

Introduction to Zechariah

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Prescript

The notes I have presented in these pages are not intended to be a scholarly commentary, supported by scholarly references. They seek primarily to provide Bible students information available in scholarly resources, and in some cases, for additional references, in the scholarly commentaries I have included in the bibliography below.

The purpose I have in mind is to provide *a scholarly context or background* to the prophetic book, **Zechariah**, to guide the student or reader in their research and teaching.

The studies seek to answer the questions, “*What is this book all about, and how does it go about its business?*”

These notes serve as a proposed *outline guide* for the student or teacher in *preparing personal studies, or for teaching and study notes*. These notes are drawn from the Bible Dictionaries and Bible Encyclopedia referenced below in the Bibliography, from select commentaries, and from other research references drawn from my own years of research in the field of *apocalyptic eschatology and Jewish mysticism*.

Since Zechariah manifests significant *apocalyptic* and *eschatological* emphases I have included several *apocalyptic resources* and notes in the bibliography.

Zechariah, the Prophetic Book

This title may sound superfluous! Zechariah is obviously a prophetic book included in the twelve *Minor Prophets*! But, “in the *Tanakh, the Hebrew Old Testament, the Twelve* appear as a single book, in the prophetic collection, the *Nevi'im*¹, the prophets and second of three major divisions of the *Tanakh*.

In the Christian Old Testament, the collection appears as twelve individual books, one for each of the prophets: the books of *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*.

However, for Bible scholarship and biblical interpretation, the question must be asked, and answered in some detail; “*what kind (genre) as a prophetic book is Zechariah, when and to whom was it written, what kind of literature does it manifest, is it in an acrostic poetic style like Lamentations, or does it present itself in a historical genre or in a different literary form?*”

In other words, what kind of **prophetic literature** is Zechariah?

We will notice that most scholars identify Zechariah as *prophetic literature in an apocalyptic genre!* if so, “*how does this work, and how does it influence our reading and interpretation.*”

We might find more to say in Zechariah, 14 chapters, than the length of Zechariah implies. In contrast to Isaiah and Jeremiah, each over 60 chapters, each presenting important Messianic prophecies, Zechariah is critical, for instance, in the figurative symbolism and understanding of one of our favorite New Testament books, *Revelation*.

¹ The Hebrew word for prophet is *Navi*.

Both F. F. Bruce and Ernst Käsemann, along with a number of New Testament scholars, have agreed that “*apocalyptic is the mother of New Testament theology*,” and to plagiarize their phrase, “*Zecharia is the grandmother of New Testament Apocalyptic!*”

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Brief Introduction to Apocalyptic Theology

We will learn that the Apocalyptic genre is the favored genre of people *experiencing religious, political, and cultural persecution*, almost the "home" experience of 300 BCE to 300 CE Jewish and Christian believers!

The literature of this era, as depicted in the *Apocryphal, Pseudepigraphical, and Apocalyptic* literature relates to such *oppression and persecution*. The apocalyptic genre had been present in both ancient Greek, Babylonian, and Egyptian "*written forms, pictographs, inscriptions, and clay tablets*" well before it became a standard of Jewish literature. Apocalyptic was a ready-made genre, expression; engraved, written, and spoken, for Jewish prophets of the sixth and later century traumatic experiences of Israel.

Zechariah falls into the closing centuries of political and religious struggles of Judea in the Second-Temple era. The apocalyptic genre was there for telling Zechariah's story!

The Term Apocalyptic

"Apocalyptic derives from the Greek word *apokalypsis* meaning "a revelation, an uncovering, a disclosure." Apocalyptic is a broad term, appearing in the modern era of Biblical criticism at the beginning of the 19th cent. *The term is used to designate those ancient visionary writings or parts of writings which, like the NT apocalypse from which the name is derived, namely, the book of Revelation, claims to reveal mysteries relating to the end of the world (eschatological age) and the glories of a future transcendent world (age) that is to break into human experience.*

Apocalyptic literature is not, however, limited to the canonical Scriptures, for a vast pool of apocalyptic, or heavily apocalyptically flavored texts are available to the biblical critic. This rich storehouse of information provided an appropriate and powerful vehicle for the authors of our biblical texts. This is particularly true of the author of Revelation who found in the apocalyptic mindset, genre, and literature a most suitable medium for his theological message.

The term is used in a variety of ways and may refer to a range of concepts and theological motifs typical of this genre of literature. It may refer to a sociological or theological mind set, a method of communicating, or a type (genre) of literature, all of which are heavily influenced by visions, symbols, cosmic eruptions and wars, and threatening beasts. Biblical apocalyptic is a distinctive Jewish and Christian phenomenon that flourished in the four centuries between 200 B. C. and 200 A. D. the roots of apocalyptic, however, reach back into the 6th and 5th cent. B. C. Two of the best examples of the Biblical genre are Daniel and the book of Revelation. Many other Biblical texts, both Old and New Testament draw in varying degrees on the apocalyptic genre: Isa 13:4-16; 24-27 (the "Isaiah

Apocalypse”); Joel 2; Zech 9-11, 12-14; Ezek 38-39; Amos 5:16-20; 9:11-15; Mk 13; Mat 23-25; Lk 21; 1 Thess 4-5; 2 Thess 2:1-2; 1 Cor 15; Rom 1:18-32; 8:18-25.

Many of the Pseudepigraphal and Apocryphal writings (see the glossary on these terms) are designated Apocalypses, or are considered to be heavily influenced by apocalyptic. Though no complete agreement exists, those so designated usually include Apocalypse of Abraham; Apocalypse of Baruch (II or Syriac Baruch); Apocalypse of Esdras (IV Ezra 3-14); I Enoch; Book of Elijah; I Baruch; Apocalypse of Moses (or the Life of Adam and Eve); Apocalypse of Sedrach; Apocalypse of Elijah; II Enoch; Assumption of Moses; Sibylline Oracles; Book of Jubilees; Testament of Abraham; Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs; Ascension of Isaiah, et. al. Of this list, the first four, plus the canonical apocalyptically influenced Daniel and Revelation, are the best literary examples of this type.

Several of the Dead Sea Scrolls are also considered to be significantly influenced by apocalyptic interests. In particular the War Scroll, the Description of the New Jerusalem, and the Thanksgiving Psalms manifest striking apocalyptic features. Several prominent apocalyptic works found among the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate the apocalyptic interests of the Dead Sea Covenanters. They are Daniel; I Enoch; and Jubilees.

Challenging questions arise when discussing Apocalyptic: How does one define Apocalyptic? What are its unique characteristics? How does it work, and what was its purpose? What unique sociological and religious contexts gave rise to this genre? And why was it so popular among Jewish and Christian writers during the 400 years of its zenith? Several challenging questions have challenged scholars addressing this unique and fascinating genre. Questions as to whether it constitutes an identifiable literary genre continue to be debated, although an Apocalyptic Group meeting as part of the Society of Biblical Studies study groups has made significant strides in identifying this genre. (See J. J. Collins’ two works referenced below in the Bibliography.) Those with somewhat negative attitudes toward an identifiable literary genre argue that apocalyptic simply uses, adapts, and transforms older traditional genres. Klaus Koch has, however, identified six general literary features which are normally present in apocalypses: 1) discourse cycles (frequently called “visions”) between the apocalyptic seer and a heavenly being, revealing the secret of man’s destiny; 2) formalized phraseology depicting the spiritual turmoil of the seer (trance, etc.) that accompanies the vision; 3) a paraenetic discourse conveying an eschatological ethic or an introductory legend illustrating proper behavior; 4) pseudonymity, bearing the name of some ancient worthy - although the book of Revelation is an exception; 5) mythical images rich in symbolism (animals, angels, demons, cosmic phenomena); and, 6) a composite character (70 percent of the book of Revelation is influenced significantly by previously written sources).

In terms of general content, apocalyptic is characterized by the belief 1) that the radical transcendent transformation of this world lies in the immediate future, Dan 12:11,12; Rev 22:20; II Baruch 85:10; IV Ezra 4:50; 2) that a cosmic catastrophe (war, fire, earthquake, famine, pestilence) precedes the end; 3) that the epochs of history leading up to the end are predetermined; 4) that a hierarchy of angels and demons mediate the events in the two worlds (this world and the one to come) and that victory is assured to the divine realm; 5) that a righteous remnant will enjoy the fruits of salvation in a heavenly Jerusalem; 6) that the act inaugurating the kingdom of God and marking the end of the present age is His (or the Son of Man’s) ascension to the heavenly throne; 7) that the actual establishment of the New Kingdom is effected through a royal mediator, such as the Messiah or the Son of Man, or simply an angel; 8) that the bliss to be enjoyed by the righteous can only be described as glory (Rev 21:1; Dan 12:3; I Enoch 50:1; etc.).

The origin of apocalyptic is variously ascribed to Hebrew prophecy, Iranian religion, Hellenistic syncretism, and Old Canaanite myths, with the greater number of scholars acknowledging at least the influence of eastern religion, particularly Zoroastrianism. For a full appraisal of the question of the origins of apocalyptic and the methodology used to answer it, see Paul D. Hanson, John J. Collins in

the Bibliography below. Points often debated in contemporary NT scholarship relate to what extent Jesus and the NT writers, especially Paul, were influenced by apocalyptic; to what extent was apocalyptic pessimistic about world history; and to what extent can the kingdom of God be continuous with this world or the present age or time.

John J. Collins and his working associates in the apocalyptic study group propose the following working definition of an apocalypse: “Specifically, an apocalypse is defined as: *‘a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcending reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.’*”

For the purpose of this study we will consider apocalyptic to be a mindset that expressed itself in literary form which eventually became an identifiable literary genre. The context of apocalyptic usually is a people under severe sociological, political, or religious opposition and persecution. Fundamentally pessimistic about human potential and the role of history (man’s effort) to resolve the problem, apocalyptic looks to divine or transcendent intervention as the only hope for the future. Drawing on cosmic visions in a kaleidoscopic manner, and an intense symbolism, the author paints impressionistic pictures as he develops his theme. The primary theme or theology of apocalyptic, especially as it relates to the biblical texts and in particular, Revelation, is that the only hope for victory over the “enemy” is God’s transcendent intervention. The persecuted are encouraged through the apocalyptic genre and its theology to not lose or compromise their faith, to be faithful to God “even unto death,” and God would transform any defeat into a magnificent victory. In the words of Paul (Rom 8:37ff) “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” A major theme in Revelation is that Christians conquer Satan and the “enemy” through dying for their faith (martyr from the Greek *martus* mean to “witness to one’s faith”). Martyrs are raised by the power of God, thus vindicated by God, and reign with Christ in God’s kingdom.²

Zechariah is a Prophecy in the Apocalyptic Genre, and serves as a Revelation from God

Phillip Jenkins makes the following statement regarding *Zechariah*, *Revelation*, and *Apocalyptic*, “I have been writing about the Old Testament book of Zechariah and where it stands in relation to the apocalyptic tradition, no less than to prophecy. Zechariah – and especially the final chapters, Deutero-Zechariah – were a huge influence on apocalyptic, and that is nowhere more clear than in the *New Testament Book of Revelation*. The closer we look at Zechariah, the clearer we see its role in early Christian thought. Most straightforward among these influences is Zechariah’s apocalyptic tone, in the conventional sense of that word. The book ends with a vision of Judgment and divine intervention into the world, from which would emerge a radically transformed and purified new order. Superficial resemblances are many, including the great war of the End Times, when all the armies will march on Jerusalem, and *God will step in at the very moment of apparent defeat and conquest*. So ruinous would the wars be that salvation would only be granted to a remnant of the people: “In the whole land, says the Lord, two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one-third shall be left alive.” (Zechariah 13:8). No less familiar is the vision of the New World.³”

Ian. A. Fair comment from summary of apocalyptic eschatology at the end of this study. “The New Testament apostolic writers and evangelists drew on these apocalyptic eschatological prophecies to *argue*, or prove typologically, *that Jesus is that eschatological king who saves those who will believe him and repent of their sinful ways*.”

² Ian. A. Fair, personal research notes, and commentary, *Conquering With Christ: A Commentary on Revelation*, ACU Press, 2011,

³ Jenkins, Phillip, *Zechariah and Revelation*, Anxious Bench Podcast, 2015.

It is helpful to remember that although the *apocalyptic eschatological* language is strange to our modern-day western heritage (after all, Americans have never been plundered and placed under oppressive kingdoms) the realm of apocalyptic eschatological symbolism was part of Israel's long history through the influence of Greek, Babylonian, and Egyptian "literature" and culture. Modern-day Evangelical Protestant Christians have only recently discovered what was an integral aspect of Israel's history!

Zechariah, The Prophet and His Prophecy

Zechariah Introduces himself and his first mission, Zech 1:1-6.

Zech 1:1-6. "In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, ² "The Lord was very angry with your fathers. ³ Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts: **Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.** ⁴ Be not like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or heed me, says the Lord. ⁵ Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us."

Zechariah's father was *Berechiah*, his grandfather was *Iddo*, one of the Jews who returned from exile with Zerubbabel and Joshua, Neh 12:1, 4, 7. Zechariah was attached to the Jewish priesthood through his father and grandfather, Iddo.

Being a contemporary of Haggai, Zechariah began his mission ca. 520 BCE. Unlike his older contemporary Haggai, who thundered short commands, Zechariah painted *vivid apocalyptic scenes*.

Zechariah's prophetic style is a little confusing! He combined historical prophetic announcements regarding the rebuilding of the Temple, and *apocalyptic judgment messages regarding the future*. The two can be separated by being aware of the *apocalyptic vocabulary* Zechariah could draw on, remember that the *apocalyptic genre, style and vocabulary* predated Zechariah by centuries of Jewish, Babylonian, Greek, and Egyptian usage.

The First message of Zechariah's initial section, Zech 1:1-8:23

Zechariah's prophecies are both *historical* and *apocalyptic*. They are defined by *two different vocabularies and styles*. Each *vocabulary style* must be read in the context of its literary style, the **first historical prophetic can be read historically**, the **second, dramatic apocalyptic judgment images must be read symbolically**.

In this process the reader, or interpreter, must be carefully informed by the *full range of apocalyptic eschatology* discussed above under "**Brief Introduction to Apocalyptic Theology.**"

Reading *apocalyptic genre* as a *historical prophecy* will only lead to confusion of contexts, styles, and messages! We should be reminded of Ernst Käsemann's, and others,' observation that *apocalyptic is the mother of New Testament theology*. The New Testament reader must constantly be aware of *the apocalyptic eschatological style* of the text.

If Käsemann and others are correct, then the same can be said of Old Testament *theological prophecies!* If the prophecies were presented in an *apocalyptic genre* (cf. *Daniel's visions etc., Ezekiel's mysterious experiences, Isaiah*) we should also understand that *apocalyptic* can also be the *mother of much Old Testament theology!*

Without a keen understanding of the apocalyptic genre, theology, and vocabulary, the reader of much Old Testament prophecies will be confused and misinformed, hence we have the *Dispensational* and *Premillennial* practice of interpreting these great books as historical prophecies, not identifying the symbolism of apocalyptic expressions!

Zech 1:1-8:23 and Zech 9:1-14:21 are *markedly dissimilar* in style, language, and subject matter.

The Second, message of Zechariah, Zech 9:1-14:21

This pericope is devoted to *messages for the era following the rebuilding of the Temple*. Moral wickedness, sin, and apostasy will permeate Israel's lifestyle and religion. This will not be tolerated by God.

Zechariah warns that if Israel repeats its past behavior of sinfulness and apostasy, the new Temple (historically the Second Temple of the restoration and Jesus' day) will be rejected and destroyed. The language of these prophecies is expressed in *highly symbolic apocalyptic language*.

The use of apocalyptic symbolism was intended to highlight the *trauma* and *oppressive experiences to be endured in such divine judgments*. Although later Jewish historians like Joseph may not have been apocalyptic in style they do record the unbelievable horror of the last days in besieged Jerusalem; mothers selling their babies to others for food!

The intended drama of the apocalyptic style was a vehicle of drawing attention to the seriousness of the coming divine activity.

Zechariah prophesies are an attention drawing apocalyptic symbolism of a *divine shepherd-king* who would come to deliver *repentant* Israel. However, eventually the *shepherd-king will be rejected* and *false shepherds will arise*. *The land will be rejected by God again, the shepherd-king killed, and Jerusalem will fall again*.

In the *eschatological age* God will, through His servant *shepherd-king*, establish an *eschatological kingdom*, welcome the nations who believe, and deliver and forgive repentant Israel.

There is in this section a *blend of styles in the prophetic messages*, the *historical* and the *apocalyptic styles*, whose differing symbolism must be respected.

The Historical, Cultural, and Religious Context of Zechariah

Zechariah's prophetic mission begins with the Persian decree of Cyrus ca 520 BCE of a return to Jerusalem. As a contemporary of Haggai and Nehemiah, his ministry continues through the period of resettlement in Jerusalem, the building of the walls of the city under Zerubbabel, the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem, and a striking reform under the reading of the Law, *Torah*, Ezra (Nehemiah 8).

Due to the remarkably different styles of Zech 1-8 and 9-14 it is possible to assume that they were written about two decades apart, *the first before the Temple was completed*, and the *later as the faith and religious practices of Israel were wearing thin*. The *first prophecies* were set in *historical* prophetic statements, *the second* in a *mix of historical and apocalyptic statements* whose dynamic must be respected and differentiated.

The **First Temple** under King Solomon was built ca. 940 BCE and destroyed in 586 BCE by Nebuchadnezzar. The **Second Temple** (Second Temple Judaism) was completed in 516 BCE under Zerubbabel, Haggai, Ezra, and destroyed by Rome in 66-70 CE.

The "**Third Messianic apocalyptic eschatological Temple**" prophesied in Zechariah 9-14 was established by Jesus' in his ministry, death, and the intervention of the Holy Spirit and the pouring out on the Day of Pentecost of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2, ca. 30 CE. This "church Temple" and eschatological kingdom will last until Jesus returns to close the age in judgment and salvation, and return to kingdom to God, 1 Cor 15, 2 Thess 4:13ff.

Zechariah's Prophecies are in two parts

Part One – Zech 1:1-8:23 and Part Two – Zech 8:1-14:21

Historical and Apocalyptic Prophecy

Zech 1:1-8:23 – Messages during the Restoration and Rebuilding the Temple

The First Message – Zech 1:1-6. Zechariah's personal calling, and a Call for National Repentance

Zech 1:1-6. ¹*In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet, saying,* ²*“The Lord was very angry with your fathers. ³Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. ⁴Be not like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or heed me, says the Lord. ⁵Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, **did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.**”*

The Second Message – Zech 1:7-8:23. Eight Visions Revealing God's Care for Israel

Note the *Jewish symbolism* of these *Visions*. The symbolism is important to God's message in *Revelation*; the Persecuted Saints belong to God and are protected by God. Revelation is not a historical fulfillment of these visions but is an *apocalyptic typological midrashic* reference to these visions. *We do not read these visions through Revelation, but read Revelation through the visions. This is how apocalyptic eschatology works!*

Vision 1. *Zech 1:7-17.* The horsemen among the myrtles. The horsemen are God's servants sent to patrol the earth and carry out his bidding. Note Zech 1:10 and Rev 6, God uses different agents to achieve his purpose; war, rebellion, famine, and death.

Vision 2. *Zech 1:18-21.* The four horns and four smiths. *Four political powers, Cf. Daniel's four beasts –Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Roman oppressive powers!*

Vision 3. *Zech 2:1-13.* Measuring the Temple. *God knows the size of his Temple, and who are his people.* Cf Rev 21:16.

Vision 4. *Zech 3:1-10.* Joshua, the High Priest. *The High Priest symbolizes the sacredness of the Nation*

Vision 5. *Zech 4:1-14.* The Seven Lampstands and Two Olive Trees. *Seven is a holy divine number; two represents truth and faithfulness*

Vision 6. *Zech 5:1-4.* The Flying Scroll. *It is large, representing the judgment of God on Israel.*

Vision 7. *Zech 5:7-11.* The Ephah of Iniquity. *The size and spread of iniquity.*

Vision 8. *Zech 6:1-15.* Four Chariots of Divine Judgment. *God's judgment is universal on all evil, cf. the chariot of Ezekiel with four wheels that go everywhere. Sequel, Joshua crowned representing a future divine representative, messianic.*

The Third Message – Zech 7:1-8:23. The Meaning of True Religion/Piety - Questions and Answers

Zech 7:1-3. *Inquiry regarding feasts.* The following sections of this section address such questions regarding Religious behaviour under the Restored Temple.

Zech 7:4-7. *Beware of hypocrisy in celebrating holy feasts.* Fasting is not for the person fasting, but for God.

Zech 7:8-14. *The Babylonian exile was because of Israel's own. The Lord judges righteously, so should Israel.* They should learn from that experience to treat others well.

Zech 8:1-17. *God's intention in punishing Israel for its sins was to restore Jerusalem and the Temple.* God is jealous for Jerusalem and the Temple and wants Israel to be jealous and treasure Jerusalem and the Temple as symbols of God's kingdom.

Zech 8:18-23. *Even the nations will seek to come to Jerusalem.* This is a prediction of final eschatological kingdom under the messianic shepherd-king.

Zech 8:18-23, “*And the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying,* ¹⁹ **“Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love truth and peace.** ²⁰ **“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities;** ²¹ **the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I am going.’** ²² **Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the Lord.** ²³ **Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten** (ten is metaphor for completeness indicating the completeness of the redemption provided by the Lord. Even the nations will seek it!) **men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”**

Part Two –Prophetic Messages Proclaimed After the Completion of the Temple – Possibly a Break in time! Zech 9:1-14:21

This section of prophetic messages is couched in a *deeply apocalyptic eschatological future figurative style and symbolism*. The prophecies are *deeply eschatological*, pronouncing a *coming future messianic redeemer king and kingdom*.

The New Testament apostolic messengers, Gospels and Epistles, framed their *Jesus- messianic narratives* around these Old Testament *apocalyptic eschatological prophecies of God's unending redemptive love*, proclaiming that *Jesus fulfills all these prophecies*, **Luke 24:44-49**:

“*Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.”* ⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,* ⁴⁶ *and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,* ⁴⁷ *and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* ⁴⁸ *You are witnesses of these things.* ⁴⁹ *And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.”*”

Unfortunately, *as per tradition*, Israel again eschatologically rejects their *messianic king in favor of a corrupt Temple*. However, a remnant of repentant Israel will also *rejoice with the king in his eschatological kingdom*, Cf. Acts 2 and the Day of Pentecost.

This problem of a lack of trust and faith in God had been endemic of Israel's history reaching back to Mount Sinai and the Egyptian *golden calf*, her history *under the Judges of Canaanite god's and powers*, *Assyrian captivity*, and *Babylonian exile*. It is in fact a picture of Satanic human failure with "roots" in the Garden of Eden, **Rom 1:18-32**.

The story of the Old and New Testaments is *the revelation of God's love for his creation that will not give up completely on his creation, but constantly extends his mercy, love, and grace to fallen humanity*. *This repetitive gracious redemption culminates in his final eschatological messiah kingdom in Christ*.

Theological Message of Zechariah

God speaks to Israel through Zechariah, *also through Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai*, just before and during their restoration under Cyrus to Jerusalem and the Temple; "*Israel, you have had to endure over 70 years of Babylonian and Persian exile because of you repeated loss of faith and trust in God who intended this tragic period of disjointed suffering away from the center of your faith, Jerusalem and the Temple, to get you to repent and return to God. Because of God's faithfulness and love for you he is going to take you back home to Jerusalem. You will need to stay true to God and his Law*, cf. Neh 7, *or you will again be conquered by evil nations*, cf. Daniel. *But God will in the end send a final redeeming messiah king who will redeem his faithful remnant, and open the door to the Nations*.

The New Testament apostolic writers and evangelists drew on these apocalyptic eschatological prophecies to *argue*, or prove typologically, *that Jesus is that eschatological king who saves those who will believe him and repent of their sinful ways*.

It is helpful to remember that although the *apocalyptic eschatological* language is strange to our modern-day western heritage (after all, Americans have never been plundered and placed under oppressive kingdoms) the realm of apocalyptic eschatological symbolism was part of Israel's long history through the influence of Greek, Babylonian, and Egyptian "literature" and culture. Modern-day Evangelical Protestant Christians have only recently discovered what was an integral aspect of Israel's history!

This narrative is played out dramatically in our New Testament in the powerful Holy Spirit Day of Pentecost Acts 2 experience, and Acts 10:44, and 11:11, where Jews and Gentiles responded to the gospel message and were saved.

Cf. Peter's sermon at Acts 2:17ff where Peter said that the Holy Spirit experience was part of the *last days, hemerai eschatai*, prophecy of Joel 2:28f.

The response to Peter's eschatological sermon at Acts 2:37 - 42, brings Zechariah's and Joel's apocalyptic eschatological prophecies into our New Testament perspective, "*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"*"³⁸ *And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"³⁹ *For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.*"⁴⁰ *And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."*⁴¹ *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."*

Zechariah's Symbols

Zechariah's tragic narrative of Jerusalem's loss of faith is initially spelled out through a series of striking symbolic images like *four horsemen*, an *angel and four horns*, a *lampstand and two olive trees*, a *flying scroll*, and *four chariots*. Most of these symbols are repeated in *later apocalyptic or apocryphal* documents, and eventually in the New Testament, *Revelation*.

Zechariah is cited or quoted 40/41 times in the New Testament making it the most often Old Testament prophecy or book cited in the New Testament.

Modern generations are not familiar with this symbolic style of communication, but even today symbolic expressions like 9/11 and Dec 7 are part of our American and European vocabulary.

It should be clear from this Zachariahan dependency that modern New Testament readers of ancient apocalyptic literature like Daniel and Zecharia need to spend considerable time exploring the apocalyptic symbolic terms that are common in the early chapters of Zechariah.

For convenience, we will examine a few of Zechariah's expressions and their repetition in our New Testaments since according to Ernst Käsemann, Bruce, and others, such apocalyptic genre is the mother of much New Testament theology. Good interpretation of all ancient literature requires that every text must be examined in at least five fundamental context; a *historical, literary, grammatical, cultural/sociological, and theological/religious* contexts. Each of these contexts has an integral role in any contemporary literary interpretation. The intention of such a critical analysis of a text is to *define the theological principle embedded in the original communication*, and to discuss *how the theological principle* may apply to the contemporary hearer/reader might be.

Recent literary interpreters speak of *speech-act situations* in which the components are defined as *locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions*. All three of these "acts" are involved when interpreting language expressions. These are defined as follows, *locutions*, "*the original form of communication to the original intended readers*," *illocutions*, "*the meaning intended by the original communicator, speaker or writer*," and the *perlocutions*, "*the behavioral meaning intended in the original locutions and illocutions*."

That Zechariah was receiving this message during Darius, the Mede's reign. At Zech 1:1-6 indicates that God had sent a positive message of encouragement to Zechariah that God had a return of Israel to Jerusalem in mind.

Applying the "speech-act," or the *critical biblical exegetic* principles to Zechariah's use of the symbolic expression *four horsemen*, we learn from the context of the *locution* of Zech 1:8 that this had to be a message explaining Israel's and Jerusalem's Babylonian captivity. Zech 1:17 explains that God had a comforting message for Israel regarding Jerusalem.

The symbolism of *four horsemen who patrolled the earth* indicates that God new what was happening throughout the world. Four already had the symbolism of the four quarters of the earth.

God was explaining to Zechariah that he knew what he was doing and promising.

The next paragraph of Zechariah *speaks of four horns and four smiths*. Drawing on the symbolism of Daniel the four horns are the four powers who would scatter Israel, Judea, and Jerusalem all over the world, most likely Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greece, and Rome. Dan 7 forecast that *one like a son of man* would destroy all the other world powers, that is horns, and establish an everlasting kingdom of God.

Horns already before Zechariah represented *powerful empires* who would *defeat, captive, and exile Israel*. At Zechariah God predicts that four smiths would terrify and destroy the four horns and cast them down. Horns and smiths both symbolize warfare in which the smiths, wartime blacksmith manufacturers of warfare weaponry.

Zech 1:18-20, "*And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four horns!*"¹⁹ *And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these?"* *And he answered me, "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."*²⁰ *Then the LORD showed me four smiths.*²¹ *And I said, "What are these*

coming to do?” He answered, “These are the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man raised his head; and these have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it.”

The four horsemen appear again at Zech 6:1-8, “*And again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of bronze. ² The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, ³ the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled gray horses. ⁴ Then I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵ And the angel answered me, “These are going forth to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. ⁶ The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go toward the west country, and the dappled ones go toward the south country.” ⁷ When the steeds came out, they were impatient to get off and patrol the earth. And he said, “Go, patrol the earth.” So they patrolled the earth. ⁸ Then he cried to me, “Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my Spirit at rest in the north country.”*

Interestingly, these four colored horsemen appear in a similar apocalyptic pronouncement depicting the same symbolic message of God using the affairs of this world like *rebellion, war, famine, and death* to achieve his purpose, cf. Revelation chapter 6. God patrols the heavens and “earth” using powers and events to achieve his purpose; for example *Daniel, Zechariah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah*. In both Zechariah and Revelation God’s purpose was to encourage his people to faith with the assurance that he knew what was happening to them and that he had a plan to redeem them in his eschatological kingdom through faith.