

CHAPTER XV

Z E C H A R I A H

THE STRUCTURE OF ZECHARIAH

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- B. The Establishment of Messiah's Kingdom—Chs. 9-14.
- 1—Chs. 9, 10. The Deliverance of Israel and Judah.
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The Problem of Authorship.

THAT Zechariah falls clearly into two distinct parts (chs. 1-8; 9-14) is denied by none. Nor is it denied that the differences between the two parts are so great that had they stood separately in the Bible none would have thought of bringing them together. It has also been shown, though this is not universally recognized, that there is a line of division in the second part as well, *viz.* chs. 9-11; 12-14. With this must be connected the fact that 9: 1; 12: 1; Mal. 1: 1 all contain a formula unique in the prophetic books, *viz.* "the burden (or oracle) of the word of Jehovah . . ."

As early as 1653 Mede attributed chs. 9-14 to Jeremiah on the basis of Matt. 27: 9, which attributes Zech 11: 12f to that prophet. Modern widely diverging views may be roughly classified as follows:

(1) The whole book is by Zechariah.¹ This view is entirely tenable, but does not really explain the facts.

(2) The second part is a unity and is later than Zechariah, though there are wide variations in the date suggested.²

(3) Zech. 9-11; Zech. 12-14; Mal. 1-4 are three anonymous prophecies—for the authorship of Malachi see ch. XVI—of which the first is pre-exilic, the second post-exilic, but not much later than Zechariah, the third not later than 450 B.C.

(4) This is much as the preceding, but it places the two sections of Zech. 9-14 not earlier than the time of Alexander the Great (330 B.C.), some putting portions as late as Maccabean times right down to 100 B.C.³

We personally tend to the third view. There is no valid reason why there should not be anonymous prophetic portions in the Old Testament, and if there are, the end of the Book of the Twelve would be the natural place for them. Once Malachi was looked on as a proper name, it was almost inevitable that the other two portions should be taken up into Zechariah, the more so as this made the total of Minor Prophets twelve, the number of the tribes of Israel.

Contacts between the style of chs. 9-11 and Jeremiah are too slight to furnish any proofs on literary grounds for Mede's attribution. At the same time there is very much in these chapters than cannot find any really satisfactory explanation on the supposition of a post-exilic date. The mention of Assyria in 10 : 11 is an outstanding example. If the section is pre-exilic, it will date between the captivity of the North and the fall of Nineveh. 9 : 13 no more demands a post-exilic date than does Joel 3 : 6.

It is difficult to understand the reasoning that would attribute a really late date to Zech. 9-14. It ignores the universally recognized fact that the canon of the prophets was closed at the latest by 200 B.C. and that the LXX translation of the prophets will have been made between 200 and 150 B.C. That they were not officially included in the canon after its having been closed is certain; that they were smuggled into both the Hebrew and the LXX is a nightmare.

The Prophet and his Message.

Zechariah was the grandson of Iddo (1 : 1), a priest who returned from Babylonia with Zerubbabel (Neh. 12 : 4, cf.

¹ So ISBE, article Zechariah, Book of; Young, pp. 269-273; Baron: *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*, ch. XIII. Harrison does not commit himself.

² So Barnes: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi (C.B.).

³ So HDB, article Zechariah, Book of; Driver, LOT, pp. 348-355; Kirkpatrick, pp. 442-456; for the extreme view Oesterley and Robinson: *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*, pp. 419-425.

12: 16). The non-mention of his father Berechiah in Neh. 12: 16; Ezra 5: 1; 6: 14 suggests that he may have died young. Nothing more is known or can be inferred from his prophecies about Zechariah, except that he was evidently a student of his prophetic predecessors. The suggestion on the basis of 2: 4 that he was young depends on what is almost certainly a false interpretation.

Chs. 1-8 present many difficulties in interpretation mainly because of the apocalyptic visions they contain (see p. 115) in which the prophet's own time and the final crisis of the Day of the Lord tend to become blended.

Chs. 9-14 are also apocalyptic, but in the general style of the older apocalyptic passages. The background and sometimes even the foreground are vague, and exact interpretation is at times impossible. The difficulty is increased by the chapters consisting of a considerable number of non-connected shorter prophecies bound together merely by an inner spiritual link.

Just as in Ezek. 40-48 God does not appear, and in the visions He does not speak directly to Zechariah. His place is taken by that mysterious figure from the earlier books of the Old Testament, the Angel of Jehovah. In numerous passages the angel of Jehovah means no more than the angel, any angel, already introduced. In such cases the context makes it clear, and this is true of the only passage where the term is used of a man (Mal. 2: 7, *q.v.*); for Hag. 1: 13 see p. 120f. But in other passages the context demands that the Angel of Jehovah should be an exalted and unique figure. Davidson defines Him excellently, "The Angel of the Lord is Jehovah present in definite time and particular place."¹ The traditional Christian interpretation of the Angel of Jehovah as the preincarnate Son is, we believe, correct, but this is based on general analogies rather than on any definite Scriptural proof. The use of the term in Zechariah stresses that though God is transcendent, far above His creation, yet He finds means of keeping in touch with His own people, and that personally and not through some mere angelic intermediary.

In the former section of the book the transcendent power of God is particularly stressed by the constant use of Jehovah of hosts (*Jehovah Zeba'oth*). In these eight chapters, if we omit a couple of cases where Jehovah means the Angel of Jehovah, we have Jehovah of hosts used 48 times, Jehovah only 33. This is unique in the Old Testament, the nearest comparable case being Haggai (—there is nothing comparable in chs. 9-14, where the figures are 8 and 39, surely a very strong argument against authorship by Zechariah of these chapters).

¹ *The Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 297f.

Whether the name Jehovah of hosts may have meant merely Jehovah of the armies of Israel, when we first find it used at the end of the period of the Judges (cf. I Sam. 1: 3), we cannot know for certain, though we doubt it. In the mouth of the great prophets the hosts are the hosts of heaven, and that is the meaning for Zechariah too. With him it has an even deeper meaning, for in exile the Jews had become familiar with the Babylonian worship of the heavenly bodies and later with the new Iranian teaching of Zoroaster with its concept of hosts of warring angels. Zechariah affirms that Jehovah is the God of whatever powers and hosts there may be. The LXX has understood his meaning very well. Normally it simply transliterates *Zeba'oth* as *Sebaoth*, but in Zechariah it renders *Pantokrator*, All-Sovereign.

Though the object of the first eight chapters is to encourage the builders of the Temple in their difficulties, the message is shot through with that deep moral earnestness that is never far distant from the true prophets; it also looks forward all the time to the Day of the Lord.

The Call to Repentance (1: 1-6).

This opening section strikes the underlying assumption behind all the future encouragement. God will bless, but only a people that have returned to Him and that do His will. Zechariah reinforces his appeal by recalling the past.

The Eight Visions (1: 7-6: 8).

While there is an undoubted predictive element in these visions, they are not really comparable with those in Daniel. Efforts to see in them mainly the more distant future of the Jews are hardly convincing. This is equally true of the attempt to interpret them solely as a symbolic description of Zechariah's own time and the immediate future. A major element in them is timeless, stressing major spiritual truths in the light of the prophet's own time.

The first and last vision with their message of divine sovereignty provide the framework for the rest. They divide naturally into three groups: visions I to III are concerned mainly with the rebuilding of the Temple, IV and V with Joshua and Zerubbabel, the leaders of the people, VI to VIII with the spiritual transformation of the people.

I. The Angel among the Myrtles (1: 7-17).

In a night vision Zechariah sees a man, later identified as the Angel of Jehovah, sitting on His horse "among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom." He had just been joined by other angelic riders belonging to three distinct groups as

shown by the colour of their horses; they give a report on the earth that all was still and at rest (ver. 11). The Angel of Jehovah then pleads for Jerusalem and there comes a comfortable message for the prophet (vers. 14-17).

Taken literally ver. 11 cannot be true of the second year of Darius. Even if, as we think, the two main rebellions had been broken, there was obviously still fighting to come. On the other hand the 70 years of ver. 12 (a round figure probably based on Jer. 25: 11; 29: 10 for it was about 66 years since the destruction of the Temple) tie down the vision to the prophet's own time. The clue is given by ver. 15, for the same people must be meant as in ver. 11, and the mere fact of peace would not have awakened God's displeasure.

The Angel of Jehovah has come to Jerusalem, but not into it, for the Temple has not yet been rebuilt. "The bottom" is somewhere near the city, and is probably chosen for the scene of the vision, even as is the Hebrew word that describes it, to typify the low position of the Jews. The angel riders had ridden out in three directions (west of Palestine is the Mediterranean!) and now give their report. When it is realized that they are not being sent out, but that their task is finished, it will prevent any linking of this vision with 6: 1-8, with Daniel or Revelation. All the peoples were at arrogant ease and self-confident peace with no thought of Jehovah of hosts or of the state of His people. It is here that we find the timelessness of the vision. The colours of the horses only distinguish the three groups and have no further meaning.

II. *Four Horns and Four Craftsmen* (1: 18-21).

How God is to carry out His purposes is shown in the next vision. Out of the surrounding night (ver. 8) Zechariah sees four great threatening horns. They are not identified, and to do so with the four beasts of Dan. 7 or otherwise is entirely to miss the point. There are four for the four corners of the earth, and they represent all who have oppressed and scattered Israel and Judah, or who ever will.

Equally unidentified are the four craftsmen (both A.V. carpenters, R.V., R.S.V. smiths are too precise) who frighten them away—fray (ver. 21) is too weak. God has His remedy for every oppressor. But the fact that they are craftsmen almost certainly points to the rebuilding of the Temple, which would be the best way of guaranteeing the divine help.

III. *The Unneeded Measuring Line* (Ch. 2).

Zechariah sees a young man—not an angel—going out to measure the proposed line of Jerusalem's walls. Then the interpreting angel (1: 9, 19) came forward, *i.e.* appeared (ver. 3)

and commanded yet "another angel" to run and stop the young man, for his work was unnecessary. The reason was not so much that Jerusalem would be larger than any man's optimism (ver. 4) but rather that Jehovah Himself would be their wall (ver. 5).

This ends the first group of visions and so there follows a call to those still in exile to return (vers. 6-9) and a picture of Zion's future glory. Though ver. 13 could refer to Jehovah's intervention in Zechariah's day, it obviously looks forward to the Day of the Lord.

IV. *The Acquittal of the High Priest* (Ch. 3).

There is no suggestion here that the scene is set in heaven. Perhaps the most striking feature is Joshua's complete passivity. The reason probably lies in the ambiguity of "stand before" (ver. 1), which makes us misinterpret the vision. The phrase may mean to stand in attendance (ver. 4), or to stand before a judge, but it also means to carry out one's priestly ministry, e.g. Deut. 10: 8, and that is its probable meaning here.

Zechariah sees Joshua standing ministering, perhaps in the rebuilt Temple, for it is a vision. All unknown to him Satan is standing ready to accuse him as the prosecutor—there is no indication that he had already spoken. There is no suggestion of personal fault on Joshua's part. His priestly garments are filthy because he represents the people. Consistently with that there is no personal confession.

Here Zechariah strikes the deeper note suggested by his introductory prophecy. The acceptance of Joshua and so of the people is an act of pure grace which looks to a yet future act of God (ver. 9). That God is willing to acknowledge Joshua and his fellow priests is a sign (ver. 8, R.V.) of the future removal of sin, which is linked with the Messiah, the Shoot (R.V. mg., cf. 6: 12 mg.; Isa. 4: 2 mg.; 11: 1; Jer. 23: 5 mg.; 33: 15). The interpretation of ver. 9 is very difficult, but there is no real doubt that the stone is that of 4: 7, and that it is to be linked with Ps. 118: 22; Isa. 28: 16. It is a headstone, i.e. the last stone to be put in place, but it will not fit unless the building has been made exactly to plan; it has been carved by Jehovah Himself.

V. *The Golden Lampstand* (Ch. 4).

The vision is of a seven-branched lampstand, which differed from that in the Temple by having a bowl above the lamps, supplying oil to the lamps by seven golden tubes. This means that providing the bowl was kept filled with oil, the lights were not dependent on human care as was the case in the

Temple. At first sight it would appear that the two olive trees (vers. 3, 12) supplied the necessary oil to the bowl. But the difficult Hebrew of ver. 12 may and probably does mean that the oil is being emptied out of the bowl not merely into the lamps but into the olive trees as well; the trees are obviously Zerubbabel and Joshua. If this is correct, it means that in the theocracy the light of witness is not maintained by the civil and religious administration, but they and the light are maintained by God. It would seem that ver. 10b (read, These seven are the eyes of Jehovah . . .) is the answer to ver. 5. For the idea of the seven eyes cf. 3: 9; Rev. 1: 4.

Just as the previous vision contained a message to Joshua looking forward to the Messiah, so here is a similar message to Zerubbabel (vers. 6-10a). Though it promises that Zerubbabel will finish building the Temple, it looks to Zerubbabel's Messianic descendant, for the headstone is both Messianic and indeed the Messiah (see above).

VI. *The Flying Roll* (5: 1-4).

Zechariah sees a great sheet of leather 30' by 15' (the roll was unrolled!) flying through the air. Since these are the dimensions of the Holy Place in the Tabernacle, it is reasonable to suppose that the roll contained the main provisions of the Law. Whenever in the vision it came to the house of the thief and perjurer—typical sinners—it brought destruction with it. The promise had been given in 3: 9 of the removal of sin. Here we are reminded that where men do not repent, the removal of sin implies the destruction of the sinner.

VII. *The Ephah* (5: 5-11).

Though the vision clearly shows the removal of wickedness from the land after the individual sinners had been dealt with, there seems no measure of agreement as to how its details should be interpreted. This has opened the door to various imaginative efforts that do not call for mention. The ephah and the talent may suggest that commerce is envisaged; it is quite possible that the woman personifies idolatry. In any case we have a promise which obviously looks to the Day of the Lord for its perfect fulfilment.

VIII. *The Four Chariots* (6: 1-8).

The visions end as they begin with the sovereignty of God over the earth. The four winds (or spirits) of heaven issue out between the mountains of brass (probably the popular idea of the gate of heaven) in form as chariots, which imply war. The colour of the horses probably merely serves to distinguish them one from another and has no further meaning

(cf. 1: 8). Any linking with Daniel is far-fetched, and while some particular situation in the prophet's own time is doubtless envisaged, the general certainty of God's rule is the fundamental thought.

The Crowning of Joshua (6: 9-15).

There is an inner contradiction in this incident, for to crown the high priest as Messianic king (ver. 12f) would be to run counter to all prophecy. In addition the promise that he should build the Temple had been earlier given to Zerubbabel (4: 9). As a result most moderns assume that it was Zerubbabel that was crowned, but when the Persians heard of it he lost his position and perhaps his life. To hide the disappointment the prophecy was distorted by substituting Joshua's name. The plausibility of this view is increased by the mistaken English translation in ver. 12, "Behold the man . . ."; it should be "Behold a man . . .", not necessarily identifying the person crowned with the prophecy.

Note that we are not dealing with a crowning or anointing ceremony. The crown (the singular is correct, so versions, R.S.V., N.E.B.) is a sign of honour rather than royalty—the Hebrew does not use the usual word for the royal crown. At the same time it was an honour which might indeed have been fatal for Zerubbabel, but not for Joshua. Zechariah gives honour to Joshua, but indicates that Zerubbabel ranks higher for he is the ancestor of the Messiah. In so doing, however, he foreshadows him who was to be priest-king for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110: 4; Heb. 6: 20).

While like Haggai, Zechariah saw in Zerubbabel the foreshadowing of the Messiah (see note on Hag. 2: 23), he did not think him the Messiah. The language always falls short of complete identification. In addition there is always an eschatological element present which reminds us that Zechariah is looking to the future, however near he may hope it to be. It may be for this reason that he prefers to use the title Shoot, which although it has Messianic connotations cannot be said to be purely Messianic.

We do not doubt that the R.V. mg., R.S.V., N.E.B. are correct in ver. 13; it is a promise that Joshua shall share in Zerubbabel's rule; at the same time the Hebrew is ambiguous, and in its deeper fulfilment it points to Jesus Christ the priest-king as expressed by the R.V. text.

The New Era (Chs. 7, 8).

The fall of Jerusalem had led to the introduction of four fasts (8: 19)—for that of the fourth month see II Kings 25: 3f; Jer. 39: 2f; for that of the fifth II Kings 25: 8ff; Jer. 52: 12ff;

for that of the seventh II Kings 25: 25; for that of the tenth II Kings 25: 1; Jer. 39: 1. The men of Bethel had now come to realize that with the restoration the keeping of them was questionable sense—ritual often paralyses common sense and is maintained long after it has lost its meaning—and so they came to lay the matter before the Jerusalem authorities. This led to a series of four prophetic messages by Zechariah.

7: 4-14 deals with the true meaning of fasting and reminds us strongly of Isa. 58: 1-12; it reaffirms the old prophetic stress on social righteousness.

8: 1-8 gives a picture of the glorious future of Jerusalem.

8: 9-17 contrasts the condition after the return from exile with the future, and gives the conditions for prosperity.

8: 18-23 gives a concluding picture of the future when Jerusalem will be the religious centre of the world.

The Establishment of Messiah's Kingdom (Chs. 9-14).

We have already pointed out that these chapters are apocalyptic, and as is usual in such prophecies the general drift is clear enough, but detailed interpretation is impossible—he who thinks otherwise should learn humility from those as good as he who have interpreted them otherwise. We must content ourselves with pointing out the main subdivisions.

(a) 9: 1-8. Jehovah's vengeance on Israel's neighbours.

(b) 9: 9f. The Messianic king of peace.

(c) 9: 11-17. Israel freed from captivity is victorious over her enemies. Obviously the fulfilment of this must precede (b) unless it is completely spiritualized.

(d) 10: 1f. A warning against superstition and magic arts. It may be in its present position because the closing words link it superficially with what follows.

(e) 10: 3-12. The raising up of rulers by God who shall lead Judah and Ephraim back to the land. Though not exclusively Messianic, there is a Messianic note in it. For the use of shepherd see p. 111.

(f) 11: 1ff. A visitation on the land. There is no possibility of identifying the particular invader. Since the mention of shepherds may explain its position here, we cannot even assume that it is eschatological.

(g) 11: 4-14. The rejection of Jehovah's Shepherd. The passage becomes easier when one remembers that the prophet is acting allegorically (with an imaginary flock?), and sometimes it is the prophet, sometimes God, who speaks in the first person.

(h) 11: 15ff. The appointment of a worthless king as a punishment. Probably a historic figure of the past used to prefigure one yet future.

(i) 12: 1-9. The deliverance of Jerusalem, cf. 14: 1-15.

(j) 12: 10-14. Judah's repentance. On the basis of John 19: 37; Rev. 1: 7, it is probably better to follow the R.V. mg. in ver. 10. The reference in ver. 11 has never been satisfactorily explained.

(k) 13: 1-6. The cleansing of Judah from all taint of sin and false prophecy.

(l) 13: 7ff. The smiting of the Shepherd, and its fruit. Some link this with 11: 15ff, but there is really no serious ground for this. It is far more satisfactory to link in with 12: 10 and refer it to our Lord. The Shepherd is called Jehovah's fellow, because Jehovah is the supreme Shepherd of Israel, cf. I Pet. 5: 1ff.

(m) 14: 1-5. The Lord comes to deliver Jerusalem.

(n) 14: 6-21. Millennial glory. Read the mg. in ver. 21, as in R.S.V., N.E.B.