at the start of Darius' reign (see on :13), but Zechariah gives the Divine perspective- it was therefore just ready for the establishment of the Kingdom. The four horsemen would then speak of the four Angels associated with the cherubim, who had now returned to Zion as Ezekiel had predicted. They proceeded from the myrtle trees in the ravine [possibly a reference to the deep depression of the Kidron Valley which separates the rocky plateau of Jerusalem from the ridge of Mount Olivet]. The colours of the horses may simply represent the different parts of the Persian empire which then covered the land promised to Abraham. The fiery sorrel (representing the sun's blaze) corresponds to the south, black to the north, white to the east, and gray to the west (the gray of the evening). The colours need not faze us; nor the appearance of four horses of similar but not identical colours in Rev. 6 [the colours depend on which Greek text we follow]. The similarities are simply that as four angels prepared a situation on earth in the time of the restoration, they will prepare another situation on earth in the last days. We note how Zech. 2:6 describes the Jews as having been "spread abroad as the four winds of the sky". They had now prepared the earth / *eretz* and it was now ready- leading to the question as to why was there any further delay in re-establishing the Kingdom. The myrtle is not a native of Palestine but of Persia; but it came to Palestine and thrived when the exiles returned. The tree came to represent the returnees from Persia, who could have thrived in Judah. The Angel had returned there, and from there had orchestrated the Angelic preparation of the entire Persian empire, or at least the land promised to Abraham.

Zechariah 1:12 Then the angel of Yahweh replied, O Yahweh of Armies, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah- We have an example here of how Angels pray for more knowledge. They "earnestly desire to look into" spiritual things and seek for signs of the times as much as we do. If we are to made like Angels, this opens up a window into what the nature of eternity will be like. In this particular case the Angel was representing those of God's people such as Ezra and Daniel who were asking God "how long?". And in response to that, the Angel seeks to persuade other Angels ["Yahweh of hosts"] to act. See on Dan. 8:15. The way the Angel prays to the "Lord of Hosts" is interesting, as this title refers to His Angelic hosts. Do we have here one Angel asking another Angel or group of Angels? Angels have the same problems grappling with time periods as we do!

Against which You have had indignation those seventy years?- The way prophetic words can be rescheduled in fulfilment is demonstrated by the elastic interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years exile. They came to fulfilment at the time of Daniel's prayer in Dan. 9:2; but also at the fall of Babylon and edict of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1); and yet also in the second year of Darius (Zech. 1:1,12). This latter period would have been timed from the actual destruction of the temple (2 Kings 25:2,8,9); whereas the captivity began before that. And the predicted restoration didn't happen as prophesied. But it will ultimately happen- at the Lord's return. Another suggestion is that the seventy years have been rescheduled as seventy jubilees, meaning that the Lord returns to establish the Kingdom at the 70th jubilee. But this is problematic, because Judah has not lain waste for 70 jubilees, and at this time is inhabited by Jews and prosperous.

"Indignation" translates a strong word, meaning to foam at the mouth. See on :2. God's anger with Israel was indeed intense. But the same word is used in Num. 23:8: "How shall I defy, whom [i.e. Israel] Yahweh has not defied?". Israel in covenant were counted righteous by grace, and so the wrath of God was not upon them. But they had broken that covenant, and so that wrath was indeed upon them. Mic. 6:10 makes the point that it was the apparently minor issues such as having dishonest weights which provoked this intense wrath (s.w.). This is how seriously God views what we might pass off as surface level sins.

Zechariah 1:13 Yahweh answered the angel who talked with me with kind and comforting words- The enquiry of the Angel was reflective of the "How long?" enquiry of the faithful remnant. In response to them, the consolation of Zion would be forthcoming from God. There is a highly significant connection here with Is. 40, the start of Isaiah's prophecies concerning the restoration, repeated in Is. 57:8 [s.w.]. Nehemiah means 'Comfort of Yah'; 'Nehemiah ye, Nehemiah ye My people'. The Angel spoke comfort to Jerusalem through the words and work of Nehemiah. The 'comforter' prophecy was refused by the returned exiles, and was reapplied to John the Baptist heralding the coming of the Lord Jesus; and now the promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, reflects a reapplication of this comfort to those who now flee Babylon and commit themselves to the things of the Kingdom.

The Angel's question is likely a representation of the question in the hearts of God's people. The answer is clear from :3 and from the prophecy of Haggai. The people had not turned / returned / repented, and so God had not turned their captivity and restored the Kingdom. God's answer, however, is full of compassion and enthusiasm for His people just because, it seems, they had even asked the question. He was so eager for any sign of their interest in Him and His work. The people were unclean, according to Haggai 2. And they weren't particularly penitent; lasting repentance didn't happen. And yet the vision of Zech. 3:9 describes the unclean and "filthy" High Priest Joshua being cleansed personally: "I have caused your iniquity / guilt to pass from you". He is representative of the people and the whole land: "I will remove the guilt [s.w. "iniquity" in :4] of this land in a single day". The idea was that Joshua-Jesus would carry the sins of the unclean people, and his cleansing

would mean the guilt of the people was taken away. This explains why there is no mention of any specific sins of Joshua or why he personally needed cleansing; I suggest he was so filthy and unclean because he was representative of the people's uncleanness. But there is no record of any such ceremony as envisioned in Zech. 3 actually happening; and Zerubbabel and Joshua fade from the scene. Perhaps Joshua was unwilling to go through with it, arguing that he was himself clean. But the essence of the prophecy was fulfilled in another Joshua-Jesus. But we marvel at how God tried so hard to overcome every obstacle to restoring the Kingdom there and then- even the lack of repentance in the people.

I noted on Hag. 2:23 that Haggai and Zechariah prophesied at a time of instability in the Persian empire, and Haggai 2 had made it clear that there was the real possibility that the Persian empire could fall and God's Kingdom be re-established under Zerubbabel. I noted on :11 that from Heaven's viewpoint, the land was ready and set for the re-establishment. It was the lethargy of the Jews that meant this didn't happen. The Persian empire didn't suddenly fall as if in an earthquake, shaken, overthrown and destroyed (Hag. 2:21,22), but continued another 200 years. And yet at the start of the reign of Darius, the Persian kingdom was divided and at risk of collapse. "After the assassination of Pseudo-Smerdis in September 522, there were rebellions in Susiana, Babylonia, Persia, Middle Assyria, Armenia and other provinces of the Persian empire. Darius had to fight [for some time] before authority was established". The prophecies of Persia's destruction show that it could've happened at that time- for Haggai and Zechariah prophesied at the start of the reign of Darius. Zechariah will go on to prophecy and describe how the great mountain of Babylon / Persia will be levelled, the coronation of Zerubbabel and the cleansing of Joshua the High Priest; and the returning of all the uncleanness amongst the exiles back to Babylon (Zech. 5). But because the exiles weren't ready and didn't really want the Kingdom, the Persian empire stabilized and continued. Just as because the exiles didn't really want to rebuild the temple, the Persians decreed that they cease.

Zechariah 1:14 So the angel who talked with me said to me, Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy- "Jealous" being the same Hebrew word translated "zealous", we see the tremendous zeal of God through the Angels for the restoration. Hence the ability of Ezra and Zerubbabel to achieve so much, seeing that they worked with the Angel, the eye of their God upon them for good whilst they wished to work with Him (Ezra 5:5). The pathetic, half hearted response of the Jews due to their obsession with materialism as decried by Haggai, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah must have been so 'frustrating' for the Angels, who were willing to provide so much power and success for those who would whole-heartedly commit themselves to the work. How many similarities with the new Israel? God's enthusiasm to work with His people was to be 'proclaimed' by Zechariah, literally 'cried out'. God so wishes to work with us in the Kingdom work, and will overcome all obstacles.

Zechariah 1:15 I am very angry with the nations that are at ease-

The reason for the 'delay' in fulfilling the restoration prophecies is given clearly in Haggai, who had prophesied only months before Zechariah. The reason was that the Jews weren't interested in the restoration, were "unclean", focused on their own houses rather than God's etc. But here God says His anger is not with them but with the Gentiles. This is a God truly "in love" with His people, seeing them so positively.

LXX "And I am very angry with the heathen that combine to attack her: forasmuch as I indeed was a little angry, but they combined to attack her for evil". This idea of combined attack recalls the historical banding together of the Jews' enemies against the temple project

as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. The historical record doesn't reflect the intense anger of God against the likes of Sanballat. But here we see the depth of His feelings against any who work against the work of building His Kingdom and house. May we not be amongst that group, through our exclusive policies and church politics. These prophecies all have their final fulfilment in the last days, seeing Judah at Zechariah's time failed to respond in order to enable their fulfilment. The combining together of the surrounding nations against Judah at a time when they are apparently at peace (:11) is the scenario of Ez. 38, and perhaps this was the intended primary fulfilment of Ez. 38:11.

For I was but a little displeased, but they added to the calamity- God's huge displeasure with Judah was indeed fierce, but it was only a fraction of His anger against her abusers. See on :2; Zech. 8:2. God was furiously angry with Judah, as Lamentations and so many other prophecies make clear. But He says here that His anger was not that great and He is more furious with the nations He sent to punish Judah. This is no contradiction, apart from the contradiction of love and compassion.

Zechariah 1:16 Therefore thus says Yahweh: I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it, says Yahweh of Armies-

Haggai's answer to 'Why the delay?' was that Judah didn't really want the restored Kingdom of God. Zechariah got the answer that in fact God was eager to restore the Kingdom. All Judah had to do was be willing for Him to do so.

"I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: My house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of Hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem". As the Jews literally returned to Jerusalem, the Angel too physically returned to "My house"- where He used to live. To some limited degree the Angel must have literally been in the temple- as Ez. 40 prophesied would happen. The Angel cherubim which departed from Zion in Ez. 1,10 would return. However, in the same way as the temple described by Ezekiel was not built on the scale intended by the Angels because of Israel's apathy, so maybe the Angelic presence too was greatly diminished to what it could have been. The presence of the temple Angel in Lk. 1 indicates that He was there to some degree.

God had stipulated that He would return if Judah returned to Him (:3). But He took the initiative and returned to them; such is His grace and earnest desire to rebuild relationship with His sinful people. And yet a far greater level of Divine 'return' was promised if they indeed repented (see on Zech. 2:10). This is to be our pattern in building relationships with others; forgiving and accepting the impenitent in the hope they will be led by God's goodness to repentance.

And a builders' line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem' - Isaiah 54:2 bids the returning exiles to "enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords!". Yet Isaiah so often uses the idea of 'stretching out' the Heavens with reference to His creation of His new Kingdom (Isaiah 40:22; Is. 42:5; 44:24; 45:15; 51:13; 65:17,18). Zechariah 1:6 cp. 12:1 show that to stretch out Jerusalem is parallel with stretching out the 'heavens'. The 'singing' of the heavens refers to Judah's intended joy at the restoration (Isaiah 49:13 cp. 48:20). Israel were being told to peg out their tent as wide and far as they could; because this would be the extent of their Kingdom. The Kingdom would be as 'large' for them as they had vision for in this life. And sadly they gave up on the rebuilding plans to focus upon their own houses, as Haggai laments.

The Lord of Hosts stretched the line upon Jerusalem by the Angel surveying and measuring Jerusalem as described in Ez. 40-48. But the prophecy was reapplied in Rev. 11 to mean that the Angels would measure Jerusalem unto destruction in the last days, because they failed to fulfil these prophecies.

The exact dimensions of the temple given in Ezekiel recall Zech. 1:16 and 2:11, where the Angel accurately measures Jerusalem in preparation for the rebuilding of the temple. In the same way as it is possible to argue that Christ's second coming in AD70 was described in detail but was postponed to the last days because of Israel's lack of spiritual response, it may be that Ezekiel's visions of the temple were what should have been achieved during the restoration, but were re-interpreted and reapplied in later fulfillment.

This prophecy of Jerusalem being measured began to be fulfilled by the Angel in Zech. 2:1, but God's love and enthusiasm for the restoration of the Kingdom bursts out and He asks that Angel to not measure Jerusalem but let her rebuilt without measure. The Angel / man with the measuring line is that of Ez. 40:3. The scenario of Ezekiel could have been fulfilled, but then in Zech. 2 it seems God decided not to go that way and achieve the restoration without this measuring and strict adherence to dimensions. Because the foundations they had laid were far smaller than what had been commanded.

It could also be argued that the use of a plumb line implied that things were wrong with the rebuilt temple. The plumb line was suspended over the city; it was not used as a tape measure, but to reveal what was not straight or right. The city and temple had not been built according to the size commanded in Ez. 40-48, and Haggai 2 says they were still defiled by dead bodies and the people were "unclean", directly contrary to the requirements of Ez. 40-48. But God still wanted to push ahead with the restoration of the Kingdom, and the use of the plumb line might suggest God was willing to straighten out and correct things in His measurement and judgment of that temple.

Zechariah 1:17 Proclaim further, saying, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies: My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and Yahweh will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem'-As noted on 13: , this was the same "comfort to Zion" of Isaiah 40:1. But Israel would not follow God back to Jerusalem, and those who did generally were consumed with their own petty self interest. And so the prophecies and promises of "comfort to Zion" were re-interpreted and fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. God had gone ahead of them- He had returned to Zion already, and bid Israel follow Him there.

Haggai and Malachi lament the effects of the famine in Judah which was affecting the exiles. The cities of Judah were not overflowing with prosperity; but the tragedy was that they could have done. The choosing of Jerusalem is always associated with God's respect of the covenant with David (1 Kings 11:13,32,36; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:27 and often). Zerubbabel was in the direct line of David and could have been established as a Messianic king in the restored Kingdom of God; but it seems this didn't work out, and he returned to Babylon.

Zechariah 1:18 I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, four horns- Daniel 2,7 envisaged the passage of four kings / kingdoms until a brief confused period leading to the open establishment of God's Kingdom or mountain in *eretz* Israel. The sequence of four could have had its conclusion at the time of the restoration. The little horn of Daniel 7 grows out of the fourth kingdom, represented by the fourth beast. But in Daniel 8, a very similar horn grows out of Greece, the third kingdom. We can therefore conclude that the antichrist figure of Daniel 8 would have appeared as an outgrowth of the Greek kingdom, and been destroyed by Messiah's coming. But this didn't happen, and Antiochus Epiphanes became but an incipient fulfilment of the antichrist of the last days. Zechariah, like Daniel, contains many conditional prophecies- "And this shall come to pass, *if* you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Zech. 6:15). Zech. 9:13 appears to be another such conditional prophecy, similar in reference to that of Daniel 8 about the possibility of Messiah's coming at the time of the Greek empire. God says He will place Ephraim within the bow of Judah, to be fired at her

enemies; and He would “raise up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece” (Zech. 9:13), leading to the final salvation of God’s people, the establishment of Messiah’s Kingdom, and her Messianic king coming unto her (Zech. 9:9). But this didn’t come true; the resistance of the Maccabees was not based on true spirituality, and the Romans took over control of the land from the Greeks. No Messianic Kingdom was established. This would explain the purposeful ambiguity of interpretation which there is in the image of Daniel 2; a good case can be made for the sequence Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece, and yet also for the sequence Babylon-Medo Persia- Greece-Rome. Daniel 8 predicts the breakup of the Greek empire after Alexander’s death into four horns, out of which a little horn arises (Dan. 8:8). The only other prophetic reference to four horns is again here in Zechariah, when we read of how the four horns who had scattered God’s people were to be cut off by the carpenters (Zech. 1:18,19). The carpenters surely look forward to the carpenter Messiah. He could have appeared and cut off those four horns; but He did not, and so another prophetic sequence was allowed, in which another [fourth] beast arose, this time with ten horns, not just four. And in Revelation we find this developed further, in that seven heads also appear on the beast, and a whore rides the best, sitting upon [another?] seven hills / kingdoms. The number and ferocity of the enemies of God’s people seems to increase over time. If Israel had repented earlier, then all this would have been unnecessary. The three horses of Zechariah 1 thus become four horses in Zechariah 6. The fact the four cherubim chariots are sent out in judgment of those same coloured horses speaks of how all earthly entities have their representative Angels in Heaven. See on Zech. 1:12.

The number four may simply refer to every point of the compass. The four horns or powers are those who had already scattered Judah (:19), so they could refer to Assyria, Egypt, Babylon and Medo-Persia. But I suggest the idea is simply of all Judah's enemies on every side, who had scattered Judah to the "four winds". In this case from the North were the Assyrians and Babylonians; from the East, the Moabites and Ammonites; from the South were the Egyptians; and from the West were the Philistines.

Zechariah 1:19 I asked the angel who talked with me, What are these? He answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah- "Four horns... which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem". The number four is associated with the four cherubim Angels- the four types of Angel-controlled punishment often presented in the prophets. The horns were the powers which scattered Judah, but they refer also to the Angels. The simple takeaway is that all evil in the lives of God's people is under His strict control. Thus the four horns here would equate with the four living creatures of the cherubim and also of Daniel, and therefore the four nations of Dan. 2. Dan. 8:8 provides an example of these links: "When he was strong, the great horn was broken (see the link between horns and the cherubim- Angels in Hab. 3:3-5; the Angel behind Alexander); and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of Heaven". This would therefore describe the division of Alexander's Kingdom between four Angels- the "notable ones" or "winds", each of whom controlled one of Alexander's succeeding generals. His Kingdom was "divided toward the four winds of Heaven" (Dan. 11:4)- the Kingdom was not literally scattered throughout the world, but divided to four Angel-winds.

Israel, and Jerusalem- It was God's purpose to regather not only Judah but also the ten tribe kingdom of Israel. But very few of the ten tribes wished to return; so again, the fulfilment of the Kingdom prophecies and acceptance of the new covenant was precluded by God's people not wanting to respond to it, preferring rather to cling on to the shell of their religion rather than experiencing it for real for themselves.

Zechariah 1:20 Yahweh showed me four carpenters- The horns who dominated the land were Angelically controlled, but so was their destruction. But the LXX here and in :21 reads

differently: "And the Lord shewed me four artificers. And I said, What are these coming to do? And he said, These are the horns that scattered Judah, and they broke Israel in pieces, and none of them lifted up his head: and these are come forth to sharpen them for their hands, even the four horns, the nations that lifted up the horn against the land of the Lord to scatter it". The idea could be that the preparation of Judah's enemies had been in Angelic hands, and so their restoration likewise was.

The impression is that four powers / workmen would destroy the powers / horns. The number "four" may refer to the "four living creatures" of the Angel-cherubim with their four faces and four sides (Ez. 1:5,6,8). But they were perhaps controlling powers on earth. They are the four chariots mentioned in Zech. 6:1-3, 6,7. We could posit a continuous historical fulfilment: Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar, was the carpenter / workman who overturned the empire / horn of the Assyrians. The second was Cyrus, who destroyed the Babylonian empire / horn. The third would then be Alexander the Great, who destroyed the empire / horn of the Persians. And then Ptolemy, who destroyed Egypt, Israel's historical oppressor.

Zechariah 1:21 *Then I asked, What are these coming to do?*- Zechariah assumed that this was a prophecy of future desolation of the land, but was told that the horns were the powers which had already scattered Judah.

He said, These are the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man lifted up his head- Judah was "scattered", throughout the territories controlled by Babylon and later Persia. A man who cannot lift up his head is a man in penitence (Lk. 18:13). The Divine plan was that the exile would elicit repentance amongst the Jews; but this didn't happen. Only when it occurs in the last days will the Kingdom be re-established.

But these have come to saw them off, to cast down the horns of the nations, which lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it- See on :20. The sawing off of animal horns was done to make the beast powerless and no longer dangerous. No longer would Judah need to fear the beasts of the nations. The "horns" are therefore assumed to be on beasts; we therefore have here a repetition of the four beasts of Daniel 7. And the point is that there were Angels appointed to do this for each of the horns; and those same Angels were powerful to restore Judah.

The four carpenter Angels "frayed" the horn Angels which had scattered Israel. The Hebrew for 'fray' means to shake, and this is the equivalent of Haggai's prophecy that Yahweh would shake all nations and establish Zerubbabel as Messianic king. But it by extension also means 'to hasten (with anxiety), to frighten'. Thus one group of Angels hastens the fulfilment of other Angels' work; hence in :12 an Angel prayed to the Lord of Hosts (Angels) encouraging them to end their indignation because the 70 years were ended. Similarly the Comforter Angel says that Jerusalem has "received of the Lord's hand (Angel) double (i. e. too much?) for all her sins" (Is. 40:2), and that her warfare ('appointed time') has ended, or expired. The phrase "appointed time" is the same word translated "host", used concerning the Angels, thus indicating that the period of the captivity was under Angelic control. Thus Dan. 10:1 also points out that "the time appointed was long"- implying too long, seeing that "the thing was true"?. This helps us to explain Angels being in some ways in opposition to each other in Daniel, e. g. the Angel prince of Persia withstanding another Angel in His action because of the need to execute a certain time period first. Again, the simple takeaway comfort was and is that all experience of evil is under careful Divine control, mediated at that time through Angels; and it is used to propel forward God's saving purpose.

However, we can understand the word translated "saw... off" as also meaning to prepare or even 'create'. Those horns / enemies of Israel were all prepared by God's Angels, and those same Angels were powerfully at work now to restore Judah.

However, any reference to "four horns" would have immediately suggested the four horns of the altar. The first thing the exiles had done was rebuild the altar, or at least, reinstate it. The cutting off of the horns would have spoken of the destruction of the altar. Yet the cutting off of the horns is interpreted as the destruction of the powers that had scattered Israel. We must recall Haggai's harsh criticism of the exiles and their unclean ways relating to the altar just a few months previously. Quite possibly Zechariah is giving yet another possible scenario: the altar would be destroyed at the same time as the nations were cut off, as just prophesied in Haggai 2. The restored Kingdom of God would then be established, as God sought to as it were force through His Kingdom purpose with Israel.

I suggest the immediate, potential reference was to how Zechariah's audience would have feared the major Gentile opposition to any establishment of Israel as an independent nation with its own king. They were being reminded that all their historical aggressors were to be cut off by Divine power. The four Angels referenced earlier in the chapter had prepared the land and the then weak state of the Persian empire, and any opposition from Persia / Babylon would be cut off. Likewise Zech. 2 goes on to address the fear that Jerusalem had no walls and could not withstand a siege; Yahweh Himself would be present amongst them. The allusion is to de-horning bulls or strong beasts; leaving aside the precise interpretation of the horns / beasts, the simple message is that all the beasts surrounding Israel [from the four points of the compass] had been de-horned by the Angel-cherubim. We recall Zechariah's audience were fearful of opposition from the surrounding nations. But they had been de-horned.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 2

Zechariah Chapter 2

Zechariah 2:1 *I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand-* To measure is a double symbol, of measuring unto destruction (as in Rev. 11), and also measuring to build up. According to the response of God's people, so His purpose with Jerusalem would be of either destruction or redemption. The "man with a measuring line" is the Angel of Zech. 1:16; cp. Ez. 40:3; 47:3; Rev. 21:15-17.

If the measuring is taken as judgment, as in Rev. 11:1; Mt. 7:12; 1 Cor. 4:21, then we have an Angel beginning to prepare judgements on Jerusalem, but in :3 being interrupted by another Angel who describes God's plan to restore Jerusalem, and quickly correcting the impression made on Zechariah by the first Angel. There, the angel is told to run back and tell Zechariah that "Jerusalem shall yet be inhabited". We see here the conflict between God's judgment and His grace, reflected in the situation amongst the Angels in the court of Heaven; and His mercy rejoices against judgment.

Ezekiel's temple prophecies begin with a man / Angel with a measuring reed, measuring Jerusalem and the temple. This recurs here, where the Angel again measures the temple and then promises that Yahweh will be a protecting wall of fire around the city, meaning that the Jews should fearlessly return from Babylon (2:5-10). There follows a description of God's Kingdom on earth, with God Himself dwelling in Zion and all nations converting to Him. Yet the Jews returned with fear from Babylon- or some of them did. And they fussed so much about building a wall to protect them, in studied disregard of God's promise here. God helped them build the

wall- He was still so keen to work with them. And He later encouraged them that “I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth [s.w. used about Judah’s return from captivity, Ezra 2:1; 6:21]: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more” (Zech. 9:7,8).

We could take Zech. 2:1-5 as being a vision of the rebuke of a man with a measuring line going forth to measure Jerusalem's length, breadth and height, as if he were going to build a wall. The Angel challenges him: "Where are you going?". And then the man planning to build the wall is basically told not to: "Run, speak to this young man, saying, ‘Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I’, says Yahweh, ‘will be to her a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory in the midst of her’". In this case, Nehemiah's rebuilding of the wall was in fact his own obsession and not actually what God wanted at that time. As I have argued throughout Nehemiah 3-6.

Zechariah 2:2 Then I asked, Where are you going? He said to me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its breadth and what is its length- As noted on :1, measuring is a double symbol- measuring in judgment, and in upbuilding. Jerusalem was being measured as it was; the idea here may be that God was assessing the spiritual condition of Jerusalem, and if they were indeed repentant, then the city would be built up into the capital of the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. Ultimately, God's desire to push through His Kingdom purpose with Israel at this time didn't work out. But these prophecies shall come ultimately true, when the new Jerusalem is built and the Angel then finds the length, breadth and height to be "equal" (Rev. 21:15-17).

I discussed on Zech. 1:21 how the potential was for the Kingdom to be re-established there and then whilst Persia was riven with revolt and division in the early years of Darius' reign. But the Jews feared that they had no walls, and wanted to measure their own strength. Hence the man in the vision wanting to do this is effectively stopped from doing this by the promise of :3. And later God addresses the fear that Jerusalem had no walls and could not withstand a siege; Yahweh Himself would be present amongst them.

Zechariah 2:3 Behold, the angel who talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him- See on Is. 37:36. As explained on :1, the Angel measuring Jerusalem for judgment is as it were interrupted by another, who is told to run back and tell Zechariah that in fact Jerusalem will be reinstated by God, even though Judah were lacking in their spiritual dimensions.

Zechariah 2:4 And said to him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, ‘Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it- As explained on :1, the 'running' [back] was in jubilation at the good news; Jerusalem had been measured, and although spiritually wanting [as Haggai and Malachi make clear], yet by grace it would be built up and the promised conditions of the restored Kingdom would come about. This was by grace alone. The fact the exiles refused to respond was indeed tragic. We note that Zechariah was a "young man"; God so often uses youth in His service. The language of blessing here is that of Ez. 36:4; these things could have come to pass if Judah had truly accepted the new deal offered them in the new covenant. But they didn't, and so such prophecies are delayed in fulfilment until the last days. “Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded”. They were happier to settle outside of Jerusalem and concentrate on building up their own farms in the villages and small towns of Judah, rather than sense the importance of Zion. Nehemiah 11:1-3

suggests that so few wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there, that they had to draw lots to get at least a tenth of the total population to live there- in what should have been the capital. *If* more had returned from Babylon, *if* more had lived in Jerusalem, then Yahweh *would have been* a wall of fire to them, and then the Kingdom conditions described in the rest of Zechariah 2 would have come about. Although the restoration prophecies speak as if the increase of Zion's population was to be unconditional, Ez. 36:37 implies that this would only happen if they prayed for it: "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock". But they got on with building their own homes and farms outside Jerusalem, they blessed those who had the courage to live in Zion itself, but didn't earnestly pray for the fulfilment of the prophecies. They figured that the time for their fulfilment hadn't come, as Haggai laments; instead of praying for their fulfilment.

The Jews were asked to leave Babylon so that Jerusalem would have an "abundance of peoples", in language evidently appropriate to the Messianic Kingdom. And yet they for the most part remained in Babylon, and thus showed they didn't want to do their part in making that prophecy of the Kingdom come true in their experience.

Jerusalem could have been a city without walls, with God's protection (2:4-6). But Israel lacked faith, and therefore God came down to their lower level and allowed them to build a wall, and worked with them in this. The exercise of building that wall was a display of great faith and zeal on Nehemiah's part; yet in fact the work he did was a result of Israel's limiting God by their lack of faith, even though Nehemiah himself had faith. Indeed the whole failure of Israel became "riches for the world." (Rom.11:12) Nothing is ultimately wasted or lost. Nothing can be done against the Truth (2 Cor. 13:8).

So the Jews built a wall and appointed human guards over them (Neh. 4:15,22), even though Yahweh Himself had promised to be their wall and their guard (Zech. 2:4,5). And Zech. 12:8 had repeated it: "In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David". But they didn't want to believe it, as they cowered in fear from those who "came to fight against Jerusalem" (Zech. 4:8), whom Zechariah prophesied would be destroyed by Yahweh. And yet He graciously worked with them in their plan to build a physical wall, just as He worked through their desire for human kingship and a physical temple in earlier days, even though it was not His ideal intention.

"Villages without walls" is s.w. "unwalled villages" in Ez. 38:11. The restoration could have happened as outlined in Ez. 37 and then the unsuccessful attack upon Zion spoken of in Ez. 38, followed by the glorification of the temple spoken of on Ez. 40-48. But instead Nehemiah built a wall and the people preferred to live in their homes and get on with their own petty materialism, as decried in Malachi.

Zechariah 2:5 For I', says Yahweh, 'will be to her a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory in the midst of her-

The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed by the fire of God's judgment (Jer. 49:27; Am. 1:7,10,14); now this is reversed, and His fire will protect the city. But this didn't happen, hence the tragedy of the pictures in Nehemiah of Jerusalem's walls broken down and consumed by fire. The allusion would be to the Persian ritual capital at Pasargadae, a city without walls and with fire altars on its perimeter, which was built by Cyrus to celebrate his victories. It would have been familiar to the exiles who returned. Yet some years later, Nehemiah was to rebuild the physical walls of

Jerusalem, ignoring the potential spoken of here- in a prophecy he was surely aware of. And yet he did that work in faith and with God's amazing blessing- for God is always open to taking an alternative, suboptimal path with His people if that is what it takes to keep moving forward with them towards the restored Kingdom. And yet the command to rebuild the temple in Ez. 48:30-35 speaks of a city with gates, implying it had walls. The exiles had laid the foundations for the restored temple far smaller than Ezekiel had commanded. So we can conclude that God was so eager for the ultimate project of the Kingdom to be realized, that through Zechariah He offers yet another possible scenario. Ezekiel saw the glory of Yahweh specifically within the temple: "This is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever". But here in Zech. 2:5 He implies His glory will dwell generally within the entire rebuilt city of Jerusalem. Likewise there is no High Priest in Ez. 40-48 only "the prince"; whereas Zech. 3 is clear that Joshua will be cleansed and forgiven, and then resume his work as high priest, in tandem with a Davidic king as political ruler [the vision of the two olive trees makes this clear].

This is the situation foreseen in Ez. 48, where God's presence and glory would be in Zion because the cherubim which had departed in Ez. 1 would return there. Ezra had recognised this promise, that God would be a wall to them (Ezra 9:9). Note how this prophecy is introduced by an Angel with a measuring reed measuring out the rebuilt Zion (Zech. 2:1), just as we have in Ezekiel 40. But Judah disbelieved the promise of a Divine wall of fire, and insisted on building a physical wall to protect them; and the record in Nehemiah has plenty of reference to their setting up of bars and gates in their fear (Neh. 3:3,6,13-15). By doing so they disallowed the fulfilment of Ez. 38:11, and thereby precluded what was prophesied as subsequently following. If they had trusted Him and paid their tithes, their cattle would have multiplied, and the Scythian tribes would have come down to seek to take them, as Ez. 38:12,13 foretold. But as it happened, their cattle were diseased and their agriculture not blessed because of their dilatory attention to Yahweh's house that lay waste (Haggai 1:11). So therefore there was no invasion, and no victory against the nations, and no Kingdom established at that time.

The reference to fire has reference to the Angels' part in the restoration and protection of Zion. As the Angel had been a pillar of protecting fire to Israel previously, He would be to them instead of a physical wall as they started rebuilding Jerusalem amidst great opposition, with no physical wall to protect them. The Angelic language continues: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts (Angels)... I will come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee" (2:8,10 AV)- i.e. the Angel and the associated shekinah glory would physically return to Jerusalem. The primary fulfilment of this was in the return from Babylon- the Angel led them back across the deserts, physically moving with them, to enter Jerusalem; as foreseen in the cherubim visions of Ezekiel. This would explain the restoration from Babylon in terms of the wilderness journey and the Angel's guidance of them then- because this very same Angel was involved in leading them through a different wilderness, back to Israel.

Joshua didn't live up to the conditional prophecies made about him in Zechariah. Ezra and Nehemiah seem to have taken over the priestly and kingly work of Joshua and Zerubbabel respectively. Nehemiah's record concludes on the negative note that Judah had forsaken Zion (Neh. 13:11)- even though God promised to come and dwell in the midst of Zion! Nobody wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there; the Levites even went and lived outside it where they had "fields", because they

weren't given their tithes (Neh. 13:10). Lots had to be drawn to get people to live there (Neh. 11:1). It became a ghost town, when it should have been inhabited as a town without walls for the multitudes of returned exiles joyfully dwelling there (:5). It was God's intention that ten men (a reference to Israelites of the ten tribes?) would take hold of the skirts of a Jew (i.e. one of Judah) and come with him to worship in the new temple (Zech. 8:23). But in fact the opposite happened. So few wanted to live in Jerusalem, that the rulers had to cast lots to force one in ten Jews to go and live in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:1). And the ten tribes didn't really unite with Judah, but went off and got lost in the Gentile world.

Zechariah 2:6 Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north', says Yahweh- By Zechariah's time there had already been ample opportunity for the people to return from captivity. But most remained there. A greater return was required for the restoration prophecies to come true, but that depended upon whether they wished to quit their idolatry and comfortable life which arose especially after the history of Esther. Fleeing is the word so often used of fleeing into a city of refuge (Num. 35 etc.). The implication would be that indeed Judah had sinned in the land of the north, but they were to flee to Zion as the ultimate city of refuge, protected by a wall of Divine fire. "Come!" translates the word usually used for "woe" or "alas". The idea was that if they remained in the land of the north, they were under threat for their lives. But when Babylon fell, the Jews prospered under Cyrus [consider how the Jews came to popularity at the end of Esther]; so much so that he eagerly encouraged them to return to their homeland. The threat was therefore of spiritual death; that was the danger, and it came true for them. Thus Jer. 51:6 urges flight from Babylon "and deliver every man his soul" (Jer. 50:6).

'For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the sky', says Yahweh- Zech. 1:21 made it clear that it was the Angelically controlled "horns" who had scattered Judah. Again God assures His people that it was He who had done this; all that had happened to them had been under His direct control, and was all part of His wider purpose in preparing them for the wonders of the restored Kingdom of God on earth. The "four winds" connect with the four horns; and God makes His Angels spirits or winds (Ps. 104:4). The number four recalls the four living creatures of the cherubim Angels. The four horsemen and the four workmen of Zech. 1 had worked to prepare these "four winds of the sky", or perhaps they are parallel with these four winds / Angels.

Zechariah 2:7 'Come, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon'-

This call to flee Babylon was made by Zechariah in the second year of Darius, at the time of Ezra 5 when the exiles were forbidden to continue rebuilding the temple and Zechariah and Haggai prophesied to them. Soon afterwards, there was another return led by Ezra as recorded in Ezra 7. This may well have been in direct response and obedience to the call to "flee from the land of the north!" made in Zech. 2:6,7.

The prophets clearly link the exodus of the Jews from Babylon and the destruction of Babylon. But the Jews didn't leave Babylon as commanded, or at least, not in significant numbers. And this affected the Divine program for Babylon's destruction. On two occasions in the reign of Darius, Babylon rebelled against the Persians and made an effort to regain its independence. These rebellions are recorded in the great inscription of Darius cut into the rock at Mount Behistun, and they appear to have happened in the fifth year of the reign of Darius (two or three years after this prophecy was given in the second year of Darius). These two attacks upon Babylon

could have flattened the city. They would have done, had all the Jews left as commanded. But they didn't, and so the potential destructions didn't happen as planned. God's love put Him as it were in a hard position. He didn't want to destroy His disobedient people and so He delayed or ameliorated the potential destructions of Babylon.

The Jews were to use their own initiative to leave the north country, but the prophecy was that God would bring them: "I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth" (Jer. 31:8). Likewise "The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them" (Jer. 23:8). If we make the move, God will eagerly confirm us, bringing and leading us. Ezra's return in Ezra 7 was in response to this call but the majority didn't want to know. The huge Divine confirming potential was wasted and left unused, as with so many and so much today.

As noted on :6, the need to "escape" was not from literal extermination, but from spiritual death there. "Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) is picking up this language (also of Is. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8) concerning the return of the exiles from Babylon. The edict of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the land is in a sense pointing forward to God's command to us to leave the spirit of Babylon, the Gentile world, and go up to do His work. The returned exiles are us. Those who left Babylon did so of their own freewill (Ezra 7:13), and yet providential events stirred up their spirits to do this (Ezra 1:5); and the way was prepared in miraculous way. And so it is for us, in our exodus from this world and from the flesh. In spiritual terms, Judah in Babylon were as captives in the prison cell, waiting to be released and return to their land, according to Isaiah's images. And these pictures are picked up and applied to all who know the redemption and restoration of Christ.

"The daughter of Babylon" is contrasted with "the daughter of Zion". 'The daughter of' means having the characteristics and spirit of the father or mother. The daughter of Zion, identifying with Zion, could not dwell with the daughters of Babylon- unless she had become a daughter of Babylon herself. The fact most of the exiles chose to remain in captivity speaks sadly so much of their sense of identity.

Zechariah 2:8 For thus says Yahweh of Armies: 'For honour He has sent me to the nations which plundered you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye-

AV "after the glory" would refer to how the Divine glory could have entered Zion and then the nations would have been converted into God's Kingdom. But the glory didn't enter.

The idea of someone being the "apple of His eye" alludes to how a person, by looking into the eye of another, will see his own image perfectly expressed in the pupil, though in extreme miniature. If we are the apple or pupil of God's eye, it means He closely looks at us and our person and image is ever impressed on His pupil. This is one of the most profound expressions of intimacy between God and man. David asked to be kept as the apple of God's eye (Ps. 17:8) by God's grace. Yet God still kept disobedient Judah as the apple of His eye. In Hebrew, the eyelid is literally 'the keeper'. This is alluded to in how Ps. 121:3 speaks of how "He who keeps you will not slumber". The slightest dust, or even possible approach of a foreign object, causes the keeper, the eyelid, to come down to protect the apple of the eye. This is how sensitive God was and is to His people. And yet when God says Judah are the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8), He appeared far off, distant, disinterested in the fact that the life

of the returnees hadn't turned out well. Haggai bluntly tells them that this was because they had strayed from God; Zechariah takes another tack in showing that God is still totally sensitive to His people and so loves them.

The GNB is close to the correct sense here: "Anyone who strikes you strikes what is most precious to me. So the LORD Almighty sent me with this message for the nations that had plundered his people". Verse 9 then becomes Zechariah's message to the Gentiles, which presumably he actually took to them. As explained on Zech. 1:2, God's great anger with Judah was less than His anger against those who had plundered them. Even in their suffering and punishment, God's people were still the apple of His eye. "The apple of His eye" speaks not only of God's extreme sensitivity toward His people; this phrase was a Hebraism for a man's wife. Who would a man be more angry with? His wife because she cheated on him repeatedly and is exposed; or a bunch of hoods who rape her after her infidelity has been exposed? The man who truly loved his wife would be more angry with the rapists, and so it was with God.

Isaiah had prophesied that God would not rest until Zion be restored. Watchmen would be set upon Zion's walls who would give Him no rest until the walls be rebuilt (Is. 62:1,6,7). At this time, Zion was felt by God to be the "apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). This prophecy started to be fulfilled straight after the Babylonian invasion when Jeremiah urged the desolated people to pray: "O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease" (Lam. 2:18). The prayerful remnant were to give *themselves* no rest; and thus was fulfilled the prophecy that *God* would have no rest. Sincere prayer according to God's will would have meant that there was a strange mutuality between the Father and those who prayed to Him. Both He and they would consider Zion to be the apple of their eye; and thus the prayers would ultimately be answered and Zion was restored. And yet despite this fervent prayer, God still attempted to restore Zion. Such was His grace and desire to bring about His saving purpose even with those who were indifferent to it.

Zechariah 2:9 For, behold, I will shake My hand over them- An idiom for direct Divine action in the destruction of Babylon (:7). Although Babylon had fallen to Cyrus, he left the city intact. The total destruction of the city envisioned in the prophets didn't happen at that time- perhaps because God's people weren't ready to leave as they should have done. For the exit of the Jews from Babylon was envisaged as preceding Babylon's total destruction (Isaiah 13,48; Jeremiah 50,51). Although the people hadn't left Babylon, God now gives another scenario- they could leave now, and then Babylon would fall as predicted. Ezra leads another group from Babylon in response to this call (Ezra 7), but again there was very limited response to his efforts to get the Jews to leave. We marvel at God's desire to somehow make it all work out. We note too how what happens amongst nations is directly related to the readiness of God's people to respond. Thus the Persians reversed the decree to rebuild the temple because God's people didn't really want to build it. Darius could easily have failed to regain control of Persia and Persia would have fallen before Zerubbabel; had the Jews left Babylon, the city would have been reduced to rubble as prophesied.

And they will be a spoil to those who served them-

NET brings out how immediately Persia was to fall by internal division: "I am about to punish them so that they will be looted by their own slaves", or "by those who were once their servants". This began to happen on the death of Smerdis as the subject tribes and territories began to rebel. This was what could have happened and was set to. But Judah just didn't respond despite all God's enthusiasm, and so Darius stabilized the empire and it continued another 200 years.

This repeats the message of Jer. 50:10, which uses the same word for "spoil": "Chaldea shall be a prey: all who prey on her shall be satisfied". When Babylon fell, the Jews were intended to spoil her and take that spoil to the promised land, just as they had done with Egypt on Passover night. The prophecies that the Gentile rulers of Judah will be their servants clearly show that Judah wasn't intended to remain a mere subject kingdom of the Persian empire. So much was possible- but they chose to remain, to take the easier option- which is always to remain within the structures we are safe and familiar with.

And you will know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me- See on :11.

Zechariah 2:10 Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion; for, behold, I come, and I will dwell in the middle of you', says Yahweh-

NET "I have come; I will settle in your midst" says the LORD". Yahweh had returned to Zion but His glory did not settle down there. But things were really so close to the Kingdom being restored.

God had already returned to Zion by grace even though they had not returned to Him (Zech. 1:3; see on Zech. 1:16), and yet He promises a far greater 'return' if His people rejoice at that prospect and repent. He did the same in Zech. 1:3: "'Return to me', says Yahweh of Armies, 'and I will return to you'". God's glory would have dwelt not only in the temple but in the whole city of Jerusalem, according to Isaiah's prophecies. But there is no evidence that the shekinah glory ever actually returned to the rebuilt temple let alone was visibly present over the whole rebuilt city of Jerusalem.

Baruch 1:12 records the exiles praying "that we may live long under the protective shadow of [the] king of Babylon". This is in sad contrast to Daniel's prophecies that the sheltering tree of Babylon was to be cut down! There ought to have been an urgency about the need to flee from Babylon. Zech. 2:10 speaks of the need to "flee" and "escape"- the language of crisis. And the call "Ho!" means quite literally "Hey!!". The urgency to flee was spiritual rather than physical- for there's no evidence that when Babylon fell to the Persians, the Jews were punished. Indeed they appear [from Esther] to have prospered even more. Hence the urgent appeal was to flee from the spiritual crisis which they faced in Babylon. And yet they didn't perceive the danger, just as so many today don't. For the call to leave Babylon is applied in New Testament passages like 2 Cor. 6 to our call to leave the world in which we live. The urgency of 'fleeing' from Babylon was understood by Nehemiah, when he referred to those who had returned to the land as those who has "escaped" from Babylon (Neh. 1:2)- even though they had returned with every blessing from the authorities. He perceived as few did the vital danger of remaining in the soft life of Babylon. Ezra likewise had referred to the Jews in Babylon as those "in bondage... bondmen" (Ezra 9:9)- when historical records, as well as the book of Esther and the fact Nehemiah the Jew was the king's cupbearer, show that the Jews were very far from being servants in Babylonian society. Yet Ezra perceived the spiritual poverty and servanthood of remaining in that affluent society.

Zechariah 2:11 Many nations shall join themselves to Yahweh in that day, and shall be My people; and I will dwell in the middle of you- The Hebrew grammar is ambiguous, the nations 'shall join themselves to Yahweh', or 'be joined to Yahweh' [the difference between reading as a niphal or a reflexive]. Here we see the mutuality between God and man; He joins us to Himself, but we must be willing to join ourselves. The verb 'to join' is always used elsewhere in the context of joining in a covenant. Clearly the idea is that a new covenant was going to be in operation, which Gentiles could join into. But the returned exiles tried to stick with the old covenant,

which had been irreversibly broken- rather than accept the new covenant offered to them in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

NET "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on the day of salvation". 2 Cor. 6:2 says that "now is the day of salvation". In our age, God is likewise constantly enthusiastic to reestablish His Kingdom. But it depends if we meet the precondition. The term "day of salvation" is used in the restoration prophecy of Is. 49:8,14, but the lament is that God's people refused that great salvation: "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee... But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me".

The Divine intention was that the Gentile nations in the land would be joined to Yahweh in repentance along with the repentant Jews. But instead, the Jews copied the pagan ways of those nations (as latter Isaiah, Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate), and became arrogantly exclusive of them personally. And so the fulfilment of this prophecy was precluded by the behaviour of the exiles, and it has been rescheduled to the last days. That Yahweh Himself would dwell in the rebuilt temple is stressed here in Zechariah; it would be the fulfilment of Ez. 48:35, that the name of the rebuilt Zion would be "Yahweh is there". But Judah didn't build the temple according to the preceding specifications in Ez. 40-48; and so Yahweh's intimate presence was not found there.

The implication is that many nations *as well as Judah* would join themselves to Yahweh. Jer. 50:4,5 had described the possibility after the fall of Babylon: "In those days, and in that time, says Yahweh, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; they shall go on their way weeping, and shall seek Yahweh their God. They shall inquire concerning Zion with their faces turned towards it saying, Come, and join yourselves to Yahweh in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten". But Israel and Judah did not then reunite, they did not accept the new covenant offered. The Gentiles' envisaged 'joining themselves to Yahweh' is that spoken of in Is. 56:6, where it is stated that this would involve their keeping the sabbath. Sabbath keeping is now not required for those in Christ; we are therefore reading of a situation envisaged as happening at the time of the restoration which never actually came about. It was a scenario also envisaged in Is. 14:1: "For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land. The foreigner will join himself with them, and they will unite with the house of Jacob". But instead, Hezekiah joined himself with the spirit of Babylon, rather than the other way around.

And you shall know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you- The implication would be that the Jews viewed this young man (:4) Zechariah sceptically, perhaps disliking his message of union with God on an equal footing to Gentiles. But he would be vindicated when the Kingdom prophecies were fulfilled, with the implication being that his generation would live to see this joining of the Gentiles to Yahweh and His presence in a restored Zion. All these things were rescheduled and reapplied to Jew and Gentile being joined together in Christ under the new covenant, to come to literal fulfilment at His second coming.

Zechariah 2:12 *Yahweh will inherit Judah as His portion-* The allusion is to Dt. 32:8,9, where Israel are God's personal portion and inheritance: "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the children of men, He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For Yahweh's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance". The metaphor reflects how intimate is His relationship with them, and how passionate His hope for

them. Despite the other nations being joined to Him (:11), Judah would still be His special portion.

In the holy land- The idea is that the land would be made holy, cleansed by God's forgiveness; not that it is holy of itself.

And will again choose Jerusalem- As explained on Zech. 1:17, the choosing of Jerusalem meant the re-establishment of the Davidic throne in the person of Zerubbabel. But this possibility didn't happen when it could have done. The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to "inherit" the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to "inherit" the land again after their return from "the north country" (Zech. 2:12; 8:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the "north country", then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized "throne of the Lord" (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn't even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

Zechariah 2:13 Be silent, all flesh, before Yahweh- The idea of silence before Yahweh is of repentance. This was an invitation to the Gentile nations to repent, and this bring about the joining of the nations to God spoken of in :11.

For He has roused Himself from His holy habitation!- This implies that God had been dwelling with His people throughout the exile, and was now as it were rousing from that and going out visibly into the world again. This didn't happen at the restoration, although it could have done. But the point to note is that Yahweh was still within His temple, physically broken down as it was. He didn't need a nicely built temple to inhabit His people; just as He had explained when David first wanted to build a temple. And that principle is true today. God dwells in people quite independent of any visible, religious structures.

NET speaks of how God was "being moved to action in his holy dwelling place". Judah were largely indifferent. What was moving God to action? Surely His absolute love and desire for His people. These same feelings are with Him now as He again earnestly seeks to restore all things, despite the indifference of His people.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 3

Zechariah Chapter 3

Zechariah 3:1 He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Yahweh- The altar was rebuilt before the temple in Ezra's time. Perhaps we are to envisage Joshua standing before Yahweh in that he was present before His appointed place of worship. The prayers offered by Joshua the high priest were represented by an Angel presenting his case; whilst the satan Angel opposed Him, representing whatever groups in opposition to those prayers. Zechariah 3:8 clearly tells us that the characters of verses 1 and 2 are "men of sign" (A.V. margin), i.e. we have to interpret them and see them as representative of others.

A theme of Zechariah's early prophecies is the opposition between groups of people, individuals or Angels who want to rebuild the temple and restore Israel, and

adversaries to them. Thus in chapter 1 there are the carpenters opposed to the horns, and the Angel who wants to measure (judge) Jerusalem being countermanded by the Angel who decrees that Jerusalem is to be inhabited in chapter 2. This is continued in chapter 3:1 by the vision of Joshua and satan standing before the Angel. It is suggested that this 'satan' is an Angel (we are familiar with satan Angels from 1 Chron. 21:1 and Num. 22:22 at least); this is because groups of people, even evil ones, have their viewpoint represented or brought to the notice of the court of Heaven by a satan Angel- a 'devil's advocate', as it were! Although as I have laboured at length in *The Real Devil*, Angels themselves don't sin. The satan Angel "resists" the Angel representing Joshua. The resisting was during the 21 year period when the temple rebuilding was suspended (Ezra 4:24). This corresponds to the 21 days (years), during which the Angel prince of Persia resisted Gabriel's work of rebuilding (Dan. 10:13). Taking this further, this 21 day-year period is the same as the three weeks (21 days) which Daniel spent praying for the rebuilding to commence. Somehow the period Daniel spent praying was over-ruled; there is a sense of time in the court of Heaven, and probably will be in the Kingdom too (e.g. Zech. 14:16), even if we are ourselves outside of that dimension. His prayer was answered from the first day he prayed (Dan. 10:12), but despite one Angel being eager to answer it, another opposed it on account of representing those humans who opposed it. For God never treats people as puppets, never forces, but works along with human freewill and respects it, even if it is contrary to His will.

The returned exiles were very influenced by Persian and Babylonian thinking and language. It has been shown that the Babylonians believed that each person has a god who accuses them (Rivkah Scharf Kluger, *Satan in the Old Testament* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 134,135). As elsewhere, Zechariah and the prophets allude to contemporary beliefs and deconstruct them, i.e. they show the truth about these matters as Yahweh wished His people to understand them, just as Moses alluded to creation myths in order to show what was false and to explain the truth about some of the matters they touched upon. So here Zechariah is making the point that the truth is that in the court of Heaven, Angels represent human beings and organizations and their positions and accusations against God's people; and it is God who judges those accusations, and sends forth His Angels to implement His subsequent judgment of the cases upon earth. Paul may have this in mind when he exults that if God and Christ are on our side, we now have no accusers – for they are the only ones who can bring valid accusation against us. And even if we have accusers, the fact that *they* are our justifiers means that effectively, no such accusation is of any power (Rom. 8:33,34).

And Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary-

The Satan / adversary may be a specific representative of the Persian empire who was questioning why Joshua and Zerubbabel were persisting in building the temple, with Haggai and Zechariah's encouragement. That meeting was played out in the court of Heaven. Or quite possibly, this vision speaks to the fear that such an encounter was bound to come.

Zechariah speaks of the Angels in the time of the exile and restoration from Persia "running to and fro in the earth" on God's behalf (Zech. 1:10,11; 4:10). The 'satan' in Job likewise does this. The references to 'wandering about on the face of the earth' have great similarities with the language used to describe the Persian empire's spies, called "The King's Eye" – a kind of agent of the King who wandered around picking up information and reporting back to him. But of course, "The King's Eye"

was on the King's side and not working against him! Satan's walking / running "to and fro in the earth / land" and reporting back to God about an individual is thus very much taken from the Persian idea of the King's "evil eye", "the eye of the King", a kind of *agent provocateur*, a secret police-type agent, travelling around the Kingdom and reporting back to the King about suspect individuals. The implication of course was that God and His Angels, and not the Persian King and his agents, were the ones really in control of the land. It's maybe significant that the Septuagint translates "going to and fro" in Job 1:7 with the word *peripatei* – and we find the same word in 1 Pet. 5:8 about the adversary of the early Christians 'going about' seeking them – a reference to the agents of the Roman and Jewish systems. I have elsewhere demonstrated that much of the Hebrew Bible was rewritten [under Divine inspiration] in Babylon, to bring out relevant issues for the Jewish exiles in Babylon (See my *Bible Lives* Chapter 11). This includes the book of Job. It can be understood as an allegory – Job, the suffering servant of the Lord, becomes a type of Israel, the suffering servant of Isaiah's later prophecies. I have traced the similarities between Job and Israel, and Job and the "suffering servant", in *Bible Lives* Sections 3-1-3, 3-1-5 and 3-3-7. There are many links between Isaiah's prophecies and Job – a glance down the margin of most reference Bibles will indicate that. Just as the returning exiles faced 'satans' in the form of local Arabic opposition, so did Job. The Zechariah 3:1,2 passage uses the word 'Satan' to describe this opposition to the returned exiles. Note that both Zechariah 3 and Job 1 use the idea of a Heavenly court. As God put a fence around Job (Job 1:10), so He was a "wall of fire" to the returning exiles (Zech. 2:5). And his final triumph and restoration, by God's grace, was intended as a prototype for Judah in captivity. J.B. Russell mentions a Babylonian document consisting of a dialogue between a sufferer and his friend (J.B. Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 87). Perhaps the re-writing of the book of Job during Judah's captivity in Babylon was intended as a counter to this, explaining Yahweh's perspective on suffering. More documentation of this in Rivkah Kluger, *The Satan of the Old Testament* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967). This view is confirmed in other research by Harry Torczyner, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, 1981) pp. 38–45. Note that Torczyner also interprets the Satan as being in God's service, and not in opposition to Him: "The figure and role of the Satan derives from the Persian secret service... We now understand that there are in God's service, as in that of any earthly king, secret roving officials, who go and come and report to him on the doings of his subjects".

The Angel in this vision of the court of Heaven was a satan / adversary by reason of representing the Samaritan opposition to the rebuilding of the temple. "The people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building" (Ezra 4:4), i.e. they acted as Satan – adversaries – to the Jews. They are actually called "the adversaries of Judah" in Ezra 4:1. They wrote "an accusation against the (new) inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem" to the king of Persia (Ezra 4:6). The Hebrew word for "accusation" is related to that translated "Satan". The implication is that the inhabitants of the land, the Satan, were complaining to God, manifested in the angel, that the new Jewish high priest was not really valid, as he did not wear the proper clothes (they had probably been lost during the captivity). The angel tells Satan, "The Lord rebuke you", and proceeds to clothe Joshua with a set of priestly clothes and a mitre (vs. 4,5), thus showing God's acceptance of him. The inference behind the complaint was that God had not really chosen Jerusalem for the Jews to rebuild, and that therefore they were going ahead with their plans without God behind

them. But the angel says that "the Lord... *has* chosen Jerusalem", in the same way as He had chosen Joshua to be high priest. Thus Joshua represented Jerusalem.

But it is possible that the "Satan", the adversary to the rebuilding, was the Jewish false prophets and the resistance to the rebuilding program noted on Haggai 1. In our notes on Jer. 24:1 we suggested that the two baskets of figs placed before the Angel in the temple laid the basis for this vision. The baskets represented the faithful and apostate Jews. The Joshua Angel would have represented the faithful Jews eager to rebuild Jerusalem, whilst the satan Angel would represent the apostates whose very existence militated against God answering the prayers of the rest of Israel. Does the same principle apply to Israel after the spirit- that the apostasy and apathy of some hinders the answering of the common prayers of the others? And our common prayer is surely for the second coming and the greater restoration of the true temple.

At the time of the restoration, the Jewish opposition to Yahweh's prophets argued that Israel had been rejected by God and that there could be no High Priest any more. A convenient excuse to get on with building their own houses rather than God's (Hag. 1:3,4). It seems to me that it is the Jews who are the 'satan' who is rebuked in the court scene of Zech. 3:1-10. I have elsewhere traced the connections between the 'satan' concept and apostate Jews (see "The Jewish Satan" in *The Real Devil*). This view was rebuked in the vision; but the point is that it was the Jews who were the satan / adversary to the prophets and the faithful minority. Is. 58:1,2 is a criticism of Judah in exile and also of those who did return to the land- they sought God daily, and yet abused their brethren (Is. 58:6), just as recorded in Neh. 5:15. If they had ceased from their sins, "Then shall your light break forth as the morning", if they had fed the hungry etc., then would've been fulfilled the Messianic Kingdom prophecies of the light of Zion rising above the Gentiles etc. (Is. 58:10,12 cp. Is. 60:1).

Zechariah 3:2 *Yahweh said to Satan, Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! Yes, Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!*- This passage is alluded to in Jude 9. "Michael the Archangel" there is the "Angel of the Lord" or "Yahweh" here.

The Angel-Lord (Jude 9) says that despite the sins of the bad figs in Israel and the opposition of the Samaritans, His choice of rebuilding Jerusalem will stand. Jude 8-10 lends support to this line of interpretation. Jude says that Michael the Archangel did not "bring a railing accusation" against the satan Angel, nor did He "despise dominion" (another Angel-ruler) or "speak evil of glories" (AV: "dignities"; the same word is in Jude 24 "the presence of His glory"- the Angels). This marked lack of aggression which Jude emphasizes shows that there was no conflict between the Angels, as may be wrongly inferred from the severity of the English word "rebuke". Our demeanour generally, especially with each other when it is necessary to have divergent opinions, or to correct others' ways of executing God's purpose as they see it, should be done in the same mutually loving spirit. Notice how Jude 8 links the satan of Zech. 3 with a "dominion"- a ruler or 'prince'. The satan Angel who resisted the Joshua Angel for 21 days is "the prince of Persia" in Dan. 10:13. "The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?". Another allusion in Jude (v. 23) interprets this: "Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh". The implication is that God through the Angel just about decided in favour of saving Jerusalem out of the 'fire' of eternal punishment (cp. Jer. 17:27) for her sins- He had "compassion, making

a difference" (v. 22). The "garment spotted by the flesh" must connect with the "filthy garments" worn by Joshua as he came into the Angel's presence.

Isn't this a burning stick plucked out of the fire?- Jude continues his allusion to the passage when he writes of "Pulling them [weak believers] out of the fire" of condemnation for sin (Jude 23). The idea is that Jerusalem had been saved from condemnation for the sake of God's grace in hearing a faithful minority; a condemnation Jerusalem rightly deserved. The rhetorical question is asking: "Would the same hand that had plucked from the fire the brand, charred, blackened and half-consumed already, cast it back again into the flames? And should He, who had delivered the remnant of His people from the furnace of Babylon, now listen to the charges of the accuser and yield them again to destruction?"

Zechariah 3:3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the angel- Joshua was without a mitre on his head (:5 implies). He was not qualified to be High Priest; and "filthy garments" Biblically speak of sin and lack of acceptance before God. Clearly :4 uses the symbol in this way. In His zeal to bring about the restoration of His Kingdom with a High Priest and Messianic King, i.e. Joshua and Zerubbabel (see on Hag. 1:1), God wanted to demonstrate that He would make Joshua acceptable to Him; and the arguments against him by the adversaries, the 'satan', whether they be Jewish or Gentile, would be overcome by His acceptance of Joshua. It would have jarred all religious sensibility to hear or read that a man in filthy garments could stand before God. But God permitted this, and changed Joshua. And in essence He is willing to do the same with sinners to this day.

Zechariah 3:4 He answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying- These persons have not been mentioned specifically; but we are to understand that this is a vision of the throne room, the court of Heaven, and it is Angels who are addressed. Those who stood before Joshua are his "fellows" (:8); his priestly helpers were also represented by Angels in the court of Heaven; and the words of :8 are applied to the Lord Jesus in Heb. 1:9, in demonstrating that He was greater than Angels, above His Heavenly "fellows".

Take the filthy garments from him. To him he said, Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with rich clothing- See on Lk. 19:24. Joshua was representative of the remnant; they too would be forgiven and cleansed by grace. The same Hebrew phrase is in Mic. 7:14: "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of His heritage?"

Although all was done by God to make Joshua a legitimate High Priest, he disappears from the scene. He didn't live up to his potential. The prophecy was reapplied to another Joshua-Jesus, the Son of God, Mary's Son. The clothing of Him in glory is the theme of Rev. 4 and 5, which describe the important part that the Angels had to play in welcoming Christ into Heaven on His ascension, and in giving Him then His full reward and glory. Verse 8 about Joshua is quoted about the Lord Jesus in Heb. 1:9.

Zechariah 3:5 I said, Let them set a clean turban on his head. So they set a clean turban on his head, and clothed him- Zechariah apparently interjects in the course of what was revealed to him, as the prophets often do. For they were not mere machines of transmission, they were themselves passionately involved. He was concerned that Joshua lacked even the high priestly mitre. It was as if this was no barrier for God to

accept Joshua as high priest, because the new covenant package He was offering the exiles was not exactly the same as the Law of Moses. Thus the legislation of Ez. 40-48 differs in many points from the Mosaic ordinances, although similar to it in outline terms. But God as it were takes on board Zechariah's cultural and legalistic concerns, and so the vision is added to. A clean mitre is placed on his head.

And the angel of Yahweh was standing by- Does this mean that the Angel commanded other Angels to arrange Joshua's forgiveness and to end his being "polluted from the priesthood" (due to lack of proven ancestry and the high priestly garments, cp. Ezra 2:62; Neh. 7:64)?

Zechariah 3:6 The angel of Yahweh protested to Joshua, saying- As noted on Hag. 1:1, the whole prophecy of Haggai was an appeal to Joshua and Zerubbabel to live up to their potential as the priest and king of the re-established Kingdom of God in Israel.

Zechariah 3:7 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: 'If you will walk in My ways, and if you will follow My instructions, then you also shall judge My house- "My house" refers to the Angel dwelling again in the temple. For it is the Angel speaking here. I submit that the prophecies *could* have had their fulfilment in Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel, or some other Messianic figure at that time. Everything was made possible to enable this- Joshua, who couldn't prove his Levitical genealogy, was given "a place of access" amongst the priesthood, those who "stood" before the Lord (Zech. 3:7 RV). Ezra thanked God that they had returned and that they had "a nail in his holy place" (Ezra 9:8), a reference surely to a Messiah figure whom he felt to be among them, the "nail in a sure place" of Is. 22:23. According to Mt. 1:12 and Lk. 3:27, Zerubbabel was the Prince of Judah, and the rightful heir to David's throne. But due to his weakness, the fulfilment was deferred to Jesus.

And shall also keep My courts- The "courts" are so often mentioned in Ez. 40-48. But Joshua didn't. He didn't keep the courts, but allowed Tobiah the Ammonite to set up his office for subversion in the temple chambers. Likewise Zerubbabel was to hold a measuring line in his hand and rebuild the temple (Zech. 4:10), just as the Angels had held the same measuring line over the temple in Ez. 40 and Zech. 2:1.

And I will give you a place of access among these who stand by- The "places to walk" is the same word in Ez. 42:4 about the walkways in the prophesied temple. Those who stood by were the Angels (:5); the offer of places to walk among the Angels is the same idea as being "made equal unto the Angels" in Lk. 20:35,36.

Zechariah 3:8 Hear now, Joshua the high priest, you and your fellows who sit before you; for they are men who are a sign- The priestly helpers of Joshua were represented or signified by Angels in the court of Heaven. These words are applied to the Lord Jesus in Heb. 1:9, in demonstrating that He was greater than Angels, above His Heavenly "fellows". For Joshua didn't live to his potential, or at best, Judah rejected him; and so the prophecy was to be fulfilled in another Joshua, the Lord Jesus.

For, behold, I will bring forth My servant, the Branch- see on Zech. 4:14. The reference is to Zerubbabel, 'branch of God', who could have been the Messianic ruler at that time; see on Hag. 2:23. According to Ezekiel, the prince-Messiah offers sacrifice for his own sin, and has children, to whom He will pass an inheritance. And he has to be warned not to oppress the people (Ez. 46:18). It is a more comfortable interpretation, surely, to see him as primarily referring to Zerubbabel or Joshua the

High Priest (Ez. 44:3). But all this huge potential wasn't realized. Dan. 9:25 appears to identify "the anointed one, a prince" with the restoration of Jerusalem after the return. The Masoretic punctuation of Dan. 9:25 actually suggests that 'Messiah the prince' appears after the first seven of the seventy weeks- perhaps there was the possibility 49 day-years after the command to rebuild Jerusalem for a Messiah to have appeared? This would've fitted Zerubbabel perfectly. Lk. 3:27 describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term 'Rhesa' is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:16). Zerubbabel was the 'head' of the house of David (Ezra 4:3; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12,13), as was his descendant Hattush (Ezra 8:1-3 cp. 1 Chron. 3:22). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled king, Zerubbabel would've been the legitimate king of Judah. Potentially, Hos. 1:11 could have come true: "Judah and... Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head [Zerubbabel?]; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (RSV). And perhaps as head of the house of David, Zerubbabel was intended to be the "David my servant" who would be the one king and one shepherd who would lead Israel back to the land from exile (Ez. 37:22,24). Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called "the people of Israel" (cp. Ezra 2:2). See on Zech. 6:12.

And perhaps there were other possibilities apart from Zerubbabel. It could have been Eliashib- but despite his apparent enthusiasm, he didn't even build the wall outside his own house (Neh. 3:20-22), and arranged for his grandson to marry Sanballat's daughter (Neh. 12:10,11). Or it could be that "the Branch" here refers to Joshua himself. It is evident from Ez. 44:3; 46:3 that the promised Messiah figure was to be both a king and a priest- which would fit Joshua. Here he is described as a crowned High Priest, called "the branch", who would build the temple and reign as "a priest upon his throne". But this didn't happen. Because Zechariah concluded this prophecy with the comment: "And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord" (Zech. 6:10-15). Joshua-Jesus didn't live up to it. And Zerubbabel never ruled in Jerusalem- he returned to the soft life in Babylon after the temple was rebuilt. But the prophecies only suffered a deferral. They will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the branch.

Zechariah 3:9 *For, behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes: behold, I will engrave its engraving', says Yahweh of Armies-* See on Ex. 25:19. The removal of Joshua's filthy garments, his sin (:4), was therefore to be seen as representative of the removal of the iniquity of all dwelling in the land. This alone ought to have encouraged the spiritually minded exiles to return to that land!

The stone could be a symbol of Messiah, for the Messianic lamb had seven eyes in Rev. 5:6. In this case, we are being told that Joshua could have become the Messiah figure for his time. He failed, and so the prophecy was applied to the Lord Jesus. The language is a criticism and deconstruction of the ideas which Judah had encountered in Babylon which later became the Zoroastrian faith. The allusion would be to the Persian belief in the seven Amshaspands who surround the throne of the Supreme, which is why the Persians referred to the senior servants of their ruler as his eyes and his ears. These ideas are being deconstructed; the One who was all these things would be the Jewish Messiah.

But the stone which flashed with eyes may allude to the urim and thummim, which were two stones which flashed. The seven eyes which are the engraving may

refer to the seven letters in the Hebrew "Holiness to Yahweh" which was inscribed upon the High Priestly mitre. See on Dan. 2:35. Ez. 42:13 commanded that in the restored temple "The priests that approach unto the Lord shall eat the most holy things". The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65- it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ezekiel 13:9: "Neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraved stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zech. 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraved stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfil Ez. 42:13. In a restoration context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zechariah 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was conditional on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey" (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he wasn't given the urim and thummim, or there was no response from them; therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom. And so all these prophecies had to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, seeing the earlier possibilities had all failed.

The seven eyes are interpreted in Zech. 4:10 as the Angels who would rejoice with Zerubbabel if he lived up to his potential. "On one stone are seven eyes" could be translated to the effect that the seven eyes were not on the stone but above it, looking down "on" it. Which would support the overall message of Zechariah, that Angelic involvement was so strong at this time. All the Angels, "seven", were looking upon the stone, orchestrating things so that he could be king and / or priest.

And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day- Joshua's rehabilitation and forgiveness (:4,5) could have been that of the whole land. But this didn't happen; but it was reapplied to the work of Joshua-Jesus, whose death removed sin for all time in the day of His death.

The people had not turned / returned / repented, and so God had not turned their captivity and restored the Kingdom. God's answer, however, is full of compassion and enthusiasm for His people just because, it seems, they had even asked the question. He was so eager for any sign of their interest in Him and His work. The people were unclean, according to Haggai 2. And they weren't particularly penitent; lasting repentance didn't happen. And yet the vision of Zech. 3:4,9 describes the unclean and "filthy" High Priest Joshua being cleansed personally: "I have caused your iniquity /

guilt to pass from you". He is representative of the people and the whole land: "I will remove the guilt [s.w. "iniquity" in :4] of this land in a single day". The idea was that Joshua-Jesus would carry the sins of the unclean people, and his cleansing would mean the guilt of the people was taken away. This explains why there is no mention of any specific sins of Joshua or why he personally needed cleansing; I suggest he was so filthy and unclean because he was representative of the people's uncleanness. But there is no record of any such ceremony as envisioned in Zech. 3 actually happening; and Zerubbabel and Joshua fade from the scene. Perhaps Joshua was unwilling to go through with it, arguing that he was himself clean. But the essence of the prophecy was fulfilled in another Joshua-Jesus. But we marvel at how God tried so hard to overcome every obstacle to restoring the Kingdom there and then- even the lack of repentance in the people.

Zechariah 3:10 In that day', says Yahweh of Armies, 'every man will invite his neighbour to come under his vine and under his fig tree' - Under Joshua, the iniquity of the land could have been removed, and the Kingdom conditions realized, re-establishing the situation that was in the early days of the Kingdom (1 Kings 4:25)- instead of the drought and lack of harvest which Haggai and Malachi lament. The Messianic Kingdom could have been brought in, the new covenant accepted by Israel.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 4

Zechariah Chapter 4

Zechariah 4:1 The angel who talked with me came again, and awoke me, as a man who is awoken out of his sleep- The context of Zechariah is God's desire through him to make the returned exiles realize that God was intensely active for them. They had the impression that He was somehow distant and otherwise occupied. He wishes them to see that He is extremely present. The waking of Zechariah from sleep perhaps hints at the need to spiritually awake and perceive the critical importance of responding immediately and zealously to God's passionate activities for His people.

Zechariah 4:2 He said to me, What do you see? I said, I have seen, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon- The "seven lamps are the seven eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zech. 4:2,10)- i.e. they represent the Angels active in the land of Israel to enable the restoration. They are energized by the spirit in the bowl; for God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). God's Spirit is just as much at work today, mediated by His Son rather than through the Angels as it was in Old Testament times. The candlestick being part of the tabernacle was therefore also a "pattern of things in the Heavens"; it represented how the Heavenly organization of Angels works. See on Jer. 1:11,12. The candlestick in the tabernacle had seven bowls (Ex. 25:31), but this has only one. As noted often, the restored temple of Ez. 40-48 was significantly different, although broadly similar to, the Mosaic arrangements. The seven lamps "are the seven spirits of God" in the vision of the temple in Rev. 4:5. The whole vision speaks of the activity of God through His Spirit and through the operation of the Angels in order to enable His work to go ahead. It was to encourage the returned exiles that so much was now possible, so much strength was behind them. The sons of Zion were as fine gold (Lam. 4:2); the candlestick system was to be the restored Israel. They were to be the light of the earth / land promised to Abraham, manifesting and empowered by God's Spirit. This whole system was God's vision for the returned exiles. It didn't come

about, and so the system has been reapplied to the new Israel, who are to shine as lights in the world, enlivened by the Spirit.

There are seven pipes to each of the lamps, which are on the top of it- "Seven pipes" is literally "seven and seven pipes to the lamps"; it could mean 14, or 49. In this case the vision was of a lampstand far larger and brighter than that in the Mosaic tabernacle. It didn't come about then, and so was fulfilled in terms of the Christian church, presented in Revelation 1 as seven candlesticks with seven lamps on each, i.e. 49 lamps. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen.

Zechariah 4:3 And two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl, and the other on the left side of it- The bowl is presented visually as the central point of the system. The two olive trees are said to stand on both sides of "The Lord of all the earth / land" (:14). The candlestick system was envisaged as central to the earth; and this was to be the restored Judah, as noted on :2, ruling over the earth / land as the spiritual light of those peoples. The candlestick system differed from the Mosaic one in that it didn't require maintenance or feeding by man; and this is the enduring message, that it is the work of the Spirit and not of flesh.

Zechariah 4:4 I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?- See on :14. The response in :5 suggests that Zechariah was supposed to have perceived himself what this was all about. But even he as a spiritual person didn't grasp the degree to which God was at work through the Spirit. We likewise need our eyes regularly opening to the extent and force of God's working, and all that is potentially possible for those who wish to walk in step with the Spirit. The response in :6 was not initially an explanation of the symbolism, but rather the overall conclusion- that the restoration would not be achieved by human strength, but by God's Spirit. It's as if Zechariah is being sidetracked by struggling with decoding the symbolism to miss the bigger picture; and that remains an abiding problem for us as we read and reflect upon such visions.

Zechariah 4:5 Then the angel who talked with me answered me, Don't you know what these are? I said, No, my lord- This could be read as a rebuke, as if Zechariah is now recording his own slowness to understand. It is that admission of weakness which would have made so much more credible his appeal to his audience to understand. Likewise the Gospels were written by the disciples, and they admit so often their failure to understand, thereby strengthening their credibility in appealing for others to understand quicker than they did. In the work of preaching and teaching, the more real the more credible.

Zechariah 4:6 Then he answered and spoke to me, saying, This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit', says Yahweh of Armies- See on Jud. 14:6. The returned exiles were "feeble" (Neh. 4:2), and they were

considered like this by the surrounding peoples to the point that this was how they too saw themselves. They were indeed feeble. But this is the trademark of God's work; the feeble are used, that the work of His Kingdom may be of His Spirit and to His glory. "Might" translates a word which can mean "wealth" or "army". He is told that it will not be due to "an army" but due to God's Spirit / Angel, the "Lord of hosts" of Angel armies ("Lord of hosts" is a common title for God in Zechariah). The "army" may refer to the army which the King of Babylon was willing to send with the returning exiles in order to support the returning exiles. But Israel's attention is focused instead on how the Spirit / Angel would enable all things.

And yet this statement could be taken as an implied criticism of Zerubbabel. He was warned that the restored Kingdom would be brought about not by "might" (military force) but by God's Spirit, operating through the Angels. This had been the message of Ezekiel as well as Zechariah's visions- that through the Angelic cherubim, God was ready to work out the promised and miraculous restoration of His Kingdom, so that Yehud would no longer be merely a province of Persia. Perhaps Zerubbabel thought that a Persian army would help them establish their autonomous kingdom by force. Hence Zech. 4:14 pleads with them to understand that Yahweh is Lord of *all* the earth, and His Angels are everywhere active; He as well as Judah were to be lords and not servants of all those in the earth / land. The cherubim chariots are seen roaming the "land of the north" just as much as Israel (Zech. 6:5-7). But Zerubbabel and the Jews believed in what they could see, rather than in God's unseen armies. They presumably thought that such independence could only be achieved by armed rebellion against their Persian benefactors, or by getting the Persian military onside with them. The history of the Maccabees soon afterwards showed this mentality. The Jews saw what was going on around them as a "day of small things" and despised it (Zech. 4:10). And yet *great* things were potentially possible. It's all *so* biting relevant to us- for we too see a day of small things, but the eye of faith sees great things prepared.

The returned exiles could have entered a new covenant with God, as offered to them in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. That new covenant involved the specific promise of the work of the Spirit in their hearts and lives. But their resistance to the Spirit and trust in human strength meant that they rejected that new covenant. Ez. 37:10 had spoken of the exiles as receiving the Spirit so that they might become a great army (s.w. "might" here). There was no other way to become mighty.

Zechariah 4:7 Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain-

This message was given at the time that temple building had been stopped by the Persian authorities for fear that they would lose tax revenue, and that the Jews would seek to create an independent state. And Haggai also prophesied exactly those things. Hag. 2:8 is absolutely specific that all wealth belongs to Yahweh, God of the Jews: "The silver is mine and the gold is mine"- not Persia's. This points up the miracle worked by God in the heart of Darius to restore the original decree of Cyrus, allowing the Jew to go ahead rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. They had been encouraged by Haggai and Zechariah, who both had predicted that Zerubbabel would become an independent king of Judah (Hag. 2:23; Zech. 6:12,13), and indeed before him, the great mountain would fall. Surely that would have been understood as the Persian empire: "Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain; and he will bring out the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace, to it!'" (Zech. 4:7). These prophecies were exactly what the adversaries of Judah were informing the Persians

about. And yet against all secular sense, the Persians commanded the rebuilding work to go on. Because of the power of God's Spirit on human hearts.

Or we can understand that the "great mountain" of Babylon was to become a plain before Zerubbabel (Zech. 4:7)- a clear allusion to Dan. 2:44, in which the little stone of Messiah destroys the Kingdoms of men and becomes a great mountain to replace the statue headed by Babylon. But Zerubbabel didn't destroy Babylon- according to Jewish tradition he returned there after 'giving up' in Jerusalem. Perhaps Zech. 11:16 refers to him as "the worthless shepherd" who didn't gather "those that be scattered", who didn't encourage the Jews scattered in Babylon to return to the fold of Zion, and who didn't care for their spiritual wellbeing. And so the prophecy that Babylon would be destroyed before Zerubbabel has to be reapplied, and will be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus. It has also been reapplied in a more spiritual sense. For the same words for "mountain" and "plain" are used in Is. 40:4; the mountains were to become plains when Judah returned from exile, and over that levelled ground was to be made the proclamation of a Messianic king by his herald, and then his appearance. This didn't happen as was potentially possible; and so the prophecy was reapplied to the coming of the Lord Jesus.

The words may be intended literally if we consider that the great mountain might refer to mount Zion and not only Babylon. If Zerubbabel lived up to his potential, then a flat tableland would be prepared as a "platform" [Heb.] on which the new temple could be built; and we see this in the vision of the restored temple which the captives were intended to build in Ez. 40. But this didn't happen- and so this language was reapplied to the work of John the Baptist in making the rough places of men's hearts smooth, in order for them to accept Jesus, the true temple. Zechariah concludes with a vision of Jerusalem falling to the Gentiles, and the Lord Jesus returning to break Mount Zion in two- not into a plain.

And he will bring out the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace, to it!' - When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: "Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former (Hag. 2:9); Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that "For brass [in Solomon's temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon's fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". But it simply didn't happen, because God's people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own "cieled houses" (the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was "covered", or cieled, with cedar). And the old men wept at the fact that the glory of the new house was *less than* that of the earlier one.

The capstone however may not have to mean the foundation stone, which had already been laid some years before. It could mean that Zerubbabel would lay the final stone in the temple, and everyone would shout out in realization of how this was all of grace. And that was the point of the vision of the candlestick; it was all of God's Spirit, and therefore of grace. Paul in Romans speaks of the work of the Spirit in this same context- as the exemplification of how we are saved by grace and not works. Indeed *charis*, "grace", is often used about the gift of the Spirit. But it seems Zerubbabel didn't complete the temple but returned to Babylon; and there was not the deep appreciation of grace which was intended.

Zechariah 4:8 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying- The "moreover" is to emphasize how Zerubbabel was indeed to lay the "capstone" of :7; his hands were to do this. And yet for all this repeated emphasis, it seems Zerubbabel returned to Babylon and didn't complete the work.

Zechariah 4:9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house. His hands shall also finish it- God through the Angel would work with Zerubbabel- but he would not. The original for "finish" more correctly means to fulfil; Bible prophecy has potential fulfilments which may never come about. But in essence, the prophetic word will be fulfilled in other ways. It was all potentially possible for Zerubbabel. But he beat it back to Babylon instead. Before him, all nations of the earth could have fallen, the whole 'mountain' of Babylon could have crumbled as before a mighty stone; in him Dan. 2:44 could have had its fulfilment (Zech. 4:7). And so much is potentially possible for us, too. The Lord may have many people in a city, all is prepared for their conversion- but we may not do our part, and so the potential harvest is never reaped. Isaiah 41 describes the Messianic saviour as coming to the land from Babylon, from the north and from the east. Babylon was east of Judah, and yet the approach road came down from the north. This was the way Zerubbabel and Joshua would have come; but the prophecies suffered a massive deferment to the coming of the Lord Jesus in a more figurative sense from the north and east.

And you will know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you- This repeats Zech. 2:9,11. The implication would be that the Jews viewed this young man (Zech. 2:4) Zechariah sceptically, perhaps disliking his message of union with God on an equal footing to Gentiles. But he would be vindicated when the Kingdom prophecies were fulfilled, with the implication being that his generation would live to see this joining of the Gentiles to Yahweh and His presence in a restored Zion. That didn't quite happen; all these things were rescheduled and reapplied to Jew and Gentile being joined together in Christ under the new covenant, to come to literal fulfilment at His second coming.

Zechariah 4:10 Indeed, who despises the day of small things?- Both the faithless Jews and the mocking local peoples considered the temple so far rebuilt to be "as nothing" (Hag. 2:3). Zerubbabel was being urged to rebuild it according to the grand plans given in Ez. 40-48, obeying the precepts laid out there, and then Yahweh would come and dwell in it. But those small beginnings were not to be despised; they were a beginning, and instead of condemning the Jews for not having built it according to the plan of Ez. 40-48, instead God sees the cup half full rather than half empty, and urges them to go on from those small beginnings to greater fulfilment. The question as to who has despised those small things may beg the answer: 'Not God. Even though you didn't do as I asked you, go on from that start to do greater things'. Really His gentle approach is similar to how we may talk to children as they initially fail to fulfil a task. See on Hag. 2:3.

For these seven shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. These are the eyes of Yahweh, which run back and forth through the whole earth- See on :6; Jer. 1:11,12; Zech. 1:10,11. The entire strength [seven as completeness] of the Angelic eyes of God would rejoice with Zerubbabel when the temple was built as commanded, using a plumb line to measure and build the edifice according to the regulations in Ez. 40-48. No wonder the whole of Haggai is an

encouragement to Zerubbabel and Joshua to live up to their potential. The builders need fear no opposition; the Angel eyes of God were running throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham, through all of it, the whole of it, including the areas governed by far superior powers, and as explained in earlier visions, they had prepared the whole area for the Kingdom to be restored in Judah. To run is an idiom for response to God's word (e.g. Dan. 12:4; Hab. 2:2). The Angels were going out to fulfil the word of restoration; but it still required the freewill response of Zerubbabel and the Jews. The people did "rejoice" at the rebuilding of the temple (s.w. Ezra 6:22; Neh. 12:43). But this was but an incipient fulfilment of the far greater joy envisaged here.

Zechariah 4:11 Then I asked him, What are these two olive trees on the right side of the lampstand and on the left side of it?- These were the obvious, major difference with the Mosaic candlestick. Typically a candlestick required human care to fill it with oil. But this system had a source of oil in two olive trees. There was apparently a silence, because Zechariah has to ask again in :12, and is told in :13 that he ought to have figured it for himself. And we see here a principle; sometimes there is a Divine silence in response to our prayers and situations, or to our requests to understand and see the meaning attached to even. And that silence is intended to elicit from us the answer from our own reflections. Knowledge of God isn't just dished up on a plate in the Bible. We need to work things out for ourselves, as God knows that this is the way to really learn anything.

Zechariah 4:12 I asked him the second time, What are these two olive branches, which are beside the two golden spouts, that pour the golden oil out of themselves?- As noted on :11, there was an initial lack of response which was designed so that Zechariah would work it out himself. He is therefore somewhat rebuked for not getting it himself. His slowness to perceive is perhaps the more rebuked because one interpretation of the two sources of oil is that they referred to himself and Haggai, who were providing the prophetic word and the articulation of God's Spirit to enable God's people to function as the candlestick to the world around them. Zechariah's focus in the second question was upon the tubes which took the oil from the trees, appearing as branches leading from spouts. The oil appeared golden because it was going into the golden candlestick; the gold of God's people Judah was to be a function of the golden oil going into them.

Zechariah 4:13 He answered me, Don't you know what these are? I said, No, my lord- As noted on :11,12, this rebuke was because the Divine silence after the first enquiry was intended to elicit in Zechariah an understanding. This in broader terms is one reason for the Divine silences in our lives. The rebuke was the more necessary if the pipes, the conduit of the Spirit, were representative of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets at the time.

Zechariah 4:14 Then he said, These are the two anointed ones- I have suggested on :12,13 that they refer to Haggai and Zechariah, who as prophets were the vehicle of the Spirit's articulation to Judah the candlestick. But perhaps they were specifically represented by the pipes or spouts, and the actual trees were Joshua and Zerubbabel. Or perhaps the other way around; the trees were Haggai and Zechariah, the source of the Spirit, and Joshua and Zerubbabel were to be the conduit of the Spirit to Israel. Hence Haggai's prophecy is specifically and solely addressed to those two men; see on Hag. 1:1.

Joshua and Zerubbabel were both anointed or commissioned to be the king and priest of the restored Kingdom. Joshua anointed is the same idea in Greek as 'Jesus Christ'. He failed in this calling, and so the prophecies were reapplied and fulfilled in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The reference is to Joshua and Zerubbabel. The whole 'lightstand' depended upon these two anointed ones, these providers of oil, and the fact they both in various ways failed to deliver true faith and spirituality meant that the victory over the world which the vision also prophesied could not come about; the final fulfilment had to come through the Lord Jesus, who was the ultimate Priest (cp. Joshua-Jesus) and Prince of Judah (cp. Zerubbabel). This prophecy could have been fulfilled at the restoration; but when we read in Rev. 11:4 that "These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks", the Lord is saying that now He has redefined and rescheduled the fulfilment of that vision in a latter day context.

Who stand by the Lord of the whole earth- The olive trees stood either side of the candlestick. And yet the candlestick is presented as a person. I suggest that the gold candlestick was the purified, return exiles (Lam. 4:2), who were intended to bear lordship over the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. The leadership were therefore incidental to the centre of the vision and candlestick system, which was the people of Judah themselves who were to be the light and lords of the *whole* earth, the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham, including Babylon and Persia.

But the symbology is mixed. The various elements here all also represent Angels. By responding to the word of restoration, Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai, Zechariah and the obedient masses were all represented by things which otherwise refer to the Angels. They would be identified together with those who had practically enabled all this to happen. Hence the seven Angelic eyes of :10 were to rejoice together with Zerubbabel when he completed the temple as specified.

The olive trees "are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth". The "Lord of the whole earth" is the Angel of Zech. 3:1 (making "the God of the earth" in Rev. 11:4 also an Angel?). The olive trees actually stand by the candlestick, thus making the whole arrangement of bowl, branches, pipes and lamps represent the workings of the one Angel- in the same way as the Angel of Jesus in Rev. 1 can somehow stand in the midst of a candlestick.

The olive being a symbol of leadership (in Judges 9:8 the olive tree was the first tree to be thought of as a national leader), it would be fitting that they represented Joshua and Zerubbabel. However, there is a definite allusion to the Angel cherubim here. "Within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree" (1 Kings 6:23); "and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two (olive tree) cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony" (Ex. 25:22). If the olive trees are like the Cherubim, then "the Lord of the whole earth" of Zech. 4:4 which was between them connects with the ark- the Angel that dwelt over the ark, between the Cherubim. Josh. 3:11-13 also makes the connection between the ark and the "Lord of all the earth". The candlestick therefore represents the Angel co-ordinating the restoration, as well as the other "seven" Angels in His control. This shows the close association between the Angel-cherubim and Joshua and Zerubbabel. Thus from the Angelic inspiration of these two men, the spirit was supplied to the candlestick through the gold pipes- the faith they showed and their prayers supplied the spirit which enabled the seven lamp Angels to act. However, the close link between the two olive trees and the Cherubim Angels once again shows that the ultimate impetus to our faith, prayers and spirituality comes from God's spirit in the Angels rather than from any personal inspiration we may feel. This idea of the flow of the spirit, enabling

God's action through the Angels as a result of our prayers, is found elsewhere: "This shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19); "... how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit ("good things", Mt. 7:11) to them that ask Him?" (Lk. 11:13). Thus in the vision of the seven lamps, the prayers and faith of Joshua and Zerubbabel were the oil, the spirit that was supplied to activate the seven lamp Angels that went to and fro in the land of Israel preparing the way for the restoration. However, the olive trees were "sons of oil" (AVmg)- they were anointed with the oil initially. Is this a dim foreshadowing of the birth of the spirit ("sons of oil")? The men of the olive trees were sons of the spirit word through their belief in the word of God concerning the restoration. The olive branches emptied the golden oil out of themselves- if we are to have the same victory of faith as Joshua and Zerubbabel, we have to in the same way pour ourselves out in prayer and golden faith. The amount of oil flowing into the bowl determined the amount flowing out of it to the lamp Angels, seeing that there was a constant flow of the oil in the vision. Thus the amount and intensity of our prayers and spirituality affect how brightly the Angels burn in their zeal to fulfil our requests. Notice too the power of the prayers of a small minority of God's people. But the envisaged situation didn't come about. The two olive branches which feed the bowl were replaced by Christ, the one branch (Zech. 3:8; 6:12), who would provide the Spirit in abundance so that the true spiritual temple could be built- "the branch... shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord" (Zech. 6:12).

We can however translate: "Against the Lord of the whole earth", which was a common title of Darius. This would provide more evidence that here we have a prophecy of overthrowing the Persian empire. See on Zech. 1:13. The two anointed ones could refer to the Angels Michael and Gabriel, who in turn represented Joshua and Zerubbabel.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 5

Zechariah Chapter 5

Zechariah 5:1 *Then again I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, a flying scroll-* The previous visions have spoken of how the rebuilding work faced opposition from the adversaries ["satan"] of both apostate Jews amongst the exiles, and from the local Gentiles. We know that in practice, those 'satans' derailed the envisaged and possible restoration of the Kingdom at that time. This vision now deals with this in more detail.

Hag. 2:14 had spoken of how the returnees were unclean; and this could preclude God's plan to restore the Kingdom. But here Zechariah prophesies soon afterwards of how even this problem of uncleanness could be resolved. This vision of Zech. 5 speaks of the banishment of sin and sinners from Judah and back to Babylonia.

Zechariah 5:2 *He said to me, What do you see? I answered, I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its breadth ten cubits-* Zechariah's vision of the flying scroll indicates the extent of Judah's weakness. The size and proportion of it was unreal for a scroll- "twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide" is about 10 meters by 5 meters. This disproportion was obviously to draw attention to something- and we find that the size of the temple porch / entrance in Solomon's temple was exactly of this size (1 Kings 6:3). This was where God's word was read from. And yet the scroll is described as entering into "the house of the thief" (Zech. 5:4). Nehemiah records how

the poor returnees were abused and effectively thieved from by the wealthy. And the Lord Jesus lamented how God's house had become "a den of thieves". But there's another reference to this 20 x 10 cubits size. The cherubim over the ark were ten cubits high and their wings were 5 cubits long, and one wing pointed back, whilst the other pointed forward, to touch the wing of the other cherub. Thus each cherub occupied a space 10 cubits high and 10 cubits across; and the two cherubim over the ark thus occupied a space 20 cubits long and 10 cubits wide- exactly the size of the flying scroll. The fact the scroll 'flies' invites us to make another connection with the cherubim, flying / hovering as it were over the ark. Yet this *shekinah* glory is changed in the vision into a curse. This is how *very* displeased God was with what was being done by those who returned- His presence and glory were no longer there, only a curse upon them. Effectively, the returnees had turned God's temple into a parody of the Babylonian temples; see on :6,8,9.

Zechariah 5:3 Then he said to me, This is the curse that goes out over the surface of the whole land- The Angelic eyes of God had been going over the "whole land" preparing it for the great potential, of God's Kingdom being reestablished in Judah. But over the whole land there was sin. What had been declared a holy land through the imputation of righteousness by God's grace (see on Zech. 2:12) was in fact very sinful.

For everyone who steals shall be cut off according to it on the one side; and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off according to it on the other side- The scroll was written on both sides, just as the tables of the covenant were (Ex. 32:15). The two of the ten commandments mentioned here as being broken were the third and eighth; which according to Jewish tradition were written on different sides of the tables. The idea would be that Judah had broken covenant relationship with Yahweh by disobeying the most basic of the ten commandments. They were stealing and swearing falsely just as they had done before the captivity (s.w. Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2). There were 'false swearers' amongst the returned exiles (s.w. Mal. 3:5). False swearing may not simply refer to perjury; it is defined in Jer. 5:2 and often as meaning to swear both by Yahweh and by other gods, thereby making their oath by Yahweh a false oath.

Zechariah 5:4 I will cause it to go out, says Yahweh of Armies, and it will enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him who swears falsely by My name; and it will remain in the midst of his house- Nehemiah records how the poor returnees were abused and effectively thieved from by the wealthy; and Zech. 8:17 later alludes to this. And the Lord Jesus lamented how God's house had become "a den of thieves". The houses of the Jews were as corrupt as the house of God they had rebuilt, although it was not according to the principles and pattern commanded them in Ez. 40-48; those prophecies often command that the previous temple abuses were not to be repeated in the new house of God. But they were.

And will destroy it with its timber and its stones- This is the fate of a house which had been dwelt in by lepers (Lev. 14:45). The house of Judah had previously been condemned as a leprous house, and now they had returned to the land they were no better. For all God's enthusiastic grace to forgive them, as described previously in Zechariah.

Zechariah 5:5 Then the angel who talked with me came forward, and said to me, Lift up now your eyes, and see what is this that is appearing- The command to lift up the

prophetic eyes and see is a repeat of what Ezekiel was told, when he was invited to lift up his eyes and see the apostasy of Judah within the temple (Ez. 8:5,16). Zechariah would have perceived the similarity. He was being given an insight into how sinful were the returned exiles.

Zechariah 5:6 *I said, What is it? He said, This is the ephah basket that is appearing-* See on :2. The ephah measure was representative of the measure of their sin. And they had changed the weights of the ephah to deceive their brethren. The winged pseudo-cherubim of :9 carry this "ephah" back to Babylon. The Sumerian word for one of the Babylonian ziggurats, a shrine to a goddess, was *e'pa*, the same Hebrew word as translated "epha" (C.L. & E.M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004) p. 296). The foreign woman in the vision wishes to return to Babylon and build a house / temple there. The terrible picture that will appear is that the apostate Jews who had returned ostensibly to rebuild Yahweh's temple in Zion were really the spiritual "daughter of Babylon" and would return to Babylon to build an idol temple there.

He said moreover, This is their appearance in all the land- "Appearance" translates the word for "eye". The Angelic eyes of God ran to and fro in the land (Zech. 4:10). And this is what they saw all over- sinful Jews.

Zechariah 5:7 *(And behold, a talent of lead was lifted up); and this is a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah basket-* They had changed the weights of the ephah to deceive their brethren (Am. 8:5). This apparently minor sin was seen by God as being as heavy as lead. Judah, the woman, had been weighed by God in judgment and found wanting. This was why all the great potential prophecies of earlier visions would not in fact come true at that time.

Zechariah 5:8 *He said, This is Wickedness!-* The woman is simply called "wickedness". Judah had previously been characterized as a wicked woman who was punished with captivity in Babylon, and now she is still unreformed (Is. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; Ez. 23:1-49 and throughout Hosea 1-3). Is there not here a hint that the essence of Judah's failure was in their marriage to foreign women, perhaps even their own wives were from Babylon and wanted to return there. Marriage to Gentiles is stressed in Ezra 10 and Neh. 13:23-27 as the epitome of Judah's sin. Even the four sons of Joshua the High Priest had married Gentiles (Ezra 10:18). The Hebrew word translated "wickedness" is *harisha*- an anagram of 'Asherah'. She is presented as a goddess- in that the foreign women are always associated with the idols they served. We know that the first temple was destroyed because of the Asherah entering the temple (2 Kings 23:4-7; 1 Kings 15:13). And it seems Judah never learnt that lesson. Zech. 13:2 is clear that there was idol worship throughout the land amongst the returned exiles.

And he threw her down into the midst of the ephah basket; and he put the weight of lead on its mouth- It was as if the due weight had been reached, and now it was closed and being sent back to Babylon. Judah, the woman, was entrapped in her own sins. This is the same idea as the previous inhabitants of Canaan reaching a certain level of sin after which they were to be thrown out of the land (Gen. 15:16).

Zechariah 5:9 *Then lifted I up my eyes, and saw, and behold, there were two women, and the wind was in their wings. Now they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah basket between earth and the sky-* The two female winged

creatures who remove the ephah to Babylon are surely parodies of the Angel cherubim; see on :2. Note how the Angel 'comes forth' (Zech. 5:5), and then the winged women are here described as 'going forth' with the same Hebrew word. The glory of God was simply not there, whereas Ez. 48:20 and often in Zechariah it was predicted that it would be, if they built and operated the temple according to the commands of Ez. 40-48. Who was it who caused the apostate Jews to be thrown out of their land and removed to Babylon? Perhaps the two women propelled by the wind / spirit were the prophets Haggai and Zechariah who were now denouncing them and pronouncing this judgment upon them. Perhaps we are to understand the 'chasing away' of the apostate Jews by Nehemiah as meaning they were chased off back to Babylon (Neh. 13:28).

Zechariah 5:10 Then I said to the angel who talked with me, Where are these carrying the ephah basket to?- If it were not for Zechariah's questions, his desire to understand, we would not have the explanations. The prophets, like the Angels, desired to look into the words they spoke, there was implied an intellectual process of struggle to understand (1 Pet. 1:12). We are seekers of God; we will never understand all, and the desire to understand is itself built into our spiritual experience.

Zechariah 5:11 He said to me, To build her a house in the land of Shinar. When it is prepared, she will be set there in her own place- "Shinar" is the title used for Babylon here because of the connections with building Babel, a building condemned by God. It could be that this prophecy concerning the wickedness in the land of Judah somehow returning to Babylon and there building a temple is a reference to how Zerubbabel was to re-direct his energies into building a corrupted house for himself on his return to Babylon, a pseudo-temple. He was personally criticized for building a ceiled house for himself in Judah rather than focusing upon rebuilding God's house (Hag. 1:3,4). So it seems the apostate Jews returned to Babylon and built a temple there to their gods. It was built in Babylon upon her own "base", the same word used in Ezra 3:3 about the altar being established upon its own "base" in Zion.

Nelson's Bible Dictionary comments: "For some mysterious reason, Zerubbabel is not mentioned in connection with the Temple dedication. Neither is he mentioned after this time". The reason seems to be that he returned to Babylon. R.K. Harrison in the Zondervan Encyclopedia mentions that "a 6th century AD Jewish chronicle preserved the tradition that Zerubbabel returned to Babylonia after 515 BC and succeeded his father Shealtiel as the prince of the exiled remnant there". He chose to be a prince in Babylon's Kingdom, the kingdoms of men, rather than in the Kingdom of God. And so many have followed his decision in the centuries since, thus frustrating what could have been for them and many others within their influence. Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.3) records that "Zorobabel, who had been made governor of the Jews that had been in captivity, came to Darius from Jerusalem, for there had been an old friendship between him and the king". He was friendly with the King of Babylon, and chose to follow where *this* lead rather than friendship with the Almighty. Compare this with how the 'friendliness' of a boss or worldly friend has lead so many into promotions or situations where they walk away from doing the work which God intended for them. And such huge potential was and is thereby wasted.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 6

Zechariah Chapter 6

Zechariah 6:1 Again I lifted up my eyes, and saw- The Hebrew has: "I turned [the word used also for repentance] and lifted up my eyes". After the exposure of Judah's sin in the preceding vision, Zechariah repents, as it were, for the situation. Just as Daniel and Ezra sought to, identifying themselves with God's sinful people. From now on in Zechariah, the visions appeal for repentance, interspersed with visions of the restored Kingdom that was even then possible. There is mention of the judgment to come upon the surrounding nations, whose idolatry clearly influenced the returning exiles. And the prophecy concludes with the picture of final judgment upon Judah in the last days, leading up to the return of the Lord Jesus to reestablish God's Kingdom in Judah for ever. The amazing potential for Zechariah's generation had been explained in chapters 1-3, but it wasn't realized by them. But the prophetic word was to come finally true in the work and coming of the Lord Jesus.

And behold, four chariots- Zechariah 1 opens the prophecy with a vision of three kinds of horses- red, white and speckled. These represented the powers which had subdued the land of Judah and left it in the desolate state it was at the time of Zechariah (Zech. 1:12). It's tempting to interpret them as Assyria, Babylon and Medo-Persia; or perhaps Babylon, Media and Persia. Straight away, we read of *four* horns, representing the powers who had desolated God's people; and how they would be destroyed by the carpenters, surely looking forward to the carpenter Messiah. And the vision of Zech. 6 has *four* and not *three* kinds of horses- red, black, white and speckled, although only three of them were used at the time (see on :6). This may be Zechariah's way of saying that because of Israel's inability to fulfil the required spiritual preconditions, as stated clearly in chapter 5, the longer version of the prophetic program was going to come into play. Although as always, there is the distinct message of hope, that finally God's triumphant purpose with Israel shall come to realization. The chariots are Angels (:5); the world empires were directly under their control, as taught in the vision of Dan. 2.

This vision follows on from the judgment of chapter 5 against the sinners amongst the returned exiles. They were to be sent back to Babylon. This vision of the chariots may be saying that the Angels who had controlled the previous judges of Judah were now again called into action; they would pursue the sinful Jews to wherever they went to, be it to Egypt or Babylon, and judge them. That is the immediate sense of the vision, although it also means that the longer term judgments were to also come into operation before the reestablishment of God's Kingdom as the mountain of Dan. 2:44.

Came out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass- It has been said that Judah rejected idolatry on their return from Babylon. I submit that the Biblical evidence is different, as expounded throughout chapter 5; see on Zech. 13:2. They mixed pagan thinking with their form of Judaism, and although physical idols were later rejected by them, the results of this idolatry by the early returnees influenced Judaism permanently. Thus Zech. 6:1 pictures Yahweh's cherubim, Angelic chariots coming out from between two bronze mountains. In the ancient Near East there was the common idea that the sun god appeared each morning in his chariot from between two mountains (See C.L. & E.M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004) p. 319 for documentation). Zechariah's point [as is the point of Psalm 19, which uses the same images] is that it is the God of Israel who is the God of the sun, and not Shamash or

some such similar deity of men's imagination. But the exiles clearly needed this reminder; we remember how only a generation or so before, Ezekiel found them worshipping the sun god in Yahweh's temple (Ez. 8:5). And earlier, Josiah had removed the "chariots of the sun" from the temple mount (2 Kings 23:11). Yet it seems that the Jews' desire to mix Yahweh's temple with the sun god was still just as strong even after the exiles returned.

The two brass mountains of Zech. 6 are from where the horses / judgments issue forth- towards the north and south of Israel. The mountains must therefore be in central Israel; the reference could be to the valley of Jehoshaphat. I suggest the mountains in view are both in Jerusalem- the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion, in between which is what was called the valley of Jehoshaphat. These mountains and that valley are from where God's latter day judgments proceed (Joel 3:2,16; Zech. 14:14). The envisaged judgments upon the apostate Jews and Gentiles at Zechariah's time didn't fully happen because so many preconditions weren't met; but they will come in the last days. Or it may be that they are the two mountains formed by the cleavage of the Mount of Olives predicted in Zech. 14:4, at which time "half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half toward the south". This would connect with the horses / chariots going out towards the north and south here in Zech. 6. Any difficulties with exact chronology may be accounted for by the suggestion that the meaning and nature of time will change in the time around the Lord's coming, as I have outlined at length in *The Last Days*.

Zechariah 6:2 In the first chariot were red horses; in the second chariot black horses- The vision in Rev. 6 of horses going forth to bring judgment is clearly alluding to the similar vision in Zech. 1:8-12; 6:1-8. Chariots of horses recall the cherubim visions of Ezekiel, and suggest Angelic activity controlling the entities on earth which they represented in the court of heaven. The horses of Zechariah 1 are those nations who have trampled up and down the earth / land of Israel, subduing it until it is quiet. The chariots / horses of Zechariah 6 are the Angel cherubim representatives of those nations, who are sent out against them in judgment. Such judgment is portended in Zech. 1 also, where straight after the vision of the horses we read of the four horns who have abused Israel being cut off by the carpenter Messiah of Israel. Significantly, there is an Angel stationed with the horses in the valley from which they emerge, as if to show that the judgments upon the land were Angelically controlled; Israel was not at the hands of chance human evil, indeed the horses report back to the Angel. This sets the scene for the horses / chariots of chapter 6 going out in judgment against those nations and the apostate Jews influenced by them of the preceding vision in chapter 5.

Zechariah 6:3 In the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot dappled horses, all of them powerful- The particular significance of the colours may not be that important; they could represent death, famine, disease etc. ; or they could simply be references to the various world powers represented. Zechariah, like us, wanted a detailed explanation of the colour scheme, but the answer was that they represent the Angels (:4,5).

Zechariah 6:4 Then I asked the angel who talked with me, What are these, my lord?- Zechariah, like us, wanted a detailed explanation of the colour scheme, but the answer was that they represent the Angels (:4,5). No specific interpretation is given. The colours may simply have been to visually differentiate them.

Zechariah 6:5 *The angel answered me, These are the four spirits of the sky-* see on :4; Zech. 1:8-11. The four horses / chariots are understood by most commentators to have connection with the four metals and beasts of Daniel's prophecies. Their connection with the four winds / spirits of the Heavens recalls the way that the four beasts of Daniel 7 arise as a result of the same four winds / spirits / Angels being active. That is the simple takeaway lesson- that our world is not out of control, but all is carefully orchestrated towards the final consummation in the establishment of God's Kingdom in Judah.

These things didn't come to term in Zechariah's days as they could have done, but they will in the last days. I have explained elsewhere that the four metals and beasts of Daniel's prophecies refer to powers that will dominate the land and people of Israel in the last days, whatever historical application they may have had. The metals and beasts all exist together in the last days, because they are all judged together at the coming of Christ to earth.

Which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth-

The horse riders of Rev. 6 are clearly based on this vision in Zech. 6, and they would therefore be Angels. Zech. 6:5 describes the horses as "standing before the lord of the whole earth"- the mighty Angel of the Cherubim that stands for the land (earth) of Israel, perhaps Michael. In Zech. 1:8 they are behind Him, although He then sends them out to survey the state of the land of Israel. They return to Him, reporting that "we have walked to and fro throughout the earth (land), and behold, all the earth sitteth still and is at rest". Is there any reason to doubt that these Angels literally walked about in the land, albeit unseen, perhaps at a similar speed to which we walk? They walked "to and fro" because it is not in their ability to know the exact situation of a country just from a cursory glance. The comment of the Angel on this was: "I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease" (Zech. 1:15)- that were sitting at rest in God's land. This scenario is similar to that in 1 Kings 22, where Angels come and go from God, reporting back information and receiving commands, showing how much the Angel in the myrtle trees, "the Lord of all the earth" (land), was a representation of God Himself.

'Chariots' and the 'cherubim' are linguistically connected, and thus also connected in Biblical usage- e. g. "He rode upon a cherub (chariot)" (Ps. 18:10). The number four has links with the Angel cherubim; John Thomas interprets these "four (chariot) spirits of the Heavens" (6:5) as the same as the four faces of the cherubim. The whole vision is full of Angelic language. "The chariots of God are... thousands of Angels" (Ps. 68:17); God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). The horses within the chariots also represent Angels, under the control of the four mighty cherubim Angels. This is similar to Ps. 68:17 describing God's chariots as being full of Angels.

Zechariah 6:6 *The one with the black horses goes out toward the north country; and the white went out after them; and the dappled went forth toward the south country-* See on :4. "The north country" must be Babylon (Zech. 2:6; Jer. 1:13,14 etc.)- those Angels went to minister to the Jews there and to enable the hearts of the Persian rulers to continue to support the work of rebuilding (or is this looking back to the judgements on Babylon in preparation for Cyrus' decree concerning the restoration?). Another group of Angels went toward the South- Egypt or the land of Judah (Ez. 20:46,47). If the *eretz* of the South is in fact the area of Judah south of Jerusalem, as it is in Zech. 7:7, then we would have confirmed the idea that the Angels of judgment

went forth because of Judah's sins, but didn't actually judge them. But they did judge Babylon, the north.

We note there were four coloured horses in :2,3, but we don't read of the red horses doing anything. Perhaps red represents blood and judgment. This was prepared against Judah for their sins, but the red horses weren't used. The restored Judah wasn't then destroyed. See on :2. In the longer term application, the four horses and chariots represented the nations of Daniel 2 who would dominate Judah. The red horse would then not be mentioned because it had already achieved its purpose upon Babylon, which had by then fallen to the Medes. Bible prophecy has multiple applications, in accordance with human prayer, repentance or lack thereof. And so these two suggested interpretations can both be legitimate.

Zechariah 6:7 The strong went out, and sought to go that they might walk back and forth through the earth: and he said, Go around and through the earth! So they walked back and forth through the earth- These Angels, the same as those who originally surveyed the whole area by walking "to and fro through the earth" in Zech. 1:10,11, "sought" permission from the co-ordinating Angel to continue their work. The Angels wished to do something but needed the permission of Michael the Angelic "lord of all the earth" to do so. We shall take over the roles of Angels in the future Kingdom. There will be scope therefore to serve God upon our own initiative; and what we earnestly desire to do for Him will be empowered. In this life we are to develop that desire to serve, and then all the limitations will be taken away. The "earth" here is probably 'the land' of Israel- which would have included Babylon, at its proper extent from 'sea to sea'.

Zechariah 6:8 Then he called to me, and spoke to me, saying, Behold, those who go toward the north country have quieted My spirit in the north country- The "spirit" must be understood in the light of :5, where the reference is to Angels. Maybe the reference is to an Angel crying out for judgment upon Babylon. Or the Spirit-Angel that needed quietening in Babylon was perhaps the satan-Angel that was resisting the Angel seeking to further the rebuilding work; . He would have gone (literally?) to Babylon to give the "prince of Persia" the idea of banning the rebuilding. The two Angels that quietened Him were those of Dan. 10:12,13- the Joshua-Angel of Zech. 3:1, and Michael who "came to help Me" (Gabriel) in Dan. 10:13. Alternatively, note that Dan. 9:21 describes Gabriel being "caused to fly with weariness"- thus it may have been Gabriel who was 'quieted' or 'given rest' (AVmg.) in Zech. 6:8, implying He was in Babylon trying to enable the rebuilding but needed the support of the other two Angels.

Zechariah 6:9 The word of Yahweh came to me, saying- Despite the awful sins and weaknesses of Judah revealed in the previous chapter, God wanted still to try to force through His plan for reestablishing His Kingdom, even if some details had to be changed.

Zechariah 6:10 Take of them of the captivity- Note how this still calls the returned community "the exiles"- as if to suggest that they still had the mentality with which they went into captivity. The temptation to mix flesh and spirit is simply very powerful, and recurs daily in our lives in various forms. In those temptations we face what the exiles faced- a desire to appear faithful to God externally whilst doing exactly what they wanted, influenced by the world around them.

Even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah; and come the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, where they have come from Babylon- They had apparently only recently arrived and were staying in the home of Josiah. It could be that they had brought with them some of the gold and silver artifacts of temple worship which had been taken into Babylon earlier, but were now released. Their names are significant. "Heldai" ['worldliness'], "Tobijah" ['Yah's goodness / grace'], "Jedaiah" ['Yah knows'], living in the house of Josiah, "Yah has founded"]. The impression is that despite the worldliness of the exiles, known by God, God's grace had led to the foundation of the new temple being founded, and they were to continue building upon it. See on Zech. 11:8.

The grace of God to the exiles is of course a foretaste of His grace to us. Time and again God speaks of the exiles in such positive language. For all that they had willingly adopted the gods of the captors, God still fondly describes them as 'Zion who dwells in Babylon' (Zech. 2:7). They were the Kingdom in embryo, waiting to just be transplanted from Babylon to Judah, just as we are the temple of God prepared symbolically in Heaven and waiting to be revealed on earth. Putting that grace another way, God proclaimed that despite all their idolatry and weakness in Babylon, Judah had 'paid off' their guilt for former sins by their service there (Is. 40:2). We can only marvel at God's grace, and the tragedy was that it was wasted and unperceived by them. May we do somewhat better.

Zechariah 6:11 Yes, take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest- Zech. 6:11-15 is clear enough that Joshua-Jesus could have become a king-priest, and the Kingdom of God been reestablished in his time. Perhaps the crowning of Joshua was because God realized that Zerubbabel was not going to make it as the king He had intended. But there is no record that Judah ever got near having a king again. Joshua the high priest never became king Joshua. Or perhaps the allusion is to High Priestly mitre, the lack of which in Zech. 3:5 was a cause for concern to Zechariah. "Crowns" plural would suggest that the priestly mitre was to be complemented by a crown of rulership.

Zechariah 6:12 And speak to him, saying, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build Yahweh's temple- see on Zech. 4:14; Jer. 23:5. "The Branch" was a title for Messiah, who was to appear at the restoration (Jer. 23:5; 33:15). The Hebrew here reads rather strangely: "Behold there is a man- Shoot is his name". Seeing Zerubbabel's name means 'Shoot from Babylon', it's odd that Zerubbabel isn't named specifically. Perhaps the implication is that Zerubbabel had failed, but another person with the same basic name still could fulfil the prophecies. But with the failure of Zerubbabel, there was no other king-priest to fulfil the prophecies. The Maccabees attempted to force a fulfilment, with opportunists like Simon and John Hyrcanus claiming to be king-priests- but with no actual dynastic evidence. And they hardly fulfilled the prediction that the King-Priest Messiah would sit on David's throne (Zech. 6:10). It could be that "Behold the man" is an invitation to look at the priest Joshua as "the man"; he was to replace Zerubbabel by becoming a king-priest.

It seems that Haggai and Zechariah returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in order to prepare the way for Zerubbabel- they were therefore the primary fulfilment of the prophecies of an Elijah-type prophet heralding the coming of the Messiah king. Zerubbabel's failure therefore meant that their ministry was re-scheduled and fulfilled in the work of John the Baptist. Zerubbabel is called "the branch" (Zech. 3:8; 6:12; Jer. 23:5,6), and this obviously invites connection with the prophecy of a branch / Messiah who would grow out of the cut down stump of Jesse (Is. 11:1). Again,

Zerubbabel fits the picture perfectly. The house of David had been cut down in judgment, but the prophesied branch would not be from the royal line of Kings- but rather simply from the 'stump' that had been left, i.e. a descendant of Jesse who was not in the direct line of kings. Mic. 5:2 speaks of a similar person- a Messiah-king who would be from Bethlehem, i.e. the family of Jesse, rather than from Jerusalem where the royal line of kings were born. His origins would be "from old"- i.e. a person who is still a descendant of Jesse, but not in the direct line of kings. See on Zech. 3:8.

But finally, all the immediate candidates to fulfil these words failed to do so. And yet the prophetic word was to come true in the person of the Lord Jesus. The Kingdom He restored was a spiritual one, and will only be physically manifested at His second coming. And thus the mocking "behold the man..." would have been seen by the Lord as a reference to Zech. 6:12, where He is foreseen as a Priest crowned with silver and gold, introduced to Israel with the same phrase: "Behold the man...". The Lord would have taken encouragement that in the Father's eyes, He was crowned there and then in glory, as He magnified His priestly office. But it would have seemed so, so different in the eyes of those mocking men. He was an intellectual genius without compare, and He applied His genius to the Father's word. He would have been conscious of all these links, and so much more. This way of His didn't seem to leave Him in His time of dying. And His awareness would doubtless have been a tremendous encouragement to Him. God likewise can control our trials so that we take strength from them in accordance with our appreciation of His word.

Zechariah 6:13 Even he shall build Yahweh's temple; and he shall bear the glory- In :11 we saw Joshua crowned with a priestly mitre; this 'bearing the glory' might mean that he was also to have the urim and thummim. Ezra 2:63 and Neh. 7:65 had perhaps prophesied that a priest would stand up with the urim and thummim in the envisaged restoration of the Kingdom. I explained on Zech. 3:9 that possession of the urim and thummim was also envisaged at this time.

And shall sit and rule on His throne; and he shall be a priest on His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both- Being a priest upon a throne implies a king-priest, after the order of Melchizedek and not according to the Mosaic system. There would be peace or a merging into unity between the concepts of priesthood and kingship which had previously been kept separate. Joshua-Jesus could have become the king-priest. But he like Zerubbabel failed and dropped the baton.

Or we can see this as a repeat of the prophecy of Hag. 2:23, that Zerubbabel would be king, with Joshua as the High Priest. We have here a clear example of a potential prophecy; like Cyrus, Zerubbabel was specifically named as having a future which didn't materialize for him. Because he and others chose for that not to happen. This helps us understand how the detailed command / prophecy of Ez. 40-48 was all likewise potential, as in fact are all of the restoration prophecies. The Davidic line from Jeconiah had been cursed by Jeremiah, saying that no offspring of "Coniah" would sit on the throne (Jer. 22:30). However, Zerubbabel was of the main Davidic line through Solomon and Jeconiah. This is stressed in the Lord's genealogy in Mt. 1:12,13: "Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud". Again we see how God's prophetic plan and even His curses are open to renegotiation. Zerubbabel the cursed not to be king could have become king. But he failed to live up to the potential, and so God's word of curse still came true.

Zechariah 6:14 The crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to

Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in Yahweh's temple- The idea is that the crowns were to be left in the temple for a sign of the potential that was possible; for Joshua and the three new arrivals from Babylon were never in fact crowned kings and rulers. "Heldai", 'worldliness'] of :10 is now renamed "Helem", 'vision' or 'vision of God'. If they quit their worldliness, then God's envisioned purpose of reestablishing the Kingdom immediately would come about. All the time, the message is of potentials. Another person, "Hen", is mentioned in addition to those of :10. This is the word for "grace", which Yahweh had kept secret ['Zephaniah']. By grace, these men could still participate in the reestablished Kingdom.

Zechariah 6:15 Those who are far off shall come and build in Yahweh's temple- Those far off could refer to the Jews still in Persia who were yet to return. Or the reference might be to the Gentiles- or perhaps both groups are in view. The implication of "come" is that Gentiles would enter the sacred space of the temple in order to rebuild it. The acceptance of Gentiles within God's house is clearly implied. But Gentiles didn't come and help the Jews in building as the restoration prophecies required. It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (Ezra 4:3 cp. Neh. 2:20), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6 and in Isaiah, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion. As with some of us, their quite correct refusal to allow "the adversaries of Judah" (Ezra 4:1) to fellowship with us in the work can lead us to an exclusive approach to fellowship, that actually disallows the essentially outgoing and inclusive spirit of the God we serve. The Jews returned from Babylonian having swung to the opposite extreme from their earlier worldliness; they returned proud and refusing contact with the Gentile world, considering themselves saved by their own strength. And this is perhaps reflected in the way they refused on principle to allow any Gentiles to help them in the building work. Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee [as in the decree of Cyrus]... Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night"; and them as Ez. 43 had also described, "I will glorify the house of my glory" (Is. 60:7). But due to the Jews' abuse of the Sabbath and their refusal to believe Yahweh would be the promised wall of protecting fire to them, the gates could not be open continually, and had to be shut at night (Neh. 7:3; 13:19). And Antiochus quite soon after Nehemiah's time destroyed them [which shows how the spirituality involved in what we do, e.g. the building of the wall, is the essential thing, rather than the achievement of anything in itself]. The implication of the prophecies about Zion's open gates was that whosoever would could then come at any time to seek Yahweh. But men were potentially turned away from Him, and His Kingdom not realized...just because greedy, materialistic Jews wanted to have a few more coins in their pocket as a result of their trading on the Sabbath. And so with us, our meanness, our disabling of adverts to be placed, preaching to be done...by our selfishness, our desire to have more than we need to cover us in the case of any eventuality, all this effectively shuts up the Kingdom against men. If the Pharisees could do just this, it is possible for us to do it. The salvation of others has been delegated into our hands.

And you shall know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you- As noted on Zech. 2:9; 4:9, there was distinct scepticism about Zechariah. But he recognizes in the next sentence that the fulfilment of his words and his personal justification would only happen if his audience were obedient. The implication is that his visions of the restored Kingdom could have come about in that generation.

This will happen, if you will diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God'- One of God's greatest tragedies must be all the potential He has set up, which we don't use- the plans He's made possible, which are left unfulfilled because we don't rise up to it. Ez. 40-48 describe a great temple which the returning exiles could have built; but they didn't. Most didn't even bother returning from Babylon; those who did traded with the Gentiles, married their women, and built their own houses rather than God's. Zech. 6:15 says the same in the context of this temple being built: "And this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord".

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 7

Zechariah Chapter 7

Zechariah 7:1 It happened in the fourth year of king Darius that the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Chislev- We note the usage of Babylonian forms for the months, reflecting how deep was the assimilation of the Jews into Babylonian language and culture. The temple work would be completed two years later (Ezra 6:25). But it was not at all on track to complete a temple according to the specifications required in Ez. 40-48, hence this prophecy of encouragement.

Zechariah 7:2 The people of Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem Melech, and their men, to entreat Yahweh's favour- The people of Bethel were amongst the first to return to the land and rebuild their own houses, whilst leaving God's house unfinished, as Hag. 1:3,4 laments. 223 of them returned in Ezra 2:28, and another 123 at the time of Neh. 7:32. "Regem Melech" is a mixture of an Assyrian and Hebrew word, implying 'friend of the king'. Again we see how deeply assimilated the Jews had become. "Sharezer" likewise reflects this, equivalent to the Assyrian *Sar-usur* or *Asur-sar-usur*, "Asur protect the King"; and it was the name of one of Sennacherib's sons (2 Kings 19:37).

Zechariah 7:3 And to speak to the priests of the house of Yahweh of Armies, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?- Weeping implied fasting (Neh. 1:4; Joel 2:12). This fast had been established to remember the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the burning of the temple in that month (2 Kings 25:8,9; Jer. 52:12,13). They had instituted several other such fasts and feasts (see on Zech. 8:19). The only fast required by God was that on the day of atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month. That fasting was intended to elicit repentance; and it was exactly that which was lacking in Judah. Instead they had fasted basically out of self pity, lamenting their national judgment as a tragedy, but without personal repentance. "These so many years" could refer to the 20 or so years since the first returnees had arrived in Judah. Or it could refer to the entire 70 years of captivity, since the destruction of the temple which this fast celebrated- which would make this another of several indications that there had been some retention of Yahweh worship in the land, and the returnees were wrong to consider the pre-existing Jewish population as somehow not in covenant with Yahweh. I have discussed this in commentary on the early chapters of Ezra.

Zechariah 7:4 Then the word of Yahweh of Armies came to me, saying- The question was used as an opportunity to call Judah to deeper repentance, and there are several answers given to the question as to whether they should continue their self-imposed

fasts of Zech. 7:3, each introduced by this same rubric "Then the word of Yahweh of Armies came to me, saying".

Zechariah 7:5 Speak to all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month for these seventy years- As explained on Zech. 8:19, the Jews had instituted a fast in the seventh month, to mourn the murder of Gedaliah (Jer. 41:1,2). But this had eclipsed the fast of the seventh month which God required- on the day of atonement, to mourn their personal sins and seek His atonement.

Did you actually fast to Me, really to Me?- God's answer is that they hadn't really fasted for Him. They'd fasted, publically appearing to love the temple and the idea of a restored Kingdom... but in reality they had not done it *for God*, but somehow for themselves. And the challenge echoes to us today; we can go through all manner of religious ritual when it is effectively to ourselves and not to God.

The returned exiles were intended to keep feasts as commanded in Ez. 40-48, but it seems they didn't. The pertinent command about the seventh month was in Ez. 45:25: "In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, shall he [the prince] do the like in the feast of the seven days, according to the sin offering, according to the burnt offering, and according to the meat offering, and according to the oil". But here God through Zechariah criticized the Jews for keeping this feast only externally, but not "unto me". Hag. 2:1 records how on the 21st day of the 7th month- i.e. once the seven day feast that began on the 15th had finished- Haggai was sent to rebuke "the prince", Zerubbabel, for being so slack in fulfilling Ezekiel's vision. Even by the time of Neh. 8:14-17, it was so that the feast of the 7th month had not been kept by Judah since the time of Joshua. They subconsciously switched off to Ezekiel's words; just as we can all do.

Zechariah 7:6 When you eat, and when you drink, don't you eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?- The challenge echoes to us today; we can go through all manner of religious ritual when it is effectively to ourselves and not to God. We can sing hymns- but to ourselves; pray, but to ourselves, as portrayed in the Lord's story of the Pharisee praying ostensibly to God, but actually to himself (Lk. 18:11). And so it was with the Jews' fasting. Zechariah is answering their question about whether or not to continue fasting on the anniversary of the temple's destruction. He doesn't say yes or no, but rather comments that all their fasting and lamenting the destruction of the temple had been mere religious ritualism and not from the heart. So the question of continuing to do so was to be answered 'No' if they were going to continue fasting in that meaningless way; the answer was not yes or no, but rather, in what spirit were they fasting? Fasting is associated with repentance, and as discussed on Zech. 1:3 the 'return' of the Jews to God was not very deep; their repentances were insincere. Although Yahweh had by grace 'returned' them to their land anyway. Daniel's repentance for the sins of the exiles and their fathers involved prayer and fasting (Dan. 9:2); but their fasting was clearly not of that quality. If they believed the prophecies about the restoration of the Kingdom and the temple, then they would now not need to continue lamenting the destruction of the first temple.

Zechariah 7:7 Aren't these the words which Yahweh proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and its cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited? '- The point was that it was whilst the Jews were in prosperity formerly that they were so far from God and needed the radical call to repentance made by the former prophets. The returned exiles had been

motivated by a desire for personal gain, and were bitterly disappointed by the drought and poor harvests (see on Hag. 1 and Malachi). The idea was that even if they attained prosperity, they would still be in sin. Bethel was one of the "cities" in view, and the answer was being given to the delegation from there (:2).

Zechariah 7:8 The word of Yahweh came to Zechariah, saying- See on :4.

Zechariah 7:9 Thus has Yahweh of Armies spoken, saying, 'Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother- The Levites were to judge justly in the restored temple (Ez. 44:24). But here and in Zech. 8:16, the same word is used to exhort them to stop judging unjustly. They were not therefore restoring the temple system and kingdom as commanded in Ez. 40-48. The records of Ezra and Nehemiah lament the lack of justice, kindness and compassion shown to their own brethren at the time of the restoration. These were the very attributes of the Yahweh Name (Ex. 34:4-6). Who God is must be an imperative for us to be likewise; and that is an abiding principle for all time. And it was the lack of these things which had been the basis for their exile (Jer. 7:5-7; 22:3). And the returned exiles were now behaving in just the same way.

Zechariah 7:10 Don't oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, the foreigner, nor the poor- The implication is that the returned exiles were committing the same sins as Judah had done before the exile. They were no better than their fathers, and the earlier prophetic criticisms of them still applied to this later generation. This is demonstration enough of how God's word is a living word and speaks to subsequent generations rather than solely to the initial audience; and that is surely why the relevant prophetic words have been preserved for us in the Bible. Thus prophetic appeals to Old Testament Israel are quoted in the New Testament as being directly to us.

And let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart'- LXX "Let none of you remember in your hearts the malice of your brother". This balances the first half of the verse, which criticizes those in power. If it were only the sins of a minority which were in view, then the judgment of the entire community would have been inappropriate. But remembering the malice of our more powerful brothers is just as much a sin as the oppression of the weak by the strong. Here again we see a major message in a minor prophet.

Zechariah 7:11 But they refused to listen, and turned their backs, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear- This quotes Nehemiah's words of warning to the returned exiles in Neh. 9:29. There are three progressive positions described here. They refused to listen, then turned their backs upon the warnings of the prophets, and then psychologically turned off their hearing. This same downward spiral is observable in human beings of all ages.

Zechariah 7:12 Yes, they made their hearts as hard as flint- Like a diamond. The same figure is used in Ez. 3:9, meaning to be psychologically unimpressable by anything other than what we already believe in our hearts. Hence LXX "They set their heart disobedient".

In case they might hear the law, and the words which Yahweh of Armies had sent by His Spirit in the previous prophets- The human mind can resist the Holy Spirit, powerful as that Spirit is. Otherwise, we would not have freewill. We wonder why people are apparently deaf to God's word. It's not merely busyness with life, or

inability to intellectually grasp what it says. There is a psychological basis for all apparent intellectual failure; and that basis is that they do not want to hear and face God's demands.

Therefore great wrath came from Yahweh of Armies- The invading, desolating armies had been those of Yahweh, controlled by His Angelic armies, as previous visions in Zechariah have made clear.

Zechariah 7:13 It has come to pass that, as He called, and they refused to listen, so they will call, and I will not listen, said Yahweh of Armies- "They" as in the former generation were already dead. But as noted on :10, God's word is a living word. Just as the former generation had refused to listen to God's call, so the present generation would call to God and God would not listen. Our attitude to God's call to us in His word is reflected in how He responds to our calls to Him in the words of our prayers. Prayer and our attitude to God's word are therefore related. As He calls to us and we respond, so we call to Him and He responds; or doesn't respond, according to our lack of response to Him. And yet Zechariah's generation were calling out for increased prosperity; and were having no response. Because they were not hearing His word about restoring the Kingdom. The delegation from Bethel (:2) had come calling to God for an answer. And there was no yes / no answer as they sought.

Zechariah 7:14 But I will scatter them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they have not known. Thus the land was desolate after them, so that no man passed through nor returned: for they made the pleasant land desolate- We note the mixing of tenses; "I will scatter... the land was desolate". This is explicable once we grasp the principle explained on :10 and :13 (see too on Zech. 8:9); God had called to a previous generation of Judah through the prophetic word, and they had refused to respond. And so the land had been desolated. But that same call came to the current generation; and they too would be scattered. But God was so gracious with the returned exiles; that scattering took centuries to happen, until the temple was again destroyed and the Jews scattered in AD70. We note that the desolation of the land was because *they* had made the land "desolate". The judgments were a reflection of what they themselves had done. And it was a "pleasant land", Heb. a land of desire- God's desire was to reestablish His Kingdom there, but they made no use of that huge potential.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 8

Zechariah Chapter 8

Zechariah 8:1 The word of Yahweh of Armies came to me- After the heavy condemnation of the returned exiles in the previous verses, we can but marvel at God's grace in now assuring them that He would still bring about His Kingdom purpose with Judah: "'Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother. Don't oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, the foreigner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart'. But they refused to listen, and turned their backs, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear. Yes, they made their hearts as hard as flint, in case they might hear the law, and the words which Yahweh of Armies had sent" (Zech. 7:9-12). Again we see God seeking to as it were force through His purpose of restoring the Kingdom, despite the weakness of the people's repentance as lamented in Zech. 7.

Zechariah 8:2 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath- The wrath was with Judah. The allusion is to Jer. 32:37: "I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place". The wrath was a reflection of His jealousy for her, the wrath of love. Zech. 7:12 has just stated God's great wrath with Judah. But His wrath against the Gentile desolators of His people was even greater. See on Zech. 1:2,15. The even greater wrath He had over Zion's treatment, deserved as it was, is a reflection of the profound depth of His passionate love for Zion. It's as if a husband who has an unfaithful wife is more angry with those who punish her than he is with her. Because, quite simply, he loves her so deeply. Again we note the title "Yahweh of Armies". The Angels' tremendous zeal for the restoration comes bubbling through. No wonder the Kingdom prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah could have been fulfilled if only the people had worked together with the Angels to their full potential!

Zechariah 8:3 Thus says Yahweh: I have returned to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem- Many times God says that He will return to Zion if they returned to Him. They had physically returned, but not spiritually. And yet He still returned to Zion. Such was and is His grace, His desire to bring about His promise of the Kingdom and restoration. The physical movement of the Angel back to Jerusalem is suggested here. The cherubic glory of God, representing His presence, had departed from Zion in Ez. 1, but Ez. 43:4 envisaged it returning: "The glory of Yahweh came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east". But there followed a stern warning to repent: "Now let them put away their prostitution, and the dead bodies of their kings, far from Me; and I will dwell in their midst forever. You, son of man, show the house to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. If they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the form of the house" (Ez. 43:9-11). The glory returned by grace, but that grace was to elicit repentance, and a building of the temple according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48. But Judah didn't respond to the tremendous initiative of God's grace.

The language of Israel's return from captivity as found in Isaiah and Ezekiel all has evident reference to the second coming and the final establishment of the Kingdom. It isn't just that Israel's return under Ezra and Zerubbabel was a type of that final homecoming. It could have been the Kingdom- had they obeyed the prophecies. It was all about a potential Kingdom of God. But they were too caught up with their own self-interest, with building their own houses rather than God's; and so it was all deferred. Using the prophetic perfect, God had prophesied that at the time of the restoration, He would come and dwell in rebuilt Zion- just as Ezekiel's prophecy had concluded: "The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (Ez. 48:35). Clearly, Ezekiel's prophecies could have been fulfilled at the restoration; God was willing that they should be. But human apathy and self-interest stopped it from happening as it could have done.

Joshua didn't live up to the conditional prophecies made about him in Zechariah. Ezra and Nehemiah seem to have taken over the priestly and kingly work of Joshua and Zerubbabel respectively. Nehemiah's record concludes on the negative note that Judah had forsaken Zion (Nehemiah 13:11). Nobody wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there; the Levites even went and lived outside it where they had "fields", because they weren't given their tithes (Nehemiah 13:1). Lots had

to be drawn to get people to live there (Nehemiah 11:1). It became a ghost town, when it should have been inhabited as a town without walls for the multitudes of returned exiles joyfully dwelling there (Zechariah 2:5).

Jerusalem shall be called 'The City of Truth;' and the mountain of Yahweh of Armies, *'The Holy Mountain'* - "Truth" is a word associated with covenant relationship. The Mount Zion would be "holy" as opposed to all the abominations being practiced there, both before and after the restoration. But that depended upon whether Judah would be faithful and holy, and they ultimately chose not to be. It is in the Messianic Kingdom that Jerusalem will be called the "city of truth" (Is. 1:26); at the time when Messiah would be enthroned upon "my holy mountain of Zion" (Ps. 2:6; Is. 11:9). This could have happened at the restoration; but Joshua and Zerubbabel failed to be the required Messianic figures, and so the prophecy is delayed in fulfilment until the return of the Lord Jesus to earth. But the city had to be of truth and holy, for these prophecies to come true. And Haggai has just condemned the returnees as "unclean". Jerusalem "shall" be a city of truth can be read more as commandment than prediction. For :16-19 will go on to beg the people to live in "truth", "therefore love the truth" (:19), so that the wonderful potentials might be made possible.

Zechariah 8:4 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Old men and old women will again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age- The prolonged lifespans envisaged are those of the Messianic Kingdom in Isaiah 65. As noted on :3, this could have happened at the restoration, but it was delayed until the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory. The dwelling of Yahweh in the midst of Jerusalem would be the time when aged men and women would likewise dwell there. The significance of very old people in the immediate context was that these were those who would have seen Zion before the Babylonian invasion. But this never came about. Instead those older ones wept as they realized the rebuilt temple was far smaller than the first temple, and not according to the prophecies of Ezekiel they had heard during the captivity.

Zechariah 8:5 The streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets- Jeremiah in his Lamentations had lamented the murder of the children in its streets. This was now to all be reversed. But instead, Nehemiah records how hard it was to get the returned exiles to dwell in Jerusalem. They preferred to build their own homes and farmsteads outside of Jerusalem. They thereby precluded the fulfilment of such prophecies. This is the undoing of the judgment of Jer. 9:21, that children would be cut off from the streets of Jerusalem. The same concept is found in the final visions of the Kingdom in Revelation; the curses upon earth for human disobedience will be reversed. Likewise the turning of fasts to feasts in :19 reverses Am. 8:10 "I will turn your feasts into mourning". Long life (:4) and prosperous children (:5) were the blessings of obedience to the old covenant, and are alluded to in Is. 65. But Judah had broken the old covenant and had been offered the new covenant by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They had refused that, and focused instead on trying to keep the Mosaic law as best they could. And yet still God is eager to move ahead with them even on that basis. The new covenant had offered "the sound of merry-makers. I will make them many, and they shall not be few" (Jer. 30:18,19), which in essence is the picture here in Zechariah, of children playing safely in the streets.

Zechariah 8:6 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: If it is too hard in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be too hard in My eyes? says Yahweh of

Armies- Here again is a timeless challenge; we can assume that what is hard for us must therefore be hard for God. This is the root psychological problem we have which is the basis for our lack of faith in His abilities. They reasoned that "the time" of which he spoke hadn't come (Hag. 1:2)- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Is. 45:13 "not for price nor reward"). They felt that all the prophecies were "marvellous" (AV) or "too hard" in the sense of something incapable of concrete fulfilment in their experience. This is why Hag. 1:2 rebuked them for saying "the time is not come... that the Lord's house should be built". They didn't want the prophecy to be fulfilled, because it would mean 'going up' from their ceiled houses- both in Babylon and in the farmsteads they had built in Judah- to build the temple. They thereby brought God down to their level of capability and potential; and this is what we do likewise through our lack of faith in His ability. And note that it was "the remnant", those who by grace God was prepared to accept, who suffered this lack of faith. "Too hard" is surely an allusion to how Abraham and Sarah felt that God's covenant promises were "too hard" to be fulfilled, earning the rebuke of Gen. 18:14 (s.w.). The exiles likewise were precluding the fulfilment of the covenant by the same attitude. Note the connection between the "covenant" and God's "marvels" [s.w. "too hard", Ex. 34:10]. Nehemiah had lamented that the exiles were not mindful of God's previous "marvels" (s.w.), His historical doing of that which was "too hard" for man, time and again (Neh. 9:17). This is why we have Biblical history; to remind us that God repeatedly achieves that which is "too hard" for men.

"These days" are the day of small things of Zech. 4:10. There seemed too large a divide between present experience and the glorious future promised. Lack of faith in our day is likewise a sense that it is a bridge too far, over too much troubled water, between present realities and the promised future. But because we tend to feel that way doesn't mean God sees it that way, and faith is the ability to see things from God's ultimate perspective. The equivalent in Jeremiah's prophecies of the restoration is Jeremiah's comment that "Nothing is impossible for You" (Jer. 32:17), confirming God's comment: "is anything impossible for Me?" (Jer. 32:27).

Zechariah 8:7 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Behold, I will save My people from the east country, and from the west country- At that time, the Jews were in the south (Egypt) and what was called "the north". Hardly any of them were in the West. This could have come true in Zechariah's time in the sense of their regathering from the sun's rising [east] to it's setting [west]. But they didn't want to be regathered, for the most part, and remained in captivity. The allusion is to how God both saved and brought (:8) His people out of Egypt and to the promised land. But in their hearts they returned to Egypt. And so the prophecy will have a latter day fulfilment, when as today, the majority of Jews are located to the west of Palestine. The context is of God forcing through His saving purpose. The calls to flee from the land of the north alluded to in Zech. 2 had gone unheeded. Now it seems God has a plan to recall the Jews in the west and east. God had earlier said that the exiles would return from all points of the compass: "I will bring thy seed from the east and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Keep not back" (Is. 43:5,6). But those in the north and south, Babylon and Egypt, hadn't returned in any great numbers. And there were very few Jews literally to the west and east of Palestine at that time. And even they it seems didn't come; for the prophecy eventually will be fulfilled in the Gentile converts: "Many shall come from the east and from the west

[note no mention of north and south], and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11).

Zechariah 8:8 And I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness- The connection is with :3; when God dwelt in the midst of Jerusalem, so would His people. Zion would be "the city of truth" (:3) in that truth and righteousness would characterize God's people and His relationship with them. God did indeed "bring them" from exile through stirring up the spirit of Cyrus by His Spirit to enable them to return. But the majority resisted that call, that 'bringing'; likewise it was His intention that they would return not just physically but also spiritually, in repentance. And those who did return likewise resisted that potential bringing back to Him. Just as so many of all ages have resisted the series of Divine nudges throughout their lives, designed to bring them to Him. "In truth and in righteousness" meant the people could preclude this by not living in truth and righteousness- which is the basis for Zechariah's appeal a few verses later. "I will be their God" is the language of the new covenant and restoration prophesied, or offered, in Jer. 30:22,25. It is the language of the promises to Abraham, which are the basis for the new covenant. But if they didn't live in truth and righteousness, then God would not be their God in the sense offered.

Zechariah 8:9 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Let your hands be strong- The context of Zechariah is that the hands of those rebuilding the temple had been weakened (Ezra 4:4). The idea is 'let your hands be strengthened'. There had to be some conscious volition on the part of the temple rebuilders; but God would strengthen their hands. We recall God strengthening the hands of Lot to leave Sodom whilst he himself delayed (same phrase in Gen. 19:16); the call was to those still in Babylon to likewise flee lest they be spiritually consumed there. The very phrase "let your hands be strong" is used repeatedly in the record of the rebuilding in Nehemiah 3, rendered in the AV "Next [s.w. "hands"... repaired [s.w. "strong"]", literally 'their hands strengthened'. Nehemiah had prayed "let their hands be strengthened" (Neh. 6:9), just as initially they had "strengthened their hands to this good work" (Neh. 2:18), just as Ezra had been strengthened by God's hand (Ezra 7:28). God has turned the heart of the king to strengthen their hands (Ezra 6:22 "[God] had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, to strengthen their hands in the work of God's house"), and yet by this point in time they needed the encouragement to again be strengthened. And that strengthening was mediated through the words of the prophets.

You who hear in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets who were in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of Armies was laid, even the temple, that it might be built- As noted on Zech. 7:10,13,14, God's word is a living word and speaks to subsequent generations rather than solely to the initial audience; and that is surely why the relevant prophetic words have been preserved for us in the Bible. The prophets who had predicted the laying of the foundation stone of the restored temple should still be listened to. That prophetic word of purpose was still capable of fulfilment in later years. The prophets in view therefore may not necessarily be Haggai and Zechariah. The idea is that the essence of the prophetic message through Zechariah was the same as that of the earlier prophets. The restoration wasn't happening, despite all the potential, because that generation of Jews were just repeating the basic errors of their ancestors who had also rejected God's appeals for true repentance. That is exactly the point made in Zech. 1:4; 7:11,12. They

had laid the foundations of the temple, and not according to the commands of Ez. 40-48. But God urges them to go ahead, He would accept and work through that smaller version. And so Zechariah reminds them that the foundations had been laid that the temple might be built.

Zechariah 8:10 For before those days there were no wages for man, nor any wages for an animal- The economic situation was so bad that men worked for nothing, and there wasn't enough to even feed the beasts of burden. God could give and take prosperity so easily. This is the scenario mentioned by Haggai, of earning wages and putting them into a bag with holes in it. This was all an outcome of their lack of devotion to the work of restoring the Kingdom.

Neither was there any peace to him who went out or came in, because of the adversary. For I set all men everyone against his neighbour- This was the state of affairs in the land before the rebuilding started. But through Angelic work, God had made the land peaceful and at rest so that the rebuilding work could start and prosper (Zech. 1:11). We note that God can set men against each other, and also bring about peace between persons. This is all the work of His Spirit upon the spirit of people. There really should be no excuse for disunity and 'every man against his neighbour' when God is willing and eager to create unity amongst His people. This is the unity of or caused by the Spirit, which Paul exults in later. Lack of unity would therefore be due to a resistance to the work of His Spirit.

Zechariah 8:11 But now I will not be to the remnant of this people as in the former days, says Yahweh of Armies- The terrible situation in Judah at the time of the founding of the temple (:10) would not continue. The people had returned motivated by a desire for material betterment, and God had given them drought and bad harvests (Hag. 1) to try to direct them to Him in repentance. They hadn't responded, and now God all the same wants to pour out the covenant blessings of good harvests (:12). Haggai had made it clear that God's blessings would appear if they focused on His house rather than their own. And so He had given them famine and plague to lead them to a better focus. But Zechariah seems to be saying that God would just pour out His blessings anyway (:12) if they were willing to accept it. He so wanted to force through His Kingdom program with them.

Zechariah 8:12 For they will sow their seed in peace and the vine will yield its fruit, and the ground will give its increase, and the skies will give their dew- See on Hag 1:9. God was willing to send the Kingdom conditions at that time, the blessings of keeping the covenant (Dt. 33:28). But we know that in reality, Judah were not obedient to the heavenly vision of Ezekiel, and therefore Judah's agriculture was *not* blessed in this way; the vines cast their fruit, and the fruit of the ground was destroyed (Hag. 1:6,11; Mal. 3:10,11). The reason was that Zech. 8:12 was conditional- upon Zech. 8:16,17: "These are the things that ye shall do [i.e. to bring these prophecies about]; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD". But Judah abused each other, and didn't fulfil the conditions for the prophecy.

And I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things- The remnant referred to those who had returned at Zechariah's time. They could have experienced this. The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to "inherit" the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing

Israel to “inherit” the land again after their return from “the north country” (Zech. 2:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the “north country”, then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized “throne of the Lord” (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn’t even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

Zechariah 8:13 It shall come to pass that, as you were a curse among the nations, house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Don't be afraid- The Divine intention was that the ten tribes along with Judah would be a blessing to the nations living in the *eretz* promised to Abraham. It was "fear" which held them back from realizing this, just as it was fear which stopped God's people possessing that same land at the time of Moses and Joshua. But all this was conditional upon their wanting to leave the lands of their captivity, and to live according to the spirit of :16.

Let your hands be strong- See on :9. Jerusalem being told not to fear and to have strong hands is a direct fulfilment of the kingdom prophecy of Zeph. 3:16: "In that day it will be said to Jerusalem, Don't be afraid, Zion. Don't let your hands be weak". The people of Judah who had returned were on the very cusp of the Kingdom of God being reestablished. It so nearly happened, such was God's enthusiasm for the salvation of that generation. But it didn't happen because they were focused on the immediate and material rather than the spiritual.

Zechariah 8:14 For thus says Yahweh of Armies: As I thought to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked Me to wrath, says Yahweh of Armies, and I didn't repent- God pronounces "evil", but in the gap between the pronouncement of judgment and carrying it out, there is the possibility of human repentance and God's repentance / change of mind. So this statement that God did not repent is effectively saying that Judah had not then repented. Judah had still not returned / repented, but God had returned them to their land all the same. Zech. 8:14,15 uses the language of the new covenant in Jer. 32:42: "For thus says the Lord... Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you... so again I have purposed in these days to do *good* to Jerusalem... do not be afraid". This matches Jer. 32:40-42: "For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the *good* fortune that I now promise them... I will rejoice in doing *good* to them". Although the Jews wanted to continue keeping the Old Covenant, God was eager to push forward their entrance into the New Covenant. But all this was conditional upon their 'doing good' (:16,17). They didn't, and remained committed to the [broken] old covenant, and so these things have been reapplied to us who enter the new covenant today.

Zechariah 8:15 So again have I thought in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Don't be afraid- There is no equivalent to "And I didn't repent" in :14. God was not promising that He would not change His mind, because He cannot force through salvation upon people. The conditions of :16 were still required. The

gap between Divine statement and its fulfilment still existed, as it did in :14. And there needed to be freewill response from the people, in the terms of :16. The appeals for repentance in :16,17 are likely against a background of the people assuming that since they had some kind of a temple rebuilt, therefore they must be automatically acceptable with God. The repeated assurances "Don't be afraid" beg the question, 'Afraid of what?'. I suggest it was the basic human fear of being taken beyond the narrow confines of their initial vision of life as it is.

Zechariah 8:16 These are the things that you shall do: speak every man the truth with his neighbour. Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates- These were the conditions for God's insistent desire to reestablish the Kingdom to come about immediately. They seem petty demands compared to the magnitude of what was on offer. But this is the major message of the minor prophets- that things like truth, justice and peace are of utterly paramount importance. And upon them stands or falls the part of men in God's Kingdom. And Judah at this time failed. The Levites were to judge justly in the restored temple (Ez. 44:24). But here and in Zech. 7:9, the same word is used to effectively exhort them to stop judging unjustly.

Zechariah 8:17 And let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his neighbour, and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, says Yahweh- As explained on :15,16, in return for apparently petty changes, God was prepared to reestablish the Kingdom in glory there and then. But to God, these things were not petty. They were requests for attitudes of mind, not loving falsity, not scheming in their hearts against their neighbour. It is mental attitudes that God hates. This itself sets up the colossal importance of being spiritually minded, and the primary importance of the heart over any external religious rituals. God was looking for them to love truth and peace (:19); rather than loving falsity. The same phrase for 'devising evil' is used of how the opponents of the exiles 'devised evil' against them (Neh. 6:2; Esther 8:3). Yet the exiles were doing to their brethren what had been done to them. This is the classic cycle of abuse; to do to others as was done to us. Only repentance and a response to Divine grace will break it. God had 'devised evil' against His people (:14; Mic. 2:3). But they were devising evil against that same people, their brethren. They were unconsciously playing God, responding to their own rightful receipt of God's judgment by judging others; instead of accepting guilt and the rightness of God's judgment. We note the parallels between :16,17 and Jer. 9:3-8, which list these very things as the reason Judah went into captivity and the old covenant was broken. If they continued behaving like this, then the possibility of entering the new covenant (see on :14) and the restored Kingdom of God would be precluded. And according to Malachi, the returnees failed.

Zechariah 8:18 The word of Yahweh of Armies came to me- See on Zech. 7:4. This appears to still be in answer to the question posed by the delegation from Bethel about fasting in Zech. 7:2.

Zechariah 8:19 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months shall be for the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts-

Zechariah chapters 7 and 8 clearly form a unit. In Zech. 7:6 Zechariah answered their question about whether or not to continue fasting on the anniversary of the temple's destruction [in the fifth month]. He doesn't say yes or no, but rather

comments that all their fasting and lamenting the destruction of the temple had been mere religious ritualism and not from the heart. So the question of continuing to do so was to be answered 'No' if they were going to continue fasting in that meaningless way; the answer was not yes or no, but rather, in what spirit were they fasting? Fasting is associated with repentance, and as discussed on Zech. 1:3 the 'return' of the Jews to God was not very deep; their repentances were insincere. Although Yahweh had by grace 'returned' them to their land anyway. Daniel's repentance for the sins of the exiles and their fathers involved prayer and fasting (Dan. 9:2); but their fasting was clearly not of that quality. If they believed the prophecies about the restoration of the Kingdom and the temple, then they would now not need to continue lamenting the destruction of the first temple. Indeed, by faith, they would turn those fasts into feasts of celebration. But the Jews didn't do so. The fasts "shall be" feasts- I take that as a command more than a prophecy. But true to human nature, they preferred to remain myopic, lamenting the past and comfortable doing so because it gave a sense of tradition and community, rather than seeing the very real possibilities of living a Kingdom life of all joy and peace through believing. The challenge is not simply to those who think the Christian walk is a glum holding on to tradition, lamenting every step of their lives in this world, taking comfort in thoughts that they are preserving God's Truth in a dark and wicked world as the miserable faithful have ever done. In fact, the problem is basic to human nature. We actually prefer to walk in myopic flat emotion, rather than be inspired and 'be strengthened' by the Spirit to see the great possibilities there are for us both now and eternally, and to change fasts to feasts. Ask believers whether they are 100% certain of their personal salvation... and the answers are disappointing. The Jews have been criticized in Zech. 7:5,6 for effectively fasting for themselves and not for God: "Did you actually fast to Me, really to Me?". To live in the postmodern world of flat emotion and continual borderline depression is in fact selfish; so much art and culture glorifies the inane and negative and people live in that same spirit. Just as Judah fasted for themselves, and refused to turn the fasts to feasts.

Joy, gladness and cheerful feasts is the language of the restoration prophecies like Jer. 33:10,11: "Yet again there shall be heard in this place, about which you say, It is waste, without man and without animal, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without animal, the voice of *joy* and the voice of *gladness*, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, Give thanks to Yahweh of Armies, for Yahweh is good, for His loving kindness endures forever; who bring thanksgiving into the house of Yahweh. For I will cause the captivity of the land to return as at the first, says Yahweh". The Messianic banquet could have happened then- if they wanted it. Just as people can make what they will of the breaking of bread banquet. We could argue that the sound of joy and gladness had been taken from the nation for 70 years- but if they turned the fasts into feasts as commanded, then the restoration would be with them: "I will take from them the voice of *joy* and the voice of *gladness*, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride... This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. It shall happen that when seventy years are accomplished, then I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, says Yahweh, for their iniquity" (Jer. 25:10-12; Jer. 7:34; 16:9). The reversal of fasts to feasts was to be part of the new covenant experience prophesied in Jer. 31:12; 33:11: "I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow". But they preferred to mope around in mourning, and those days of mourning are kept in Judaism to this day. The essence of

these things is to be found in the experience of those on the Lord Jesus, who said that His disciples would feast and not fast because of His presence with them.

The Jews had instituted their own fasts: the ninth day of the fourth month, in memory of the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; in the fifth month, in remembrance of the burning of the temple and city (see on Zech. 7:3); in the seventh month, to mourn the murder of Gedaliah (Jer. 41:1,2); and in the tenth month, in memory of the commencement of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. But the only fast required by God was that on the day of atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month. That fasting was intended to elicit repentance; and it was exactly that which was lacking in Judah. Instead they had fasted basically out of self pity, lamenting their national judgment as a tragedy, but without personal repentance. We see here the human tendency towards religion; and even when ostensibly based upon spiritual things, it can end up a totally separate religion to the one God desires. In their case, fasting to lament Gedaliah's death took precedence over fasting in repentance for personal sins, which was what God wanted.

Therefore love truth and peace- Without loving truth, these feasts would not be joyful to the Jews who had returned. The prophecy was conditional. As noted on :17, they had loved falsity; God was and is intensely concerned with the state of the human heart. What do we really love and aspire to? Hence all who truly love the Lord's appearing, with all that entails, shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). To love truth is not to love achieving intellectual truths of interpretation. Rather the idea is of loving integrity and rightness, righteousness. So that Jerusalem could be called a "city of truth", inhabited by people who 'did truth'. And this is the idea of Jer. 31:23: "Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its towns when I return their fortunes: "The Lord bless you, O abode of righteousness, O holy mountain!". That meant, however, that for the restoration to happen- there had to be righteousness and holiness within Jerusalem. Haggai had declared the people there "unclean"; and now Zechariah appeals for integrity, truth in its moral sense, which in the end is true Biblical love. We note how John's letters often harp on the connection between love and 'truth'. Jer. 32:41 speaks of how "I will plant them in this land in faithfulness"- the same Hebrew idea as 'truth'. But Zechariah has to appeal to the people to have that faithfulness. In the end, they didn't. And a case can be made that the rest of the prophecy, Zech. 9-14, moves on to reinterpret the prophetic possibilities with reference to the Lord Jesus and the establishment of His Kingdom in an even more glorious way, seeing that the people didn't want it then. And that is why the appeals for repentance in Zechariah finish here, and the prophecies are no longer dated specifically, as they have no immediate relevance to the time of Darius.

Indeed it could be argued that Zech. 8 is a summary of the previous prophecies in Zech. 1-7, and gives Judah an ultimatum- to live the Kingdom life now, or the Kingdom will not be restored. The rest of the prophecy then focuses upon the future. The connections are persuasive: 8:2 = 1:14; 8:3 = 1:16; 2:14,15; 8:4,5 = 2:4,8; 8:7,8 = 2:6,11,12; 8:9-13 = 3:10; 4:9; 8:14,17 = 5:3,4; 7:9,10; 8:19 = 7:3,9; 8:20-22 = 2:15; 5:5-11; 8:23 = 2:10-12,15.

Zechariah 8:20 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Many peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come- The "many peoples" could refer to the peoples of Judah / Israel (as in Dt. 33:3,19). Consistently, the restoration prophecies envisaged God's restored people as being a blessing to the nations around them; they would recognize

that Yahweh had done great things for His people (Ps. 126:1-3) and would wish to therefore become part of that people. The reality was that Judah and Israel continued worshipping the idols of those nations, and later evolved an exclusivist, superior attitude toward them.

Zechariah 8:21 *And the inhabitants of one shall go to another, saying-* "The inhabitants of one" is LXX "five cities", perhaps alluding to the five cities which were the capitals of Persia and which therefore became a figure of speech for Persia. Likewise the five cities (the Pentapolis) of the Philistines may also be in view. The peoples of their captivity could have turned to the wonderful God of the Jews; but this didn't happen.

'Let us go speedily to entreat the favour of Yahweh, and to seek Yahweh of Armies. I will go also' - "Speedily" is also rendered 'continually'. This is the picture of the closing vision in Zech. 14; Gentiles coming up at regular intervals to keep the feasts. But we see here how the word of the Gospel spreads; it is by the invitation of those seeking God artlessly passed on to others. We see here a powerful picture of effective evangelism. Those who ask others to go the journey to Zion must themselves lead by example: "I will go also".

Zechariah 8:22 *Yes, many peoples and strong nations will come to seek Yahweh of Armies in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of Yahweh-* Perhaps Nehemiah was some kind of potential Messiah- for the surrounding Gentiles 'came up' to him and shared in the luxurious temple meals (a common Kingdom prophecy- the same Hebrew words are used for the Gentiles 'coming up' to the temple in Is. 60:5,11; Jer. 16:19; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Those meals could have been the Messianic banquets. See on Mal. 1:10.

Zechariah 8:23 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: In those days, ten men will take hold-*

It has been estimated that about 20,000 Jews were taken to Babylon. But the population of Babylon was 200,000, indeed it is noted as the first city to pass 200,000 population. This would mean that the population of Babylon was ten percent Jewish. The ideal was that Babylon would turn to Judah's God, 'taking hold of the skirt' in covenant relationship.

Out of all the languages of the nations- Initially the reference would have been to the 127 languages of the Persian empire. They would beg for acceptance by the minority nation amongst them, the Jews.

They will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you' - See on Ez. 16:63. It was God's intention that ten men (a reference to Israelites of the ten tribes?) would take hold of the skirts of a Jew (i.e. one of Judah) and come with him to worship in the new temple. The idea was that those Jews still in Babylon and Persia would return, and there would be many Gentiles who would come with them. But in fact the opposite happened. So few wanted to live in Jerusalem, that the rulers had to cast lots to force one in ten Jews to go and live in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1). Most of the captives chose to stay where they were, in captivity, assimilated into the culture and ways of the world around them. And the ten tribes didn't really unite with Judah, but went off and got lost in the Gentile world.

"A Jew" is literally 'a Yehudite'- a specific term for a resident of the Persian province of Judah. They could have had the peoples of all the nations in the Persian empire grabbing hold of their skirt. Yehud could have risen up to be the head of all

the nations in the land promised to Abraham, i.e. the Persian empire. These were the very real possibilities.

"God is with you" refers to how the visible presence of Yahweh would have been seen in Zion, when Yahweh Shammah, "the Lord is there". This should have been the effect of the Gentiles witnessing a mass return of Jews and the reestablishment of God's Kingdom at that time. But that didn't happen, and so the words are alluded in 1 Cor. 14:25 of how Gentiles who behold the functional Christian church would say that "God is with you".

The LXX hints that even this prophecy is conditional, upon the Gentiles actually wanting to join the Jews in Yahweh worship: "In those days my word shall be fulfilled if ten men of all the languages of the nations should take hold—even take hold of the hem of a Jew...".

We see a number of different potential movements within God's purpose. Jeremiah and Ezekiel had offered the captives a return from exile, a new covenant and a restored Kingdom, with a new temple and a Messianic "Prince" and conditions of great blessing in the land, with the Gentiles becoming proselytes. But this was conditional upon their repentance. They didn't repent and only a relatively few returned from exile. They didn't build the temple as commanded by Ezekiel and sought to return to the [now broken] old covenant. They didn't repent and were only interested in their own properties and material betterment. Haggai and Zechariah appealed for repentance, but it was only done on a surface level. Through Zechariah, God offered them a new version of things- a priest [Joshua] and a king [Zerubbabel], and offers to cleanse the Levitical priesthood. And offered the blessings of the old covenant in return for obedience to the old covenant. Jeremiah's prophecies of the new covenant are alluded to in Zechariah 1-8 and parts of them are mixed in with the new deal God was offering a people who still wanted the old covenant, for reasons of preserving tradition. But even that wasn't acceptable to them. God condemns them as "unclean" (Haggai) and unacceptable (Malachi). After Zechariah 8, Zechariah refocuses the possible futures upon the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. Yet Mal. 1: 11 is clear that God enjoyed fellowship and worship from a faithful remnant of exiles still in captivity, quite without a temple and sanctuary. And quite possibly without a Levitical priesthood. Zech. 8:20-23 and other restoration prophecies speak of a pilgrimage of nations to worship at the restored temple in Jerusalem. But Malachi sees the possibility of individual Jews [initially] acceptably worshipping God from a distance. And this merges with the wider vision of individual Gentiles worldwide glorifying Him, without the temple and restored Kingdom in the specific form envisaged by the restoration prophets. In all this we see God's earnest desire to somehow work with men, on whatever level.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 9

Zechariah Chapter 9

Zechariah 9:1 *An oracle. The word of Yahweh is against the land of Hadrach-* Hadrach is another name for the area around Damascus. It may be mentioned because here Alexander the Great of Greece won his victory which opened the way for him to then pursue his campaign against Syria and the areas around Israel, which the next verses describe. Or the reference could be to the Syrian god Chadrak; the oracle was specifically against the god of Damascus.

And will rest upon Damascus; for the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel is toward Yahweh- This continues the theme of Zech. 8, that in the Messianic Kingdom there would be a joining together of the Gentiles with the Jews in turning to God. This time would also be of unity between the ten tribes and the two tribes- *all* the tribes of Israel would together turn toward Yahweh. Our common repentance and relationship with God is what is in practice the basis of fellowship between God's people; it is based upon spiritual experience rather than common theology. But this time of turning to Yahweh would only come about after terrible judgments upon the nations around Judah. These would elicit repentance of a remnant, as the following prophecy makes clear. In the first instance, the reference is to the campaign of Alexander the Great against the neighbours of Judah; this could have led to the coming of a Messiah figure and the reestablishment of the Kingdom. But this possibility also didn't work out, and so these events will have their major fulfilment in the last days and the time of the Lord's return.

Zechariah 9:2 And Hamath, also, which borders on it- The idea is that Hamath would share the same judgment as Damascus, perhaps at the same time or at the same hands. This happened during the campaign of Alexander the Great.

Tyre and Sidon, because they are very wise- This continues the great prophetic theme; that all human strength and wisdom is as nothing before God's judgment.

Zechariah 9:3 Tyre built herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver like the dust, and fine gold like the mire of the streets- All human strength was and is to crumble before God's judgment. Isaiah and Ezekiel had prophesied against mainland Tyre, and their words had been fulfilled by the Babylonians. But they then built their island stronghold, as if to ensure future Divine prophecies against them would not be fulfilled.

Zechariah 9:4 Behold, the Lord will dispossess her, and He will strike her power in the sea; and she will be devoured with fire- Initially seen in the destruction of Tyre's island citadel by Alexander the Great building a mole into the sea to reach it. "Dispossess" is literally 'to send into exile', and there are records of 13,000 people from the conquered Tyre being sent away into slavery.

Zechariah 9:5 Ashkelon will see it, and fear; Gaza also, and will writhe in agony; as will Ekron, for her expectation will be disappointed- LXX "for she is ashamed at her trespass". The idea is that the Divine judgments would elicit repentance in a minority, just as was intended to happen with Judah. Or if we read as the Masoretic text, the idea would be that Ekron as the most northerly city in the route of Alexander's advance had hoped that Tyre or Egypt would come to the support of the Philistines; but they were disappointed. All trust in human strength can lead only to disappointment.

And the king will perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon will not be inhabited- The order of mention of the cities in this section follows the route of Alexander's campaign. I suggested on Dan. 2 that there were various potential fulfilments of the sequence of metals in the image, culminating in the reestablishment of the Kingdom of God in Israel. The perishing of the king of Gaza at the hands of Alexander is

recorded by Herodotus: "Batis the satrap, or petty "king," was bound to a chariot by thongs thrust through the soles of his feet, and dragged round the city".

Zechariah 9:6 Foreigners will dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines- Neh. 4:7; 13:24 stress that Ashdod was a particular opponent of the restoration. But they too would be cut off. Perhaps the "foreigners" in view were those whom the people of Ashdod considered foreigners, i.e. the Jews. And again we note the continued, repeated prophetic criticism of pride. This was and is the fundamental reason for Divine judgment. In :10 we read of the 'cutting off' (s.w.) of the military strength of Zion's enemies; perhaps the pride of the Philistines refers specifically to that about which they prided themselves, namely their military technology. And we can see clear similarities in the latter day fulfilment of these verses, in the judgments to come upon the latter day Philistines- the Palestinians.

Zechariah 9:7 I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth- This implies that the previously mentioned nations are as a beast with Judah in their mouth, whom they are treating abominably. This is the same figure as Am. 3:12 describing a shepherd taking out the remnants of Judah from the mouth of the beast which had devoured them. Such an arrest of their behaviour never happened, let alone resulting in a remnant of them repenting and joining with Israel as spoken of in the rest of this verse. Yet it will come true, in the last days. It is this which means that Zechariah 9 is clearly a prophecy of the return of Christ to earth and the establishment of His Kingdom (see Zech. 9:1,9-11 especially). But this worldwide Kingdom will be established after judgments are executed upon Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, Ekron, Ashdod and Gaza- a collection of peoples likened to a beast with a mouth and teeth which have enclosed Israel. These areas are geographically exactly where the jihadists envisage the 'greater Syria' as being. They surround present day Israel, from the Gaza Strip to Lebanon. And they are likened to some latter day beast descending upon Israel, which must be destroyed before God's Kingdom can be established. This encourages us to see the beast of Daniel and Revelation as referring in its final form to Israel's Islamist neighbours who now surround her. Is. 9:12 uses 'beast' imagery when it speaks of the Syrians and Philistines [same word as 'Palestinians'] as being the mouth of a huge beast, closing around Israel: "The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth". This image of an Arab beast devouring Israel is repeated in Joel 1:6 concerning the later Assyrian invader.

And he also will be a remnant for our God; and he will be as a chieftain in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite- Just as remnant of Judah will be for "our God", so a remnant of the aggressive nations around Judah would likewise serve the same God ["our God"]. They would become equal to the Jews, even becoming chiefs in Judah, and the remnant of Ekron's inhabitants would be as the Jews who lived in Jerusalem itself. It is called "Jebus" here, its Palestinian name, to demonstrate the degree of unity between the Jewish remnant and the repentant remnant of the surrounding nations. This could have happened at the time of the restoration, but neither remnant repented. This is therefore yet to come, and will bring about the situation of Is. 19:24, when in the Kingdom, natural Israel and the surrounding nations will have equal share. This message was unattractive to the returned exiles, who wanted an exclusively Jewish kingdom.

Zechariah 9:8 I will encamp around My house against the army, so that none pass through or return; and no oppressor will pass through them any more- The potential fulfilment was that Alexander could have come to Jerusalem, encamp against it, and be destroyed by the appearance of a Messianic figure in Zion (:9). But this also didn't happen, and so the prophecy will have a rescheduled fulfilment in the last days. "I will encamp about mine house because of the army of him that passeth by [the latter-day Sennacherib], and because of him that returneth... the Lord of Hosts (Angels) shall defend them" (Zech. 9:8,15) is all the language of Jacob under threat from Esau, being Angelically camped around. This is the basis for the latter day situation in Jerusalem. It has been noted that Alexander averted his plans to attack Jerusalem and instead bypassed Judah in his enthusiasm to get to Egypt and conquer it. This was of God, but reflected how the scenario envisaged here was not then to happen, although in essence it will do so in the last day. "Oppressor" is the word used about the Egyptians oppressing Israel in Egypt (Ex. 3:7; 5:6,10). Alexander didn't do this to Judah. The idea is that an oppressor would come into Judah and oppress them, but Yahweh would defend Jerusalem- exactly as happened when the Assyrians invaded Judah at the time of Hezekiah. This didn't really happen under Alexander, although it was potentially possible. But it will happen in the last days.

For now I have seen with My eyes- The allusion may be to how God also 'saw' His people in Egypt, and saved them (Ex. 2:25; 3:7). The problem was that they did not lift their eyes to their maker, and His gaze and theirs didn't meet.

Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem!- This is the potential "shout" of Is. 44:23-28: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: *shout* [s.w.], ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.... that frustrateth the tokens of the liars [s.w. Nehemiah 4:15 re. God frustrating the Samaritan opposition]... That confirmeth the word of his servant [Cyrus], and *performeth the counsel* of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built".

Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; humble, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey- This is another prophecy of Zerubbabel or Joshua which had to have its real fulfilment deferred until the coming of Jesus. This King could have brought salvation- the salvation prophesied as coming at the restoration (Zech. 8:7) when Yahweh [as represented by His appointed king] came to Zion (Zech. 8:3). See on Jer. 23:5. Did Zerubbabel / Joshua like Nehemiah enter Jerusalem on a donkey? Or were they intended to but didn't? "His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth" (:10) means that full inheritance of the territory promised to Abraham could have been possible at the restoration, had Joshua or Zerubbabel become their king. The phrase contrasts with the repeated reminder that the Persians had dominion "on this side the river" (Ezra 4:10,11,16; 5:3,6; 6:13; 8:36; Neh. 3:7). The coming King (and Joshua was prophesied as a king) was to free Judah from Persia's dominion, and establish God's Kingdom on its territory, with boys and girls playing in the streets of Jerusalem (Zech. 8:5). "From sea even to sea" is a conscious quote of the famous Messianic prophecy of Ps. 72:8. This was David's prayer for Solomon; that he should have been the Messiah, and his Kingdom should have been Messiah's. 1 Chron. 28:6,7 definitely seems to imply that Solomon could have lived for ever had he been obedient: "I will establish his kingdom for ever, *if* he be constant to do my commandments". But as everyone knew, Solomon had failed, what was potentially

possible hadn't come true, due to his apostasy. Now, again, it *could* come true through the work of Joshua and Zerubbabel, and the priesthood and people being obedient to the temple prophecies of Ezekiel. If they wanted the Kingdom to come, then they had to live the Kingdom life.

There is an intended juxtaposition here: "Your King comes... lowly, and riding on a donkey". Kings were supposed to enter upon a charger, not upon a donkey, let alone upon a foal who had not been broken in, bucking and starting in every direction rather than sedately bearing the glorious king. This was and is the great paradox- a humble king. Likewise in the New Testament, the Spirit chose 'shepherd' as an image of ecclesial leadership, when the surrounding Rabbis despised shepherds as dishonest. It's just the same as the Lord Jesus describing Himself as the humble King- a very contradiction in the terms of the contemporary culture.

Zechariah 9:10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow will be cut off; and he will speak peace to the nations: and his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth- The Greek invasion is seen as focusing upon the territory of Israel and Jerusalem particularly. A united Ephraim [the ten tribes] and Judah, freshly returned from captivity and to God, would overcome these invaders with God's help, and take over the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham for the new Messianic King; with a message of peace with God to those nations.

Zechariah 9:11 As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I have set free your prisoners from the pit in which is no water- The prisoners in the pit in the first instance were Judah in captivity, represented by Jeremiah who was cast into such a pit (Is. 51:14; 61:1; Jer. 37:16). Jeremiah had foreseen that a new covenant would be made with the returning exiles when they were freed from the pit of Babylonian captivity. It is this covenant which is in view here, and it is associated with blood, just as the Abrahamic covenant had been [through the blood of circumcision] and the old, Mosaic covenant, which was inaugurated through the sprinkling of blood. Quite how this would have worked out at the time of the restoration is unclear; perhaps the "blood" referred to that shed in the Babylonian invasion of Judah. But the wording is as it is because most of the exiles preferred to remain in the pit of Babylon, and those who did return repeatedly broke the covenant by their behaviour. The final fulfilment would be in the blood of the Lord Jesus, mediator of the new covenant, releasing God's people from the pit of sin and death.

Zechariah 9:12 Turn to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope!- The exiles are presented as prisoners, whereas in fact they enjoyed a degree of freedom, as the book of Esther reveals. So the imprisonment was spiritual, just as the exiles were urged to flee spiritual death in Babylon. They were imprisoned in the hope of deliverance at the restoration, and yet this "hope of Israel" was rejected by them, in preference for life in Babylon. They were asked to turn or return to the stronghold of Zion. They had been released from prison (:11); but they needed to actually leave. And they for the most part chose to remain in their cells.

Even today I declare that I will restore double to you- "Even today", when the exiles were still so weak and sinful. "Restore" is the same original word as "Turn" at the start of the verse. Their returning literally and spiritually to God and the things of the Kingdom would result in God's returning "double" to them. And so it is today; any move we make toward God is compensated double by His movement toward us.

Zechariah 9:13 For indeed I bend Judah as a bow for Myself. I have filled the bow with Ephraim; and I will stir up your sons, Zion- "Stir up" is s.w. Ezra 1:5 about Judah's spirit being 'stirred up' to return. But most of them preferred to remain in exile. And so this prophecy of Judah and Ephraim being reunited at the restoration and used by God to achieve military victory against their enemies... simply never happened.

Against your sons, Greece, and will make you like the sword of a mighty man- The envisaged scenario was that the Greek invasion of the Middle East would come against Jerusalem, and be defeated by a united Judah and Israel; who would then dominate the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. This had also been envisaged in Daniel. The little horn of Daniel 7 grows out of the fourth kingdom, represented by the fourth beast. But in Daniel 8, a very similar horn grows out of Greece, the third kingdom. We can therefore conclude that the antichrist figure of Daniel 8 would have appeared as an outgrowth of the Greek kingdom, and been destroyed by Messiah's coming. But this didn't happen, and Antiochus Epiphanes became but an incipient fulfilment of the antichrist of the last days. Zechariah, like Daniel, contains many conditional prophecies- "And this shall come to pass, *if* you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Zech. 6:15). Zech. 9:13 appears to be another such conditional prophecy, similar in reference to that of Daniel 8 about the possibility of Messiah's coming at the time of the Greek empire. God says He will place Ephraim within the bow of Judah, to be fired at her enemies; and He would "raise up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece" (Zech. 9:13), leading to the final salvation of God's people, the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom, and her Messianic king coming unto her (Zech. 9:9). But this didn't come true; the resistance of the Maccabees was not based on true spirituality, and the Romans took over control of the land from the Greeks. No Messianic Kingdom was established. This would explain the purposeful ambiguity of interpretation which there is in the image of Daniel 2; a good case can be made for the sequence Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece, and yet also for the sequence Babylon-Media Persia- Greece-Rome. Daniel 8 predicts the breakup of the Greek empire after Alexander's death into four horns, out of which a little horn arises (Dan. 8:8). The only other prophetic reference to four horns is again in Zechariah, when we read of how the four horns who had scattered God's people were to be cut off by the carpenters (Zech. 1:18,19). The carpenters surely look forward to the carpenter Messiah. He could have appeared and cut off those four horns; but He did not, and so another prophetic sequence was allowed, in which another [fourth] beast arose, this time with ten horns, not just four. And in Revelation we find this developed further, in that seven heads also appear on the beast, and a whore rides the best, sitting upon [another?] seven hills / kingdoms. The number and ferocity of the enemies of God's people seems to increase over time. If Israel had repented earlier, then all this would have been unnecessary. The three horses of Zechariah 1 thus become four horses in Zechariah 6. The fact the four cherubim chariots are sent out in judgment of those same coloured horses speaks of how all earthly entities have their representative Angels in Heaven. See on Zech. 1:12.

Zechariah 9:14 Yahweh will be seen over them; and His arrow will go flashing like lightning; and the Lord Yahweh will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south- "The Lord shall be over them"- as the Angels went over David beyond the mulberry trees (2 Sam. 5:24) and as the Angel in the cloud was over Israel in the wilderness. "His arrow shall go forth as lightning"- Angel cherubim language. He

"shall go with whirlwinds of the South"- the group of Angels sent into "the south" (i.e. Judah) in Zech. 6:6. If Judah returned, both physically and spiritually, then they would be walking in step with the Spirit in that they would be in harmony with the Angel cherubim who were also returning to Zion, having left in Ez. 1 and returning when the glory would have returned to the rebuilt Zion in Ez. 40-48. Thus in the next verse Zechariah attributes Israel's final success as thanks to "the Lord of hosts"- the hosts of Angels working with them and for them. See on Zech. 10:1. But they didn't rebuild according to those specifications, many didn't return physically, and only a very few returned to God in repentance. And so it didn't happen; and the trumpet blowing, perhaps alluding to the announcing of the year of release and day of atonement, never happened.

Zechariah 9:15 Yahweh of Armies will defend them- In the restoration context, this would be a reference to the Angel cherubim working with the returned exiles, defending them from the Greek invasion; see on :14.

And they will destroy and overcome with sling stones- The reference is clearly to David's victory over Goliath and the Philistines, who have been mentioned earlier in this chapter. The idea is that there would be a revival of how things were in David's time when Israel were God's kingdom in the past. See on Zech. 10:5. But instead of subduing the nations around them with the victory of Israel's God, they brought their own brethren into subjection unto them, that they might gain out of them (Zech. 9:15 s.w. Neh. 5:5). It could've been the Kingdom, Israel could have become the joy of the whole earth and her people a joy. But instead, they were obsessed with their petty, miserable little kingdoms, and the next few centuries had nothing of the joy which Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied as being possible for them.

And they will drink, and roar as through wine; and they will be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar- The drinking of wine in the context of the altar bowls suggests the drink offering. But they would be as bowls, filled by God- a reference to the filling with His Spirit which was promised at the restoration and entering of the new covenant. But the GNB and LXX offer to the effect that: "They will shout in battle like drunk men and will shed the blood of their enemies; it will flow like the blood of a sacrifice poured on the altar from a bowl". This mass military victory over their enemies never really happened at the restoration, but it will at the Lord's return. This will be the sacrifice in Bozrah of Is. 34:6; 63:1.

Zechariah 9:16 Yahweh their God will save them in that day as the flock of His people- This salvation could have happened at the time of the restoration; but the flock were not obedient to the call to return to Zion and spiritually to their shepherd. And they were misled by false shepherds from amongst themselves (Zech. 10:2). We noted on :14 that the Angels were potentially a big part of the restoration. The Angel leading the exiles is elsewhere styled a shepherd (Is. 63:9-11; Ps. 80:1). "The lord of Hosts (Angels) has visited His flock the house of Judah" (Zech. 10:3). Similarly, Israel "went their way as a flock, they were troubled because there was no shepherd" (Zech. 10:2)- i.e. the Angel was not with them because they refused to follow Him.

For they are like the jewels of a crown, lifted on high over His land- As explained on Zech. 6:11, Joshua could have been crowned as priest and Messianic king, but the jewels of the crown were God's people. Malachi speaks of them likewise, but accepts

that the day was yet future when they would be made up together into a crown (Mal. 3:17).

Zechariah 9:17 For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!- The beauty may refer to the potential beauty of Israel as jewels (:16), made so by the grace / goodness of their God.

Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins- Grain and new wine were the blessings for an Israel who remained in covenant relationship with their God. This could have happened at the restoration, for Ez. 36:29 had spoken of how at that time "I will also save you from all your uncleanness: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you". But instead, as Hag. 1 notes, they were beset by famine and crops ruined by plague.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 10

Zechariah Chapter 10

Zechariah 10:1 Ask of Yahweh rain in the time of the spring rains; Yahweh will make storm clouds, He will give rain showers to everyone for the plants in the field- I explained on Zech. 9:14 that the Angels had potentially prepared a way for Judah to return and prosper into a restored kingdom of God, just as the Spirit now fulfils that function for those who wish to be God's people today. Had Judah moved in step with this, they would have become part of the cherubim system. The cherubim reference is continued here. Yahweh would again "make bright clouds" (AV) for Israel, reminiscent of Ezekiel's cherubim. Finally, the Lord *shall* go before them, as He had wanted to in Ezekiel's time, and even the feeble amongst Israel "shall be as the angel of the Lord [who goes] before them" (Zech. 12:8). They would become as the Angel in the same way as Ezekiel became part of the cherubim system, following eagerly where the Angel-cherubim lead. All this huge potential, to move forward with the Angel cherubim above them, was theirs for the asking- "Ask [this] of Yahweh...". The drought which was crippling the exiles at this time (see on Hag. 1), would be replaced by showers.

Zechariah 10:2 For the teraphim have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie; and they have told false dreams. They comfort in vain- Here is evidence enough that the Jews returned from exile with teraphim and false prophets; perhaps the term "teraphim" is used to recall how the historical Jacob had also returned from his exile with teraphim (Gen. 31:32).

Therefore they go their way like sheep. They are oppressed, because there is no shepherd- As noted on Zech. 9:16, God was eager to shepherd His people; but they preferred false shepherds (:3), and chose not to walk in step with the Angel cherubim who were to shepherd the people (see on Zech. 9:16). This was exactly why they had gone into captivity (Ez. 34:8), and they were behaving the same at their return. The situation would only finally be resolved by a new shepherd arising in the Lord Jesus, and the final homecoming will be at His return.

Zechariah 10:3 My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the male goats; because Yahweh of Armies has visited His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His majestic horse in the battle- God was angry with the false shepherds who claimed that now was not the time to rebuild the temple (see on Hag.

1:2); because it was the time, and the Angel hosts / armies of Yahweh had potentially enabled the way for them to return, and to be ridden by Him as a horse in victory against all their enemies. Those false shepherds acted as male goats, who were used to direct the sheep in the absence of a human shepherd. Zechariah and Malachi repeatedly criticize the shepherd-priests of Judah for not leading the people as they should have done, and thereby enabled the restoration as potentially envisaged. Because Yahweh had visited His people and (potentially) made them capable of establishing His Kingdom, *therefore* the priests were at fault for not enabling Judah's spiritual revival. See on Zech. 13:7-9.

Zechariah 10:4 *From Him will come forth the cornerstone, from Him the nail, from Him the battle bow, from Him every ruler together-* The cornerstone of the new temple had been laid, but a far more glorious structure was possible, in line with that in Ez. 40-48. God would have raised up a new leadership, as explained on Zech. 6:14. "The nail", like the cornerstone, was the language of Messiah (Is. 22:23; Mt. 21:42). Under this leadership, a repentant Israel and Judah would have vanquished all opposition and established a restored Kingdom of God in the territory of the *eretz*. But they didn't, and yet the prophecies will come true when they do repent in the last days.

Zechariah 10:5 *They shall be as mighty men, treading down muddy streets in the battle; and they shall fight, because Yahweh is with them; and the riders on horses will be confounded-* The reference to trampling as mud is the language of 2 Sam. 22:43 about David, who has already been alluded to in Zech. 9:15; this would be a restoration of the Davidic kingdom. See on Gen. 49:17. As noted on :1 and Zech. 9:14, repentant Judah could have merged into the Angel-cherubim system; they could have been 'mighty ones', *elohim*, just as the Angels. Horse riders would be confounded because the restored Judah were as a horse ridden by Angels, and Yahweh Himself (:3). "Yahweh is with them" may be a hint that "God with us" in the person of Messiah was with them; and all this has its major fulfilment at the Lord's second coming. There is the implication that the returned exiles could have won great military victories; but instead they feared to challenge the local powers.

Zechariah 10:6 *I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back-* Again we see the Divine intention to reunite both Judah and the ten tribe kingdom in their restoration; but this didn't happen because the majority preferred to remain in the lands of their exile. Ez. 37:16 had clearly spoken of such unity at the restoration: "Judah... the children of Israel... Joseph, the stick of Ephraim... all the house of Israel". They didn't return despite God's desire to strengthen them and bring them back. And Judah was not strengthened or 'made to prevail' above their brethren (same Hebrew in 1 Chron. 5:2), even though this was the Divine intention. See on :12.

For I have mercy on them; and they will be as though I had not cast them off- This mercy was dependent upon their asking for it in repentance; but they didn't. And so it must have its fulfilment in a latter day scenario. Paul's positive approach to Israel's conversion is reflected in his whole reasoning in Romans 11, his classic statement about preaching to Israel. He begins by saying that God has not cast off His people Israel totally, because some, e.g. himself, have turned to Christ. So, seeing that God will not cast off His people Israel in the ultimate sense, it perhaps follows that in every generation some of them will come to Christ as Paul did (Rom. 11:1,2). In some sense, God has cast off His people (2 Kings 21:14 RV; Zech. 10:6); and yet, because a minority of them will always accept Christ, it is not true that God has cast off His people in a total sense (Rom. 11:1 RV). It was only because of this remnant that Israel

have not become like Sodom (Rom. 9:29)- even though Old Testament passages such as Ezekiel 16 clearly liken Jerusalem to Sodom. Yet they are not as Sodom ultimately, for the sake of the remnant who will believe.

For I am Yahweh their God, and I will hear them- As noted on :1, if they had asked for the restoration to come about and done their part, it would've done.

Zechariah 10:7 Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will rejoice as through wine; yes, their children will see it, and rejoice. Their heart will be glad in Yahweh- Ephraim, the ten tribes, were not regathered because they didn't want to be. I noted on :5 that it would've been possible for the exiles to be the earthly function of the Angel cherubim of the heavens. Ephraim would be "mighty ones", *elohim*. They would receive the blessing of wine, the sign of covenant blessing, and the next generation, "their children", would experience the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. All this was possible but tragically was precluded by a lack of repentance and short term outlook which wanted to remain in the old and familiar. "Mighty man" is literally *gibbor*, the term used of Messiah in Is. 9:6. Finally these prophecies will come true when a repentant Israel identify with ["be like"] the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming.

Zechariah 10:8 I will signal for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them- "I will hiss for them" (AV) is the same phrase used in Is. 5:26 of the latter day regathering of Judah. But even at the time of the restoration it could have been fulfilled; God had hissed for them, urging them to return, because He had already potentially redeemed them. They were to quit Babylon to accept that redemption. And like many today, most of them just didn't want to do that. The short term attractions were too great for them. The regathering of Israel is therefore related to their redemption. The fact so many have now been regathered to the land is surely an indication that their redemption draws nigh; and should we not therefore tell them of the Gospel which they must accept as part of that redemption?

And they will increase as they have increased- The promise to Abraham of the seed multiplying would come true; for those promises are the basis of the new covenant, the new deal offered to repentant Israel and Judah.

Zechariah 10:9 I will sow them among the peoples; and they will remember Me in far countries; and they will live with their children, and will return- The context is of the return from captivity, so perhaps the reading of the GNB is correct: "Though I have scattered them among the nations, yet in far-off places they will remember me. They and their children will survive and return home together". We note the repeated mention of the children (:7 too). Likely the reason given for remaining in captivity was that it was better for the children to remain, rather than drag them on a long, uncertain journey to a strange land and live amongst the ruins. But their children would be blessed if they did return in penitence, with the experience of growing up in God's restored Kingdom. The exile was a 'sowing'; the fruit intended to rise up was a generation of penitent young people who would seek to return to their ancestral homeland. But instead, that generation bitterly blamed God for punishing them for their fathers' sins (Ez. 18). "Remember me" is better 'make mention of me'. The idea was that they would openly witness to the surrounding nations about the Hope of Israel, and even bring those Gentiles with them to Zion.

Zechariah 10:10 I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather

them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and there won't be room enough for them- In the first instance, the Jews in Egypt were those who had gone there in Jeremiah's time, disbelieving the promise that they would be safer remaining in the ruins of Judah. Those once spiritually weak ones, along with the ten tribes in Assyria, would return in great numbers, and live in the now fertile land of Gilead and Lebanon, back in the northern Kingdom. The potential for this had been set up by the chariots of Angels in the vision of Zech. 6:6. But they didn't- at that time. The potential prepared by the Angels wasn't actualized by them. Such a restoration will be realized, but in the last days. That generation resisted God's 'bringing them again' and 'gathering' of them, just as the invitation to participate in the Hope of Israel and the restored Kingdom of God is resisted by those who hear it today. "Bring them again" translates the usual Hebrew word for "return". God would return them; but they had to return. If they took that step in faith, just as today, then God would make it happen. They would be "gathered... with a mighty hand and [God's] stretched out arm" (Ez. 20:34 s.w.). But they refused that might hand which would have brought them safely through their physical and spiritual journey.

Zechariah 10:11 He will pass through the sea of affliction, and will strike the waves in the sea, and all the depths of the Nile will dry up; and the pride of Assyria will be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt will depart- If the Jewish exiles in Egypt and the ten tribes in Assyria had wanted to return, then as noted on :10, God's mighty hand would have even dried up the Nile, taken away the power of the Egyptians and brought down Assyria- just so that they could return. God will work powerfully in the geopolitics of the world for the sake of just a minority with whom He has a purpose. In my days I saw God open up then Communist Eastern Europe, allow the internet to be developed- for the sake of getting the Gospel to millions He sought to call out and save.

Zechariah 10:12 I will strengthen them in Yahweh; and they will walk up and down in His name, says Yahweh- see on Zech. 12:5,8; Ez. 16:63. As in :6, the strengthening in view is not simply prevailing above others in military terms; they would be spiritually strengthened. The new covenant offered to the exiles involved being given a new heart (Ez. 36:26), and that strengthening of the Spirit is still a part of the same new covenant we accept today in baptism. To some degree a repentant natural Israel will take over the role of the Angels as God's eyes walking up and down and to and fro in the earth (land?). This follows from Zechariah earlier describing the Angels as walking to and fro in the earth (Zech. 1:10;6:7). As noted on :1 and Zech. 9:14, repentant Judah on earth could have become part of the glorious system of the Angel cherubim above them. But this is to be fulfilled in their latter day repentance, when in visible, literal terms the glory returns to Zion eternally.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 11

Zechariah Chapter 11

Zechariah 11:1 Open your doors, Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars- The tone of Zechariah changes as the prophecy progresses. All the wonderful potentials were not being used by the exiles, and so judgment and rejection was to come. The returned exiles from Assyria could have lived in Lebanon, as stated just a few verses earlier in Zech. 10:10. But God in this chapter is now as it were breaking

up all those potentials. The cedars of Lebanon were to be devoured by fire. Finally this came true in the sense that the cedars which characterized the temple were destroyed by fire in AD70.

Zechariah 11:2 Wail, fir tree, for the cedar has fallen, because the stately ones are destroyed. Wail, you oaks of Bashan, for the strong forest has come down- As noted on :1, the potential just stated in Zech. 10:10 was not now going to come about. The exiles didn't want to return, and so they would not live in Bashan; rather, the oaks and forests there would be burnt. This initially applies to the breaking of all the potentials in Zechariah's time, but the prophecy came to a fulfilment in the destruction of the northern areas of Palestine in the Roman advance of AD70, and will likely have another fulfilment in the last days. The relevance to the first century becomes more apparent later in the chapter. The "stately ones" uses the same word for the "nobles" in Judah at the time of the restoration (Neh. 3:5; 10:29). They could have become the leaders of the restored kingdom of God in Israel at Zechariah's time; but that potential was rejected by them, and now broken by God.

Zechariah 11:3 A voice of the wailing of the shepherds! For their glory is destroyed: a voice of the roaring of young lions! For the pride of the Jordan is ruined- The wailing of shepherds and the roaring of lions create the idea that the invaders [lions] came as a result of the failure of the shepherds. This was why Judah had gone into captivity (Ez. 34), and sadly they didn't reform and so their final destruction in AD70 was a result of their bad shepherds. "The wailing of the shepherds" occurred when Babylon took Jerusalem (same phrase in Jer. 25:36). The Jordan was the famed habitat of young lions; the idea is that the destruction of their habitat made them roam.

Zechariah 11:4 Thus says Yahweh my God: Feed the flock of slaughter- Zechariah was asked to act out a parable of a shepherd. God had decided to slaughter the flock, and they were to be prepared for that by their own shepherds. The slaughter of the post-exilic community didn't come until AD70; this again was a reflection of God's huge patience.

Zechariah 11:5 Their buyers slaughter them, and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, 'Blessed be Yahweh, for I am rich;' and their own shepherds don't pity them- The buyers and sellers of the flock are presented as worshippers of Yahweh. The slaughter of the flock was to be in the first century when the covenant was finally broken; but the abuses of the Jews against each other was effectively a slaughtering of the flock for their own enrichment. Nehemiah records how the rich enslaved the poor during the famine. And they "repent not" (LXX; NEV "Go unpunished"). There was not the required repentance of the exiles, but rather a simplistic desire for personal wealth out of the situation in Judah (see on Hag. 1).

Zechariah 11:6 For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, says Yahweh- God had often stated in Ezekiel that He would not pity Judah. But at the restoration, He did pity them, by absolute grace (Ez. 36:21 s.w.). But this pity is now as it were withdrawn; they were to be destroyed, and only God's true remnant would find His pity (Mal. 3:17 s.w.).

But, behold, I will deliver the men, every one of them, into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king. They will strike the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them- Earlier in Zechariah, God had enthusiastically explained that

Zerubbabel and then Joshua could have been the Messianic king of the restored kingdom. But both those men and their people didn't want that, and returned to remain under the kingship of the Gentiles. And so Judah was to be destroyed by each other, and also by the one they had chosen king. When they crucified the Lord, they stated that Caesar was their only king (Jn. 19:15), and he was the one who was to destroy them in AD70.

Zechariah 11:7 So I fed the flock of slaughter, especially the oppressed of the flock- LXX "And I will tend the flock of slaughter in the land of Chanaan". The returned exiles would grow into the 'Judea' of the first century. But they were to be led by their shepherds, whose role Zechariah played, towards their final slaughter in AD70. Or consider the GNB: "Those who bought and sold the sheep hired me, and I became the shepherd of the sheep that were going to be butchered".

I took for myself two staves. The one I called Grace, and the other I called Union, and I fed the flock- Grace is to be the basis for unity between God's people. The covenant relationship experienced with God naturally binds us in union with others in that same covenant. Unity with God and with our brother is therefore connected. It could be deduced that division between brethren is therefore a reflection of how some have not grasped the wonder of personal, covenant relationship with God through His grace. All interpersonal issues take on a completely different colour in the face of God's grace. And is this which is the staff or rod which will guide the flock rightly. But those staves were to be broken; without an awareness of Divine grace and unity between brethren, God's people are really without any shepherding. It had been God's intention to reunite Israel and Judah at the restoration, on the basis of the fact that both would accept His grace as offered in the new covenant.

Zechariah 11:8 I cut off the three shepherds in one month; for my soul was weary of them, and their soul also loathed me- GNB "I lost patience with three other shepherds, who hated me". God had patiently waited for Judah to respond, there had been several potential Messianic shepherd figures (Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah), and yet His patience had limits.

Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah returned from Babylon and were intended to be leaders who would crown Joshua / Jesus as the Messiah-Priest-Branch who would rebuild Jerusalem. See on Zech. 6:10,14. But nothing is heard of them further. Perhaps it is to them that this refers. They had gone into captivity because of poor shepherds, and now at their return they again lacked men willing to be their Saviours; and God is saying that He would not do the shepherding job which He had delegated to others. It could be that Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah all died in one month as a result of Zechariah's prophecy at the time of Ezra 5:1.

Zechariah 11:9 Then I said, I will not feed you- GNB "I will not be your shepherd any longer". In this acted parable, Zechariah is reflecting God's feelings. The shepherds were unwilling to manifest God to the people, and the flock / people didn't want His shepherding. They would not 'return' to Him.

That which dies, let it die; and that which is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let those who are left eat each other's flesh- This was finally fulfilled in the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem in AD70. It is the spirit of Rev. 22:11: "He that is unrighteous, let him continue to do unrighteousness, and he that is filthy, let him remain filthy, and he that is righteous, let him continue to do righteousness, and he that is holy, let him remain holy". We get the impression that this calamity was intended for Zechariah's

time, but by grace and God's continual efforts and longsuffering it didn't come about until AD70; and it yet will come true in the last days.

Zechariah 11:10 I took my staff Grace, and cut it apart, 'That I might break My covenant that I had made with all the people' - The breaking of "grace" meant breaking the "bands" of unity between Israel and Judah. The basis for interpersonal unity is response to God's grace, rather than an academic, technical agreement on theology. The basis of the new covenant offered to Israel at the restoration was grace. By that grace, God was willing to accept the unspiritual exiles if they came to Him. But they didn't, they refused covenant relationship with Him. And so having spurned and broken the covenant, He broke it from His side too. God will not break His covenants; but He is here confirming that His people had broken the covenant.

Throughout Zechariah we have seen multiple allusions to the work of the Angels. This was in that time how God revealed Himself to men, and invited them to conceive of Him. We recall the words of the Angel in Jud. 2:1 "And an Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers: and I said, I will never break My covenant with you". The subsequent rebuke of Israel by the Angel makes this passage imply that although the Angel had promised never to break the Covenant, He could and would do so- reflecting the God of Hosea, who has emotion and can change His mind in accordance with the mind of His people. Now, the Angel speaking to Zechariah does break the covenant. There is another Angelic reference in :6: "I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, says the Lord" (cp. Is. 63:9 regarding the wilderness Angel: "in His love and in His pity" He redeemed Israel from Egypt). Although the Angelic covenant was broken, it is to be re-established: "I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant (i.e. you've broken the covenant, I'll do the same). Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with thee... and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant... thou shalt receive thy sisters... and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy (former) covenant. And I will establish My covenant with thee" (Ez. 16:59-62). This covenant was a marriage covenant. "For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God" (Michael the Angel?), Is. 54:6. This is all referring back to the Angel calling Hagar, showing that God's Angel was figuratively 'married' to Israel; thus Judah were invited to understand that it was the Angel representing God who divorced and will take back Israel.

Zechariah 11:11 It was broken in that day; and thus the poor of the flock that listened to me knew that it was the word of Yahweh- LXX "The Chananites, the sheep that are kept for me, shall know that it is the word of the Lord". There was a minority amongst the returned exiles who did respond to Zechariah's teaching; perhaps the Lord alludes here when commenting that "to the poor the Gospel is preached" (Lk. 7:22). There's no doubt that "the poor" in whatever sense, be it poverty of spirit or finances, are those more likely to respond to God's word of the Kingdom. "The poor" perceived that Zechariah's breaking of the staff meant that the covenant was broken; what had been possible for returned Judah now wasn't.

Zechariah 11:12 I said to them, If you think it best, give me my value; and if not, keep it. So they weighed for my wages thirty pieces of silver- In the acted parable, Zechariah asks the sheep merchants what wages they will give him for having kept their flock for slaughter. The implication is that they had now arrived at the time for

slaughter, and he was handing the flock back to them which he had prepared for slaughter. The time of slaughter was in the first century. The Lord Jesus was the shepherd who had tried to save the flock but His very efforts with them, and their rejection of them, made them the generation that had to be slaughtered. In this sense He shepherded the flock to slaughter. Zechariah at this point therefore becomes a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. The way he asks them if they wish to pay him, leaving the choice with them, perhaps again hints at the huge freewill Judah were allowed; they need not have gone ahead with the path that led to the betrayal and murder of their own Messiah.

Zechariah 11:13 Yahweh said to me, Throw it to the potter, the handsome price that I was valued at by them!- This appears to be sarcasm, as if it was a very low price for his work. It was the price of a slave; and all Judas could buy with it was a field of muddy clay soil, not much use for anything. It is incredible that Judas did what he did for so little; but this is the power of avarice, greed, insisting blindly upon our own agenda and jealousy.

I took the thirty pieces of silver, and threw them to the potter, in the house of Yahweh- This clearly looks forward to Judas throwing down the thirty pieces of silver in the temple, and the money being used to purchase the potter's field. It has been suggested that there were earthen, potter's vessels in the temple, and Zechariah threw the coins to a potter who was in the temple at the time, perhaps in connection with the earthen vessels there. Zechariah has been speaking in this chapter of how because the exiles had refused God's offer of a new covenant, the community would be judged and rejected. This came to its full term in the first century, and so his acting out the rejection and betrayal of the Lord Jesus is appropriate and in context.

Zechariah 11:14 Then I cut apart my other staff, even Union, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel- At the time of Zechariah, that brotherhood was already broken. Repeatedly in Zechariah, there has been the message that Judah and Israel would be reunited at the restoration. This didn't happen, as the majority of both groups preferred to remain in the lands of their exile. But that unity was potentially prepared. But it seems now God breaks that, He takes away that potential because it is clear that in Zechariah's time, that was just not the wish of God's people to make use of it. And we have surely all seen potentially unity between groups and persons being broken by God in response to the way that the humans involved just didn't want it. We note again that union between individuals is related to our acceptance of grace, the first 'staff' which was to guide the flock.

Zechariah 11:15 Yahweh said to me, Take for yourself yet again the equipment of a foolish shepherd- This final acted parable appears to speak specifically of the failure of Zerubbabel, the one who could have been the shepherd. Just as the shepherd leaders of Judah had been foolish and this had led Judah into captivity (s.w. Hos. 9:7), so now the restored community likewise were foolish and had foolish shepherds.

Zechariah 11:16 For, behold, I will raise up a shepherd in the land- "Raise up" is the language of restoration (s.w. Am. 9:11 and often). God had raised up a shepherd in the land, indeed it seems when Zerubbabel failed, Joshua was raised up, and even Nehemiah. But despite this initiative of God, the shepherds were like those before the captivity.

Who will not visit those who are cut off, neither will seek those who are scattered, nor heal that which is broken, nor feed that which is sound; but he will eat the flesh of the fat sheep, and will tear their hoofs in pieces- This is the language of Ez. 34 concerning the shepherds of Judah before the exile. Now those who had been restored were behaving the same way. The leadership of Judah were not interested in the spiritual welfare of people, but rather just their own material benefit from them. This came to full term in the generation which led Judah to crucify their King, the Lord Jesus the Messiah. The “great mountain” of Babylon was to become a plain before Zerubbabel (Zech. 4:7)- a clear allusion to Dan. 2:44, in which the little stone of Messiah destroys the Kingdoms of men and becomes a great mountain to replace the statue headed by Babylon. But Zerubbabel didn’t destroy Babylon- according to Jewish tradition he returned there after ‘giving up’ in Jerusalem. He was “the worthless shepherd” who didn’t gather “those that be scattered”, who didn’t encourage the Jews scattered in Babylon to return to the fold of Zion, and who didn’t care for their spiritual wellbeing. And so the prophecy that Babylon would be destroyed before Zerubbabel has to be reapplied, and will be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus. "That which is broken" would then refer to the walls and buildings of Jerusalem and the temple. These were not rebuilt as potentially possible.

Zechariah 11:17 Woe to the worthless shepherd who leaves the flock!- I suggested on :16 that this refers to Zerubbabel leaving the flock of Judah in the land and returning to Babylon.

The sword will be on his arm, and on his right eye. His arm will be completely withered, and his right eye will be totally blinded!- This could also speak of leprosy. Was this how he ended his days, we wonder? Yet he, the ‘shoot out of Babylon’ as his name means, *could have been* the promised Messianic shoot out of the withered stem of Jesse. He could have been the Messianic shoot out of the dry ground of Babylon (Is. 53:2) who would accompany the return of the temple vessels from Babylon (Is. 52:11). But he disappears strangely out of the record. Thus the events of Nehemiah 8, where the Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles as well as the dedication of the wall are all recorded, make no mention of the High Priest or Zerubbabel officiating. He, Joshua and indeed anyone who could have taken their place somehow didn’t rise to the occasion. And so Is. 51:17-18 lamented, prophetically: “Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury [at the end of the 70 years captivity]... [but] There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up”. Perhaps Zerubbabel, or whoever could have been the Messianic prince, was smitten with a stroke which left his arm withered and his right eye blinded. That language certainly sounds like a stroke. And those who had heard Zechariah's words would immediately have perceived their fulfilment.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 12

Zechariah Chapter 12

Zechariah 12:1 An oracle. The word of Yahweh concerning Israel- The previous chapter has stated that the potential unity between Israel and Judah at the restoration had now been broken; that was not to happen at Zechariah's time. But Judah's judgments in the last days would in fact bring about the final fulfilment of God's plans, which He had potentially enabled for fulfilment at Zechariah's time. And so "Israel" is addressed as Jerusalem, capital of Judah (:2), and used as a parallel with "Judah".

Yahweh, who stretches out the heavens, and lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him says- God's ability to stretch out the *eretz* and the sky above it was a figure understood to refer to His ability to rebuild and restore that land and its people, just as He had stretched out and founded the literal heavens and earth (Is. 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12 and often). He had promised to place His Spirit in the restored Judah at their return from captivity (Ez. 37). All these Divine capabilities, and therefore human potentials, had been refused by the Judah of Zechariah's day. But they would again become possible in the last days.

Zechariah 12:2 Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the surrounding peoples, and on Judah also will it be in the siege against Jerusalem- As explained on :1, the focus now is specifically upon the latter day, final fulfilment of God's prophetic purpose for Judah and Jerusalem. Babylon is depicted as a latter day entity which gives a cup to others to drink; and that cup is here defined as Jerusalem. There will be a requirement that all within latter day Babylon are somehow associated with Jerusalem, and this will cause their condemnation; for the cup is also a symbol of condemnation. It is their 'taking' of Jerusalem which is the taking of the cup of condemnation. The "surrounding peoples" are the constituents, therefore, of the latter day Babylon which Revelation constructs upon the basis of prophecies such as this. And this is the arena of focus of Bible prophecy- the land promised to Abraham and its immediate neighbours. These "surrounding peoples" are "all the nations of the earth / *eretz* promised to Abraham" of :3. We notice the increased focus upon Jerusalem in radical Islamist theology. The "siege against Jerusalem" seems to refer to that of the last days and not AD70, for the "surrounding peoples" were not destroyed then as required by :3,4.

Zechariah 12:3 It will happen in that day- Zech. 12:3-11 is a passage which contains seven occurrences of the phrase "In that day...". The passage does not have to be interpreted chronologically; this is a list of events which will occur around the same time, "in that day". They are snapshots of the same scene from different angles. The seals of Rev. 6 and the repeated references to a three and a half year tribulation period can be understood likewise; they do not necessarily refer to chronologically different events, but are giving different aspects of information about the same basic scene. The lack of strict chronological sequence in prophecy is a major feature of the Old Testament; thus a consideration of the phrase "in that day..." in Isaiah reveals that the context 'jumps around' all over the place, from the first coming of Christ to the Babylonian invasion to the Kingdom. There is no reason to think that Revelation is any different.

That I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all the peoples- Babylon's judgment will be to have a stone placed around them and then to be thrown into the sea (Rev. 18:21). But they will themselves have prepared this judgment, by lading themselves with the stone of Jerusalem. "All the peoples" therefore refer to all those within the Babylon confederacy of the last days.

All who trample upon it will be severely wounded, and all the nations of the earth will be gathered together against it- The nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham are the "surrounding peoples" of :2. They will be gathered together against it through accepting a radical jihadist theology which focuses upon Jerusalem; and that theology is clearly now in development. This trampling upon Jerusalem is clear evidence that Jerusalem will fall. Israel and the IDF are not invincible, as some Protestants like to imply. This is the time when Jerusalem is trodden underfoot of the Gentiles during the "times of the Gentiles" [domination of Jerusalem]; see on Lk. 21:24. Those "times" appear to be the 1260 days / 42 months / three and a half years of other prophecies. "Severely wounded" is literally "cut to pieces", and this

is the picture of Dan. 2:44; the stone of God's Kingdom shall dash to pieces those who trample upon the stone of Zion.

Zechariah 12:4 In that day, says Yahweh, I will strike every horse with terror, and his rider with madness- All the apparently invincible military technology of the latter day invasion will be brought to nothing and revealed as foolishness. To be struck with terror and madness from Yahweh is the very term used of God's judgments upon Israel for their disobedience (Dt. 28:28). All that was done to Israel will be done to their abusers. The confounding of the horse riders is that spoken of in Zech. 10:5, and it is to be achieved by God working through a repentant Jewish remnant.

And I will open My eyes on the house of Judah, and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness- God's eyes are a metaphor for His Angels. The Angel Michael is described as "standing up" for Israel in the last days (Dan. 12:1); as if Angelic activity on Israel's behalf revives in the last days. Striking with blindness recalls what the Angels did to the men of Sodom, in order to preserve a tiny remnant of God's people within it. And those events typify the latter day salvation of the remnant from the city called Sodom, which is Jerusalem. The image of blind horses may mean in modern terms that some sensory technology which is used in weaponry will be disabled. We note that horse riders are used to represent the latter day invaders of Israel in Revelation, and also in the prophecy of Gog's invasion (Ez. 38:15).

Zechariah 12:5 The chieftains of Judah will say in their heart, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in Yahweh of Armies their God' - The chieftains or governors of Judah are referred to in Zech. 9:7, where they refer to repentant Jews and Gentiles. These repentant ones who will become the rulers in the restored Kingdom of God will be strengthened by those then dwelling in Jerusalem. And those are "Yahweh of Armies", the Angels with which the Lord Jesus will return to earth, the saviours who appear on mount Zion to deliver her from her latter day abusers (see on Obadiah 21). This shows how Angels will be very much in evidence on earth at the time of Jerusalem's surrounding by armies and Armageddon. : "The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of Hosts (Angels) their God". Who this 'God' refers to is defined in :8: "He that is feeble amongst them (the "inhabitants of Jerusalem") at that day shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, as the Angel of the Lord (which will go) before them". This implies that the inhabitants of Jerusalem will have the same power as the hosts of Angels which will have been seen fighting "before them". Thus the Jews will "walk up and down in His Name" (Zech. 10:12) as the Angels are now said to do (Zech. 1:11; Job 1:7).

Zechariah 12:6 In that day I will make the chieftains of Judah like a pan of fire among wood, and like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they will devour all the surrounding peoples, on the right hand and on the left- As explained on 2 Pet. 3:7,12, literal fire will be used to destroy the latter day abusers of God's land and people. And that fire will be directed by the chieftains of Judah, who as explained on :5 refer to the repentant Jewish remnant now directly empowered by the Angels who have returned with Jesus to Zion; and those Angels are made as a flaming fire (Ps. 104:4). We see again how the faithful Jews on earth will be in step with the Angel cherubim above them. The invaders will be as "sheaves" awaiting judgment- the idea of 'Armageddon', cp. Mic. 4:12.

And Jerusalem will yet again dwell in their own place, even in Jerusalem- "Jerusalem" is here put for its people, the daughter of Zion.

Zechariah 12:7 Yahweh also will save- 'Jesus' means in Hebrew 'Yah will save'. His second coming is here in view.

The tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem be not magnified above Judah- This is reflective of how David reigned first over Judah and then later took Jerusalem and all Israel (2 Sam. 5:3). The Lord Jesus as the true Davidic king will act as His forefather. "First" can be as LXX and others, "as in the beginning" or "as in former days". The theme is of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom as God's Kingdom. In the Kingdom to be established, association with any particular place or family line, even David's, will be irrelevant compared to the glory of the Lord Jesus. And this needed to be written, for the generations to come after Zechariah would tend to glory in such things.

Zechariah 12:8 In that day Yahweh will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem- I suggested on :5 that this term there referred to the Angels who come to Zion at the Lord's second coming. But here it refers to the human Jews in Zion (see :10); because they will be identified with the Angels, "like the Angel of Yahweh", as this verse goes on to say. This may appear to contradict the command of the Olivet prophecy to flee Jerusalem (Mt. 24:16). We see here an example of God's grace. Those who were commanded to flee, but did not, are still saved- but by grace alone.

He who is feeble among them at that day will be like David- The theme of Zechariah is the restoration of the Davidic king and kingdom; but the final, latter day fulfilment of this is that all God's people shall be as David. "Feeble" is literally 'he who has stumbled' and is often used in a spiritual sense, as it is in Mal. 2:8 of the spiritually stumbled / fallen exiles. But they will then repent, and from their weakness will be made spiritually strong by the gift of the Spirit.

And the house of David will be like God- David accepted that his house / family was "not so with God" (2 Sam. 23:5), but in the last days it will be; for the Lord Jesus and His spiritual children are in that sense from the house of David. God's family will be David's family.

Like the angel of Yahweh before them- As often noted, the repentant Jews on earth were to be identified with the Angel cherubim above them. See on :5; Zech. 10:12.

Zechariah 12:9 It will happen in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem- These nations are the "surrounding peoples" of :2, who are gathered against Jerusalem by accepting a theology which persuades them that Jerusalem must be taken by them at all costs; see on :3. The Hebrew for "destroy" is used multiple times in Deuteronomy about the destruction of the nations of the *eretz* so that Israel could inherit that land. And this continues to be the context and frame of reference here.

Zechariah 12:10 I will pour on the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication- The restored exiles had been offered a new covenant with God, which would involve His Spirit being put into them, "a new heart" given, and all the blessings of the gift of the Spirit which the New Testament promises to those who accept that same new covenant today. They had then refused it, but now in repentance they will accept it. This spiritual gift will lead them to the acceptance of the crucified Christ now spoken of. The spirit of supplications is GNB "the spirit of prayer". As Paul puts it, we know not what to pray for as we ought (Rom. 8:26), but the gift of the Spirit makes supplication for us. For those open to the Spirit, we are guided what to pray for, and our relationship with God and Jesus in prayer is guided by His Spirit. This will be experienced by the repentant Jews.

And they will look to Me whom they have pierced- Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one

reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10 AV). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood.

These words are quoted in Rev. 1:7: "Behold, he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him". This passage from Zechariah appears to be a prophecy of how Israel shall see the Lord at His second coming, and that is the interpretation given here. Those who crucified the Lord had this prophecy come true as they looked upon and gloated over the pierced Lord Jesus on the cross (see on Jn. 19:37). But it shall come true again, when they are resurrected to judgment at the last day, see His enthronement in glory ["he comes with the clouds" is the language of Dan. 7 about this], realize from marks in His body that this is the one whom they crucified, exclaim "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mt. 23:39), but find they are not able to be in His Kingdom. That bitter disappointment at the future they have missed, that they now so want, with all the resulting self-anger, is described as weeping and gnashing of teeth. That will be psychological punishment enough for the rejected. "The tribes of the earth", every eye of them, shall see the Lord in that moment. "The earth" refers to the land, of Israel; all those who looked upon Him upon the cross, "every eye", shall then be resurrected to see Him and mourn bitterly over what they did. The "every eye" is I suggest unpacked and defined by "they that pierced him" and "all the tribes of the land". The "and..." does not have to mean 'in addition to'; it can be a device for defining the term which has gone before it. As if to say 'Yes, even...!'

And they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and will grieve bitterly for him- Men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched

and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord. In coming before the cross we likewise have a foretaste of judgment day.

As one grieves for his firstborn- The idea is of a firstborn who dies in babyhood, with no other children. All the parent had has been lost. This is a window into God's feelings at the loss of His only begotten son; and their mourning would help them know His feelings. And it was the Lord Jesus Himself who was "grieved" in His crucifixion sufferings (s.w. Gen. 49:23).

Haggai and Zechariah clearly set up Zerubbabel as the Messianic king who could have ruled over a restored kingdom. But he strangely disappears from the scene. One possibility is that he was killed by the priestly group in a power struggle with Joshua the High Priest. In this case, this would be the primary potential interpretation of Zech. 12:10.

Zechariah 12:11 In that day there will be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon- The historical event in view seems to be the mourning for Josiah in that location, for which Jeremiah wrote special lamentations (2 Chron. 35:22,25).

Zechariah 12:12 The land will mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart- This mourning is that of the last days. We can conclude that David and his son Nathan and their families will be resurrected, the Davidic kingdom will be so fully restored; and will mourn for what their descendants had done to the Lord Jesus, their great descendant. Zerubbabel, the failed potential Davidic king, was in the line of Nathan (1 Chron. 3:5; Lk. 3:27,31) and perhaps the mourning will also be for all the failed potentials.

And their wives apart- The emphasis upon how the wives would mourn separately is to highlight the fact that repentance is deeply personal; religion is not just for men, as it was traditionally. Every man and woman of every family would realize their guilt for having failed to accept Jesus as Christ, and for having thereby sided with His historical persecutors and crucifiers.

Zechariah 12:13 The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of the Shimeites apart, and their wives apart- The idea is that the kingly (:12) and priestly (:13) families would mourn; and this would have been also because of how Joshua had failed to be the priestly king and high priest which he could have been (see on Zech. 3:1; 6:11). Why mention the Shimeites particularly? The LXX gives, "the tribe of Simeon", and after the exile it seems that this tribe was also accepted into the priesthood. "Simeon and Levi" are connected in Gen. 49:5. They were between them particularly responsible for the Lord's death, hence their mourning. They would mourn "apart", i.e. from their own deep sense of personal sin; rather than guilt being as it were elicited from the proximity of others in mourning. All emotional response tends to be influenced by those close to us; but this was and is not to be when it comes to the issues of repentance, which are so essentially personal.

Zechariah 12:14 All the families who remain, every family apart, and their wives apart- Those who "remain" could refer to the very few Jews who remain alive after the traumas of the last days, and who come to repentance. Or it may mean that all the other tribes / families of Israel would likewise mourn.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 13

Zechariah Chapter 13

Zechariah 13:1 *In that day there will be a spring opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness-* The purifying is alluding to Mosaic rituals of purification from sin and uncleanness, and also of preparing the priests for service. This spring is mentioned in Joel 3:18, where it apparently emerges from the temple mount. And in a symbolic sense it is used in John's Gospel and Rev. 21 of the cleansing available in Christ. Entry to the new covenant offered to the exiles had involved receiving purification and the Spirit as it were sprinkled on their hearts (Ez. 36:25). They didn't want this at that time, and yet it shall be given finally in the last days to those who want it. Whether or not there will be a literal spring from mount Zion at the Lord's return is to my mind a too literal and secular perspective. John and Revelation, along with Ez. 36:25, are clear that the essence is that the repentant mind will be washed by the Spirit, just as it can be for those in this life who accept God's dominion over them, His Kingdom.

Zechariah 13:2 *It will come to pass in that day, says Yahweh of Armies, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they will be remembered no more. I will also cause the prophets and the spirit of impurity to pass out of the land-* In contrast to the spirit of grace that will be poured out (Zech. 12:10), all other spirits will be driven out. The "that day" is that of :1, which finally will be the Lord's return. At Zechariah's time, there were still problems with idol worship and false prophets; and we can deduce from Nehemiah and Mal. 3:5; Zech. 10:2 that these were problems even after the restoration from Babylon. But the essence of these issues will again be seen in latter day Judah. Idolatry is now covetousness (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), and this is currently the spirit of latter day Judah. "The spirit of impurity" surely connects with their being "three unclean spirits like frogs" which lead the nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham to Armageddon (Rev. 16:13).

Zechariah 13:3 *It will happen that, when anyone still prophesies, then his father and his mother who bore him will tell him, 'You must die, because you speak lies in the name of Yahweh;' and his father and his mother who bore him will stab him when he prophesies-* LXX "Bind him". Binding is part of the condemnation process (Mt. 22:13). We are reading about what is to happen "in that day" (:2), which finally refers to the last day when the Lord returns. We may have envisaged here the resurrection to judgment at that time of the false prophets of Zechariah's time, and their parents. Those who remain impenitent will then be judged and condemned. Then, their parents would be obedient to the commands of Dt. 13:6-10 about what to do if your son was a false prophet.

Zechariah 13:4 *It will happen in that day, that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision, when he prophesies; neither will they wear a hairy mantle to deceive-* This verse could suggest that the resurrected false prophets repent, no longer wearing prophetic garb in imitation of Elijah; or at least, they suffer the shame of condemnation as they recall what they did. Too much stress should not be laid upon the Hebrew tenses here.

Jacob's flight into Syria is set up as typical of Israel going into dispersion as a punishment for their idolatry. But they will return, as Jacob did. *Then* Israel will not

wear a rough garment to deceive any more as Jacob did in order to deceive his father; *then* they will have renounced the human side of Jacob and captured his final spirituality for their own.

Zechariah 13:5 But he will say, 'I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the ground; for I have been made a bondservant from my youth' - This again could be read as a statement of repentance by the resurrected false prophets, insisting that they were no longer prophets. Or it could be a desperate denial of their being false prophets; the accused would be claiming that he only wore a hairy garment because he was an agricultural labourer. It is this denial which leads to the objection of :6.

Zechariah 13:6 One will say to him, 'What are these wounds in your hands?'. Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends' - This appears to be in objection to the resurrected false prophet protesting his innocence in :5. In this case, there is an element to which the judgment process is a collective affair, with people effectively judged by others, like the men of Nineveh judging first century Israel; see on Rev. 16:15. The wounds in the palms would refer to the self-inflicted wounds made by the prophets of Baal, as happened at the time of Elijah's contest with them on Carmel. The Hebrew behind "With which I was wounded" apparently implies 'Which I wounded myself with', and this would confirm the application to how the false prophets wounded themselves in worship sessions. This implies that the resurrected still have some characteristics of their previous life. And the false prophet in this case caves in and admits, that he had done this in the house of his friends. He recognizes that the house of Baal was the house of his friends, and his claim to have been an agricultural labourer-slave with wounds in his hands from his labour was just an untrue excuse.

It is tempting to apply these words to the Lord Jesus showing wounds in His hands from the nails of the cross. But this is quite outside of the context.

Zechariah 13:7 Awake, sword- The idea is that the sword of judicial judgment of men (Rom. 13:4) is commanded by God; whatever happens as a result of it was therefore willed by God and was not random chance.

Against My shepherd- The intended shepherd was Zerubbabel and then Joshua. But they didn't live up to this. The intended scenario was that this shepherd would be smitten, and Judah again be scattered in captivity. But for whatever reason, perhaps because of the repentance and prayer of a tiny minority, that didn't happen. But the prophetic word came true at the time of the Lord Jesus, and the scattering and salvation of the weak faithed disciples became its fulfilment. Therefore the shepherd here clearly finally refers to Jesus (Mt. 26:31), although the shepherd elsewhere in Zechariah refers to the Angel- another proof that there was one specific Angel in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Jesus, presumably Gabriel.

And against the man who is close to Me, says Yahweh of Armies- The term can mean a close relative, an 'equal' only insofar as they are related. The term is supremely relevant to the relationship between Father and Son.

Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones- The "little ones" are the lambs of the scattered sheep, and the term is also used of the disciples (Mt. 10:42; 18:6,10), who are also the scattered sheep (Mt. 26:31). The image of scattered sheep in the absence of shepherds is used of Judah's scattering as a result of their bad shepherds (Jer. 10:21; 23:1,2; Ez. 34:5,6). But this intended second scattering of Judah didn't then happen; the disciples as it

were bore the fulfilment of it when they were scattered from the Lord and then spiritually reformed- for the Hebrew phrase "turn My hand against" doesn't have to mean that God was against the lambs. "Against" can as well be translated "upon" (as AV), and the identical Hebrew term is used in Is. 1:25: "I will turn My hand upon you and purge away your dross". There is the idea there of God's direct intervention in order to ultimately save.

Zechariah 13:8 It shall happen that in all the land, says Yahweh, two parts in it will be cut off and die; but the third will be left in it- This appears to continue in the context of :7 and therefore refers to the fate of the flock once the shepherd is cut off. I suggested on :7 that there was an initial scenario of the appointed "shepherd" of Judah being smitten, and the people being scattered again; and now we learn that there would have been the cutting off of two thirds within the land, and then the final spiritual purging of the remaining third. The cutting off is that of :2, where the same word is used of the cutting off of idols and those who worshipped them. For those who worship and trust them are like unto them (Ps. 115:8); the cutting off of the idols (:2) meant the cutting off of those who worshipped them (:8). But there has never been a time when two thirds of Judah were cut off and a third brought to repentance (:9). Perhaps, given that the preceding verse talks about the first century, the idea was that the Roman invasion would have led to a third repenting. This would fit in with the clear possibility that there was for the Lord Jesus to have returned in AD70. But they didn't repent. So this threatened scenario was deferred, and will therefore come true in the last days. The reference to "all the *eretz*" may intend us to understand that this is not in fact talking solely about Judah in Palestine, but about all the inhabitants of the *eretz* promised to Abraham; and a third of them will come to repentance.

Zechariah 13:9 I will bring the third part into the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will test them like gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will hear them. I will say, 'It is My people;' and they will say, 'Yahweh is my God'- This could well be speaking of how God cut off men like Zerubbabel who were poor shepherds, although potential Messiahs; and it *could* have then happened that during the 'cutting off' of Jewish population during the Antiochus invasions, a minority could have repented and ushered in the true restoration. But this didn't happen, and so the prophecy had a deferred fulfilment, although humanly speaking somewhat out of context, in the cutting off of the good shepherd, the scattering of the disciples, and their spiritual refining. And then another possible fulfilment arose in the scattering of AD70; but the refinement was again not achieved, and so the whole scene is deferred to the last days for fulfilment. See on Zech. 10:3.

If the two halves of this verse are indeed chronological, we have a salvation by grace, a pulling out of the fire just as Judah had been plucked out of the fire of Babylon (Zech. 3:2)- which is only then followed by a repentant calling upon God's Name. God took the initiative in bringing Judah and Jerusalem out of the fire- but they had to then respond. They didn't, but the remnant of latter day Judah will do. God's statement that they are His people is matched by their response that He is their God. But the point is that He takes the initiative in declaring impenitent people 'My people', and they then respond. It's rather like how the Lord broke His bread with impenitent sinners, showing them He accepted them, exactly *so that* they would repent. And we need to follow the Father and Son in taking such initiatives of grace; forgiving without repentance in order that God's grace leads those forgiven to repentance.

ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 14

Zechariah Chapter 14

Zechariah 14:1 *Behold, the day of Yahweh comes*- All the previous potentials had not been responded to by Judah, and I have continually mentioned throughout Zechariah that the various prophecies were therefore rescheduled and reapplied to the last days. In this sense, God's prophetic word will come true in essence. And so it is appropriate that Zechariah finishes with a prophecy specifically about the very last days, when all the previous prophecies will come to their final term. Likewise the many judgments upon Judah which had been promised but somehow had been delayed, will all come true. Hence the coming of the day of Yahweh was to be seen as judgment for Judah (Mal. 4:1).

When your spoil will be divided in your midst- The significance of "in your midst" is that it is done there rather than in the camp of the invaders outside the city. This would imply the total fall of the city and its possession by the invaders. The Egyptians sought to pursue Israel and "divide the spoil" (s.w. Ex. 15:9). But there will be no Passover deliverance. Jerusalem will fall.

Zechariah 14:2 *For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle*- The gathering of all nations to battle predicted here is the language of Rev. 9 and 16 regarding the gathering of the nations to Armageddon after the release of the hordes bound by the Euphrates- and we have already seen that happening with jihadists bursting across that river into the *eretz* promised to Abraham. The point is, the words of Zechariah 14 are applied to the events of the last days. Jerusalem therefore must fall. The final outworking of all this, of course, depends upon whether, or to what degree, Israel repent in response to our appeals: "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the Earth" (Rev. 3:10-11).

And the city will be taken, the houses pillaged, and the women raped- This is a quotation from Is. 13:16 about the fate of Babylon. Jerusalem was to be treated as Babylon because that is how they were in spirit. Zechariah was prophesying in the context of Judah's rather unenthusiastic return from captivity in Babylon; and most of them remained behind in Babylon. The memory was still relatively fresh of how a generation ago, Babylon had captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and taken the people into captivity. And now they had returned after the 70 years captivity- and Zechariah was telling them that yet again, Jerusalem was to be "taken" and the population taken into captivity. It would be hard to imagine a more unpopular message. The same Hebrew word translated "taken" is many times used of how Babylon took Jerusalem (Jer. 32:3 "I will give this city into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall *take* it"; Jer. 32:24,28; 34:22; 37:8; 38:3,28). Clearly the implication is that a second, revived Babylon would arise and take Jerusalem; and there would be yet another captivity. We are seeing Babylon – Assyria reforming, with a jihadist theology focusing upon taking the city of Jerusalem. The prophecy of Zechariah 14 has never been fulfilled- but it will be.

Half of the city will go out into captivity, and the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city- Significantly, half of Jerusalem is comprised of East Jerusalem, which is Arab. So when we read of how "Half of the city will go out into captivity",

this may well refer to the Jewish half of the city. "The rest of the people" is literally "the remnant"; the implication is that there will be a faithful remnant which will not be cut off and will remain in Jerusalem.

Dan. 9:26,27 require the city of Jerusalem to be taken, and the abomination of desolation placed there; and this is quoted by the Lord Jesus as requiring fulfilment in the last days just prior to His return (Mt. 24:14,15,29-31). Any previous fulfilments were incipient at best; they did not immediately herald the Lord's visible return as required by the Oliver prophecy. Lk. 21:24 adds: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot*". This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Lk. 21:20)= All nations against Jerusalem to battle (Zech. 14:2).

The desolation of Jerusalem is near (Lk. 21:20) = The city shall be taken (Zech. 14:2).

Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains (Lk. 21:21) = You shall flee to the... mountains (Zech. 14:5)

Great distress in the land(Lk. 21:22) = Houses ransacked, women raped (Zech. 14:2)

Led away captive into all nations (Lk. 21:24) = Half the city shall go into captivity (Zech. 14:2)

Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24) = Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles (Zech. 12:3 LXX).

The "treading down" of Jerusalem didn't end in 1967; for if that is the reference of the prophecy, then Christ should be back by now. The presence of the Dome of the Rock and Arab possession of East Jerusalem hardly sounds as if 1967 was much of a fulfilment anyway. The times of the Gentiles have clearly continued since 1967. The more logical interpretation is surely that Jerusalem must be trodden down by Gentiles until the "times" of that domination end- and that is probably a reference to the 42 months / 1260 days / three and a half year down-treading which we meet in both Daniel and Revelation.

Zechariah 14:3 Then Yahweh will go out and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle- God again will act openly as He did against Israel's neighbours in past conflicts. The 'going out' will in a literal sense be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, on behalf of His Father, going forth out of Heaven to intervene against Judah's abusers.

Zechariah 14:4 His feet will stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east- The description of the Lord's feet standing on the Mount of Olives naturally looks ahead to the words of the Angels at the ascension of the Lord Jesus from that same Mount, promising that He would return in the same way. As He stands upon His feet, so do the opponents (:14 s.w.). This is the greatest showdown of human history, between God and man, Spirit and flesh.

And the Mount of Olives will be split in two, from east to west, making a very great valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward

the south- This will create four separate elevated areas, with a large valley running north-south between them. Hence the reference to "My mountains" plural in :5; this valley will be the way to flee in :5. The mount of Olives is described as being on the East of Jerusalem; the faithful will flee eastwards and then through the newly created valley. This will then become the valley of Judah's revival spoken of in Ez. 37; they will arise as a powerful army to subdue their enemies, energized by the Spirit and led by the returned Lord Jesus.

Zechariah 14:5 You shall flee by the valley of My mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azel- As noted on :4, this implies they flee out of Jerusalem to the east and through the new valley opened up through the mount of Olives. The GNB offers: "You will escape through this valley that divides the mountain in two", avoiding interpreting "Azel" as a proper noun. A way of escape will be made, through a mountain; parted as the Red Sea was parted, that God's people might escape. And yet according to Ezekiel, the glory is to enter from the east (Ez. 43:2); so we are to imagine them uniting with the Lord of glory at the mount of Olives, and joining Him in returning through east Jerusalem. The western slopes of the Mount of Olives appear to be part of what forms the "valley of decision" of Joel 3:14, the "valley of slaughter" of Jer. 19:6. It is through this new valley that the way of Yahweh is prepared to come to Zion from the east.

Yes, you shall flee, just like you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah- The LXX is significantly different, implying instead that there will be no way of escape: "And the valley of my mountains shall be closed up, and the valley of the mountains shall be joined on to Jasod, and shall be blocked up as it was blocked up in the days of the earthquake, in the days of Ozias king of Juda". Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional; depending upon the faith of the remnant, the earthquake will either open up a way of escape through a new valley across the former mount of Olives (:4), or will block their escape and leave them to their final destruction. The earthquake at Uzziah's time may have been one of the ways in which he was "marvellously / miraculously helped" against his enemies (2 Chron. 26:15). Zechariah's prophecy is based around the restoration of the throne of David, and there are therefore allusions to the historical David throughout. Here, to the fleeing of David from Jerusalem via the Mount of Olives along this same path (2 Sam. 15:30,32).

Yahweh my God will come, and all the holy ones with you- LXX, as GNB: "The LORD my God will come, bringing all the angels with him". This is quoted in the New Testament about the return of the Lord Jesus on God's behalf, with "all the angels with him" (Mt. 25:31). Note the change of pronouns; it's as if Zechariah is caught up in the wonder of having Yahweh as his personal God, when otherwise addressing God ["with you"]. Such shifting of address are likely familiar to us if we have ever tried to make a transcript of our own personal prayers. Focus and address shifts within the same sentence, as we often see in the prayers transcribed in the Psalms.

Zechariah 14:6 It will happen in that day, that there will not be light, cold, or frost- The idea is that seasons will be no more. But the Hebrew is difficult; the RVmg. offers "There shall not be light, the bright ones shall contract themselves". This radical change in the planets, sun and stars at the Lord's return is likewise spoken of in

Joel 3:15; Is. 13:10; Mt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12,13. It was prefigured by how Joshua-Jesus made them stop in their tracks (Josh. 10:12,13).

Zechariah 14:7 *It will be a unique day-* Literally, "it will be one day". This recalls the first day of creation, described this way in Gen. 1:3. We will note on :21 that there are seven occurrences of "that day" in this vision. A new creation is being presented. This verse then goes on to allude to "there was evening and morning, the first day".

Which is known to Yahweh; not day, and not night; but it will come to pass, that at evening time there will be light- LXX "When this will happen is known only to the LORD"; alluded to in NT teaching that none knows the day nor hour, but only the Father. But this may be one of a number of indications that the meaning of time will be collapsed around the Lord's return. This is really necessary for there to be the individual judgment of a multitude as many as the sand on the shore. This also explains why it's impossible to construct a chronology of events around His coming in terms of a linear progression. "In that day" is a favourite phrase of Zechariah's, and the events spoken of as then happening are hard to fit into a chronological framework. It would also explain the apparent tension between passages which imply an immortal emergence from the grave, and those which suggest a mortal emergence and then judgment and reward. It just depends which view of time one takes. If there is light at evening time, we would have here another way of saying that the sun will never go down, which is the language of the Kingdom of God established on earth (Is. 60:20; Rev. 22:5).

Zechariah 14:8 *It will happen in that day, that living waters will go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the eastern sea, and half of them toward the western sea; in summer and in winter will it be-* LXX "in the dry season as well as the wet". The new valley spoken of in :4,5 will have living waters flowing in it. The situation of Ez. 47:1-12 which was potentially possible for the restored exiles will then be finally brought about. Just as the waters are mentioned as being created in Genesis (see on:7,21), so in this new creation the equivalent is these living waters, parallel with the law of Yahweh going out of Jerusalem in Is. 2:3; Mic. 4:2, causing the nations to flow back to Zion. And they will revive the otherwise 'Dead Sea' to the east. These are the living waters which Judah could have earlier experienced but refused (Jer. 2:13). Clearly this water of life is used symbolically in Rev. 22:1, but this is not to say that the symbol will have no literal basis. Most symbols do. We can live the essence of the Kingdom life now, in that this living water should come forth from our innermost being to give life to the dead world around us (Jn. 7:38). And this outflow from us should be constant, just as these future waters are not seasonal nor occasional.

Zechariah 14:9 *Yahweh will be King over all the earth-* Zechariah has previously spoken of a Davidic king reigning for Yahweh over all the *eretz* or "earth" promised to Abraham. Now this King will be reigning for Yahweh, and clearly looks forward to the Lord Jesus.

In that day Yahweh will be declared as the one and only- This declaration will cut out all idolatry amongst God's people, and all other forms of worship amongst the Gentiles. The command to exalt Yahweh as the only God in Dt. 6:4 was and is therefore an invitation to live the Kingdom life now. In this sense, as in John's Gospel, we can experience the nature of the life eternal right now. The "one day" of :7 is an eternal manifestation of the one God.

And His name unified- It may well be that Eph. 4:4-6 is alluding back to this verse; this passage inspires us to keep the unity of the Spirit, because here and now "there is one body, and one Spirit... *one Lord* ... one baptism, one God"; Paul is saying that the unity of the Kingdom, as spoken of in Zech. 14:9, must be found in the ecclesia of today.

Zechariah 14:10 *All the land will be made like the Arabah-* GNB "will be made level". A new flat plateau is envisaged. This could be brought about by the shaking / earthquake predicted in Hag. 2:6 and which could have come at the end of the Ez. 38 invasion: "in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel... all the men who are on the surface of the earth, shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and every wall shall fall to the ground" (Ez. 38:19,20). Had Judah accepted the new covenant offered to them in Ez. 33,34, they would have revived as in Ez. 37, the Ez. 38 invasion and earthquake would have happened and then on the resultant plateau, the new temple would have been built. Despite Judah's failures to engage with these things, Haggai and Zechariah were saying that if the people wanted, they could have the earthquake and temple. God really was trying to force through His saving purpose.

From Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and she will be lifted up, and will dwell in her place, from Benjamin's gate to the place of the first gate, to the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses- These locations feature in the account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the temple (Neh. 3:1,31,32; 12:39). Zechariah was prophesying in this context. He is implying that the work of rebuilding the temple and city had not been done according to the specifications and commandments for the exiles in Ez. 40-48 and Jer. 31:38,40, and so God will finally make it good in His own way. The reference to "the king's winepresses" at the south of Jerusalem (Neh. 3:15) would only have made sense to the primary audience of Zechariah; he is inviting them to imagine how places they knew well would one day be in the literal, eternal Kingdom of God on earth. And we can imagine the same, regarding things in our lives.

Zechariah 14:11 *Men will dwell therein-* LXX "They shall dwell in the city". This was in contrast to how in Nehemiah's time, the returned exiles had been reluctant to dwell there because it was not safe. It was a reminder to the initial audience of the potential they had wasted.

And there will be no more curse- Quoted in Rev. 22:3 about the future Kingdom of God on earth. The "curse" in view is not only that placed in Genesis, but the specific curses for disobedience which had come upon Judah.

But Jerusalem will dwell safely- Proof enough, surely, that the invasion of Gog when Jerusalem 'dwells safely' is *after* the Lord's return and not before it (Ez. 38:8,11,14). Attempts to identify the invaders at this stage are therefore slightly misplaced. The Hebrew phrase for 'dwelling safely' is repeatedly used about the blessings of living in covenant relationship with God

Zechariah 14:12 *This will be the plague with which Yahweh will strike all the peoples who have warred against Jerusalem: their flesh will consume away while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will consume away in their sockets, and their tongue will consume away in their mouth-* See on :4. This implies that the plague will be sudden, whilst the warring soldiers are standing up. The language could suggest the effects of

nuclear radiation. Perhaps Yahweh will punish the nations through their destroying of each other with their own weaponry, and this is implied in :13. This is how He has destroyed previous invaders. The triple reference to "consume away" is perhaps to serve as a signpost to the fact that most of the occurrences of this word relate to the consuming away of Israel because of their sins. Now what has been done to them shall be done to those who did it, as the structure of Revelation explains.

Zechariah 14:13 It will happen in that day, that a great panic from Yahweh will be among them; and they, each of them, will lay hold on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand will rise up against the hand of his neighbour- This is how historically the invaders of Israel were destroyed (Jud. 7:22; 1 Sam. 14:20; 2 Chron. 20:23). I suggested on :12 that they may use their nuclear weaponry against each other. "Panic" translates the word used in Dt. 7:23 about the destruction of the Canaanite nations; and these are the same nations in view in the last days: "But Yahweh your God will deliver them up before you and will confuse them with a great confusion until they are destroyed". It is also the word used of the destruction of the Philistines / Palestinians in 1 Sam. 5:9,11.

Zechariah 14:14 Judah also will fight at Jerusalem- The repentant Jewish remnant are here prophesied as liberating the captured Jerusalem. This contrasts with passages like Psalm 2 which suggest Jerusalem will be defended and preserved from her invaders. A common way of dealing with these apparent contradictions has been to postulate a timeline of events, a series of invasions, with some happening after the return of the Lord Jesus and His enthronement in Zion. This may be a legitimate way of dealing with the problem, but no proposed chronology seems to resolve all the points of contradiction between the various prophecies. My suggestion again is that Bible prophecy is conditional. Various scenarios may happen, depending upon various factors such as the speed of Israel's repentance, the amount and quality of prayer and spirituality in the believers of the last days, God's grace, His desire to just end it all and get on with the Kingdom balanced against His desire to see more saved by prolonging things... And so Jerusalem may or may not fall, various invasions may or may not happen, in accordance with the human freewill factors that God so respects in how He finally works things out with Israel and this world.

And the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered together: gold, and silver, and clothing, in great abundance- What was done to Judah in :1 would now be done to her abusers. This explains the structure of the book of Revelation; the seven seals of judgment upon Israel are reflected in the bowls of judgment then poured out upon those who judged her. This verse is behind Rev. 21:26: "They shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into" the restored Zion.

Zechariah 14:15 So will be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the donkey, and of all the animals that will be in those camps, as that plague- The animals mentioned were all of military usage, and refer to the military resources of the invaders. In latter day terms this translates into the military technology and hardware of the attackers being plagued and thereby destroyed in the same way as the users thereof (:12).

Zechariah 14:16 It will happen that everyone who is left of all the nations- The remnant that is left is a term which is usually used about the repentant remnant of

God's people. There will also be such a remnant amongst her latter day enemies. This is a major theme- that there will be a minority amongst the attackers who repent.

That came against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of Armies- We note the focus of the attackers as specifically upon Jerusalem. This fits with an increasing focus in jihadist Islam [the religion of Israel's surrounding nations and enemies] upon Jerusalem. We can expect to see the Jerusalem issue becoming increasingly prominent, both politically and in their theology.

And to keep the feast of tabernacles- This festival is chosen because it celebrated the entry into the promised land. It will be a way of celebrating God's grace to Israel; the Gentiles will keep it because they have so identified with Israel that her God and her history is now theirs. It was a celebration too of the end of harvest, which is often used as a metaphor for judgment. It is a mistake to think that the Law of Moses will be reinstated for some period at the Lord's return. That law was ended permanently, as the New Testament makes clear. Under that law, men were required to appear three times before the Lord at the main feasts (Ex. 23:17); but here, only one feast appears to be required. Likewise the legal requirements of the restored temple in Ez. 40-48 were not the Law of Moses, as they differed significantly from it.

Zechariah 14:17 It will be, that whoever of all the families of the earth doesn't go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, Yahweh of Armies, on them there will be no rain- At the time of Zechariah, rain was being withheld upon Judah because of their disobedience, as Hag. 1 and Malachi mention. The initial audience would have been aware of this and realized they were being treated like the obstinate Gentiles of the last days who would refuse all evidence of Yahweh's supremacy and refuse to submit to Him. For this is what they were doing.

Zechariah 14:18 If the family of Egypt doesn't go up, and doesn't come, neither will it rain on them- The obvious point is that Egypt was then the nation which was independent of rainfall, because it depended for irrigation upon the flooding of the Nile rather than precipitation. With all the huge tectonic upheavals of the last days, this situation will change. That is the clear implication of this threat. "The family of Egypt" is a slightly unusual term. The implication may be that at Zechariah's time, the family of God in Egypt had chosen not to 'come up' to Zion, preferring the land of their exile.

This will be the plague with which Yahweh will strike the nations that don't go up to keep the feast of tents- Perhaps God expected the Jews in Egypt to come to Jerusalem to keep the feast. But they didn't, and thereby were living out the condemnation of latter day people who refuse the most obvious evidence that Yahweh is indeed king in Zion.

Zechariah 14:19 This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations that don't go up to keep the feast of tabernacles- Egypt as so often is presented as representative of "all the nations". We note that even when the Lord Jesus is enthroned in Jerusalem, obedience will not be forced. And we also are reminded that in the face of the most overpowering visual evidence, human nature is such that men can still refuse it. "Punishment" translates the same original word translated "sin", e.g. in Zech. 13:1. The Hebrew language at this point was structured to reflect the fact that sin is its own punishment. It's not so much that God punishes sin, but that sin is its punishment.

Zechariah 14:20 *In that day there will be on the bells of the horses, HOLY TO YAHWEH*- "The horses" suggests a specific group of horses is in view; and the horses of the context are those ridden by the invaders in :15. Instead of bearing slogans glorifying their dedication to pagan gods, the "bridles" (LXX, NEV "bells") of the surviving horses will be dedicated instead to Yahweh. This is another way of saying that swords will be beaten into ploughs (Is. 2:4). "Holy to Yahweh" was the inscription on the High Priestly mitre (Ex. 28:36). The idea is that such holiness would extend equally; the horses were to be as dedicated to Yahweh as the High Priest. This thought continues in the second half of the verse, where sacred bowls are to be as holy as earthen pots. And we can live with that spirit now; every part of our lives is to be dedicated to Yahweh. No area of life or field of human endeavour is to be considered as more or less sanctified than any other.

And the pots in Yahweh's house will be like the bowls before the altar- LXX "The cooking pots in the Temple will be as sacred as the bowls before the altar". Holiness will extend to absolutely everything.

Zechariah 14:21 *Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to Yahweh of Armies; and all those who sacrifice will come and take of them, and cook in them*- This rather conflicts with the practice amongst the Jews of the priests preparing the sacrifices, with the resultant abuses exemplified in the situation in 1 Sam. 2:13-15. But God seeks for personal relationship with individual people; both now and in that future day, we are to personally prepare and offer our own sacrifice to Him. We cannot depend upon any religious structure to do this for us, assuming because we made a general donation to a fund or charitable appeal we are thereby freed from any further concept of sacrifice.

In that day- This phrase occurs seven times in the prophecy of Zech. 14; see on :7. We are perhaps invited to see this as the consumption of the creation week, a new creation. The final "in that day" we expect to be something very significant, but instead the prophecy concludes with what could appear an anticlimax- a reference to there no longer being traders / Canaanites in the temple. But this is typical of the prophets; to focus upon moral failure which might appear relatively minor, and show how deeply significant it in fact is to God.

There will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of Yahweh of Armies- This was of obvious relevance to Zechariah's generation; for the book of Nehemiah laments how Canaanites came and traded and even had chambers in the temple. So the crowning blessing of the Kingdom "in that day" will be that there will be no more spiritual weakness within us the people and temple of God. And this is what surely every spiritually minded believer wishes for above all. Fear of our own weakness and the corruption of God's "house" by apostasy will then be no more.