

# An Isagogical Study of Zechariah

By Robert M. Krueger

The name Zechariah (which means Jehovah remembers; in the LXX Zacharias; Vulgate: Zacharias) was a very common on name among the Israelites. There are twenty (20) men by that name mentioned in the various books of the Old Testament. Harrison in his "Intro to the Old Testament" claims to have found twenty-five (25) different men by that name. It is very helpful, then, that the Zechariah who wrote the Old Testament book that bears his name identified himself very clearly. He does this in chapter 1, verse 1, where he writes that he is "Zechariah, the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo (Zechariah ben Berechiah ben Iddo)."

Zechariah's grandfather, Iddo, is commonly believed to be the Iddo of Nehemiah 12:4, who was the head or the a chief of one of the priestly families who returned with Zerubbabel (Nehemiah 12:1-47) to Israel after the Babylonian captivity. If this is correct, it follows that Zechariah was a priest and can be identified with the Zechariah of Nehemiah 12:16. Evidently the same family is being spoken about in Ezra 5:1 but there we are told. that Zechariah was the son of Iddo. It is believed that Berechiah, the son of Iddo, died before Iddo, so that Zechariah succeeded Iddo as the head of the family (Nehemiah 12:16). This undoubtedly is the reason why Ezra in his purely historical record (Ezra 5:1) calls Zechariah "son" of the more illustrious grandfather (Laetsch, page 403, *Minor Prophets*). In connection with Ezra 5:1, it also needs to be remembered that the Hebrew word "*ben*" can be equivalent to the English word grandson. Compare Laban, Nahor's grandson (Genesis 21: 20-21, 28:2-5), called the son of Nahor (Genesis 29:5), see also 2 Kings 9:14-20 (Jehu), 22:2 (Josiah), etc. Ezra 5:1 can not be used to prove that a different family is being spoken of but it is the same family, the family of Zechariah ben Berechiah ben Iddo.

Because of his name, Archer in his "Survey of Old Testament Introduction" conjectures that the prophet received his name because "presumably, the Lord had remembered the prayer of his parents for a baby boy." We realize this is only conjecture and have no Scriptural support. We do know, however, that Zechariah was young (chapter 2:4) contemporary and co-worker of Haggai (Ezra 5). He continued Haggai's work by encouraging the returned captives to rebuild the Temple of the Lord. His mission was to proclaim to the poor and despondent repatriated people that the great Messianic future awaited them, even though it would come about only after much tribulation. Like Haggai, Zechariah dates his prophecies and visions ( the first date mentioned in 11:1 is the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Darius and the last in 7:1 as the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Darius in the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month). Quite properly, the prophet is sometimes called the prophet of Passion week, for beginning with the entry into Jerusalem (chapter 9:9) he foretells a number of incidents of the same week (chapter 11:13 - "then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord." Chapter 12:10 - "And will pout out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on he whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.." Chapter 13:7 - 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man, My Associate,' declares the Lord of hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; and I will turn my hand against the little one.'" Zechariah refers frequently to the Torah. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel, while expanding a number of features the Four world empires of Daniel. Like Isaiah, Zechariah is an evangelical prophet, and his evangelical emphasis appears throughout the book. "Zechariah preached to his people God's Law, in order to make them conscious of their wickedness and God's gospel, which alone could turn them back to the Lord to serve Him in loving obedience (Laetsch, page 403)."

The purpose of the prophet Zechariah has already been alluded to as the proclaiming of the Messianic future that awaited the Israelites. Young (*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, page 283) expands by saying, "Zechariah serves to encourage the nation in its divinely appointed task. The indignation of the Lord has come, he teaches, because of the people's sin. If then the nation will humble itself before God, it will have a glorious future. The heathen nations will one day be cast down and Jerusalem will prosper. This future spiritual blessing will be brought about through the Messiah." In the supplement to the Thompson Bible, Zechariah's purpose is

described in this way, “Like Haggai, he saw the sinful condition of his people, and uttered strong exhortations which aided in the building of the Temple. But his prophecy had a broader scope - he looked down the ages and beheld the coming of the Messiah King and the dawning of a brighter day for Zion (page 205). Zechariah proclaimed both the Law and the Gospel, he urged the Israelites to repent of their sins and to be obedient to God while he held before them the blessed hope of the forgiveness of sins that the coming Messiah would win for them and all men.

We cannot be certain how long Zechariah continued his activity. Nehemiah 12: 16, 26 are sometimes adduced to prove that he was still active in the days of Nehemiah (445-433). This would mean that the prophet lived to quite an old age. Depending on how one interprets his age as a “young man” in the beginning of his ministry, he would be about one hundred years old if he lived to the days of Nehemiah. This is certainly not impossible. He would then have been active during the reign of Darius I (521 - 485), Xerxes (485-465), and Artaxerxes I (465-425). Others contend that Nehemiah 12:26 refers back to the list of priests begun in verse 22 and not back to the list begun in verse 12 which would include Zechariah.

Archer concludes his remarks on the life of Zechariah with the thought, “We have no further information concerning Zechariah’s personal career, except the reference in Matthew 23:35, which seems to indicate he was martyred by mob action in the Temple grounds (since the Zechariah that Christ mentions is said to be the son of Berechiah rather than of Jehoiada, who however met his end in a like manner in the days of king Joash, according to 2 Chronicles 24:20-21).” Archer seems to stand alone in his conclusion. The Zechariah referred to in Matthew 23:35 is believed to be the son of Jehoiada. This is explained in either of the two suggested solutions. First, it was not uncommon for the Israelites to receive a second name. The Zechariah mentioned by Jesus could have been the Son of Jehoiada Berechiah. Or secondly, the Hebrew word “ben” in 2 Chronicles could mean grandson as in a similar situation noted earlier and thus connecting the man with his more illustrious grandfather in Chronicles while Matthew chose to report his father’s name and not his grandfather’s name. Either solution answers the question, it is highly doubtful that the man mentioned by Jesus and recorded for us by Matthew is the same Zechariah who wrote the prophecy known as the book of Zechariah.

### **The Unity of Authorship**

For more than 2000 years, Zechariah was universally regarded as the author of the entire book. But with the rise of higher criticism, the book of Zechariah and its unity and its authorship came into question. The critics of the unity of the book divide it into two sections (the book lends itself well to this division since it begins with visions and closes with prophecy). Chapters 1-8 are credited to the prophet Zechariah and chapters 9-14 are said to be by different authors or authors unknown. The dating and authorship of the second section has been hotly debated among the critics and opinions as to these matters are almost as numerous as the critics themselves. Yet their theories fall into two general categories: the pre-exilic theory or the post-Zecharian theory. The pre-exilic theory began with a man by the name of Joseph Bede (1653) a scholar of Cambridge. Bede was troubled by the quotation of Zechariah 11:12-13 in Matthew 27:9-10, where the prophecy is attributed to Jeremiah. Bede’s solution to the problem was to maintain that chapters 9-14 were not the work of Zechariah but the work of Jeremiah. This appears to be the main argument for those who had accepted this theory. In his book *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* Arndt suggests two very acceptable solutions. First he explains that the quote in question is a combination of quotes from Zechariah and Jeremiah. He continues, “No one will take it amiss if a work which has two authors is, in a brief allusion to it, ascribed to merely one of them, especially if this writer happens to be the more prominent of the two...hence it is not surprising that a prophecy which can be traced back to both of them is called a prophecy of Jeremiah, even though the greater part of it is taken from Zechariah (page 52).” Secondly, Arndt suggests, “there is good evidence for the assumption that the Jews, in their arrangement of the books of the Prophets, placed Jeremiah first. Now, we find that in all ages people have often designated a collection of writings by the name of the first one, which in such cases usually is one of importance...From this point of view, too, every vestige of contradiction between Matthew 27:9-10 and the Old

Testament must disappear (Page 53).” Although the original grounds for doubting the unity of Zechariah is cleared up, Bede opened the flood gates for other objections. All Old Testament introductions treat these objections and ideas at great length. Let it be sufficient to say that the pre-exilic theory has now for the most part fallen in stature in the eyes of the critics. As Young states, “The pre-exilic hypothesis, once triumphantly proclaimed as one of the surest results of modern criticism, has no defenders in the present day.”

Yet the pre-exilic theory only gave way to the post-Zecharian theory. As far as can be determined Hugo Grotius, in 1644, is credited with the thought that chapters 9-14- are from a date later than Zechariah. Again we note there is little agreement among the higher critics as to the authorship. The only point of agreement is that Zechariah did not write these chapters. The same holds true of the dating of chapters 9-14. For example, some claim them to be from the Seleucid period (300) and others claim they are from the Maccabean period (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC). Critics who favor the later dating (post-Zecharian theory) consider such things as the grammar, vocabulary, style and content to support their ideas. It is difficult to examine all of the claims that are made so we will seek to summarize the main points the critics make.

1. Objection: The content of the book is too different to be by the same author. Chapters 1-8 are visions, while chapters 9-14 are prophecies and not visions.

Answer: This is really no valid argument against authorship. If the author had to change every time the subject changed there would be no end to the number of authors.

2. Objection: There are chronological difficulties. The Greeks (Javans, Ionians) are named as enemies of Israel in chapter 9: 13, hence the book cannot be dated prior to the Alexandrian era, 300-200.

Answer: There is no reason to assume that the Ionians were unknown to the Jews of the time of Zechariah. Moses names them in his table of nations (Gen. 10: 2, 4; cpl. Chron. 5: 7). Ionians had colonized the western coastlands of Asia Minor as early as the tenth century BC. Already in Joel’s and Obediah’s days they had bought and sold Jewish slaves (Joel 3: 6, Obad. 20).

3. Objection: There are differences in language and style.

Answer: What differences there are may well be explained by the different content. A careful study of the language even reveals a very close unity.

4. Objection: The author of part I uses introductory phrases which do not occur in part II.

Answer: The same usage is observed by Hosea (cp. Chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-14.)

5. Objection: The obscure historical allusions and apocalyptic eschatology of chapters 9-14, contrast sharply with the clear historical background of chapters 1-8.

Answer: There is no reason why the Lord may not have chosen the same man to write clear history and apocalyptic eschatology. These so-called obscure allusions remain obscure only if one refers them to the contemporaneous history of the author and seeks to identify them with occurrences in his lifetime. These prophecies are of the Messianic era, of the New Testament church, in terms of Old Testament times. And with this we can conclude by saying that there is no reason whatsoever to doubt that Zechariah ben Berechiah ben Iddo wrote the entire book that bears his name.

## **The Content**

The book of Zechariah consists of three parts: the first, chapters 1-6, consists of eight visions; the second, chapters 7 and 8 answers the question concerning the observance of fasts; and the third, chapters 9-14 prophesies concerning the future powers of the world and the kingdom of God.

- I. A Series of 8 Visions and a Symbolic Action: 1-6
  - A. Title and Author: 1:1
  - B. The prophet admonishes the people not to follow their forefathers' evil example, but to turn to the Lord: 1:2-6
  - C. The vision of the horsemen in the myrtle grove: 1:7-17
  - D. The vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen: 1:18-21
  - E. The vision of the man with the measuring line: 2:1-15
  - F. The vision of Joshua the high priest before the angel: 3:1-10
  - G. The vision of the golden candlestick: 4:1-14
  - H. The vision of the flying scroll: 5:1-4
  - I. The vision of the woman and the ephah: 5:5-11
  - J. The vision of the four chariots: 6:1-8
  - K. A symbolic act—the crowning of the high priest: 6:9-15
  
- II. Answer to the question concerning fasts: 7-8
  - A. Should a fast instituted in calamitous times be maintained? 7:1-5
  - B. Fasting is an indifferent thing: 7:6-7
  - C. In the past they were disobedient and were punished: 7:8-14
  - D. The Lord will show his love for Zion and will fill Jerusalem with happy people: 8:1-8
  - E. God will bless the people in the future, if they are obedient: 8:9-17
  - F. The fasts will be turned into festivals, calamities forgotten: 8: 18-23
  
- III. The future of the world powers and the kingdom of God: 9-14
  - A. The first prophecy
    1. The heathen will be destroyed, Israel shall dwell safely: 9:1-3
    2. The King shall come to Zion and bring a kingdom of peace: 9:9-10
    3. A united Israel shall vanquish its enemies and be glorious: 9:11-17
    4. These blessings come from the Lord, not from idols: 10: 1-2
    5. Evil rulers shall be removed, Israel established: 10:3-4
    6. Israel and Judah together shall triumph over foes: 10: 5-7
    7. The people shall be gathered, dwell in their own land: 10:8-12
    8. The Holy Land is threatened with judgement: 11:1-3
    9. Punishment is caused by rejection of God's Good Shepherd: 11:4-14
    10. A foolish shepherd will destroy the people and perish: 11:15-17
  
  - B. The second prophecy
    1. Foes will be overthrown: 12:1-9
    2. God's Holy Spirit shall produce a national repentance: 12:10-14
    3. Repentance will remove the defilement and idolatry: 13:1-6
    4. Israel punished for smiting the Good Shepherd: 13:7-9
    5. The Lord comes to help plundered Jerusalem: 14:1-7
    6. The Lord shall be acknowledged as King of all the earth: 14:8-11
    7. The heathen shall be converted and all shall be holy: 14:12-21