

Continuing the study of the Second Coming and the signs of the end times.

Perhaps the greatest sign to watch is Israel and how the nations treat them. Iraq/Babylon is an ancient enemy. Christians can not watch the most powerful empire on earth still struggling with Babylon and not think it is worth our special notice. You will be aware that the issue of Palestinian land is an ongoing grievance to the Arab people.

Today we will look at Israel and Babylon.

**Intro 1:**

You are welcome to come to your own conclusions about the end times (eschatology), including the wacky of you want. But first you need to know the foundational prophecies and scriptures.

This week we hardly mention the Second Coming of Jesus. Instead, this week we are setting the stage.

**Intro 2:**

A potted history of Israel up to that time.

**Intro 3:**

Zech 1

Believers down the centuries have divided Zech into two parts. The styles are so different that some have even thought that there were two different writers. The answer is simple, chapters 1 to 8 were written when Zechariah was a “young man” (2:4). Zechariah had to carry this revelation, trusting, until more was added years later.

In the first half of the book, the young Zechariah and the old Haggai were declaring their prophecies on almost alternate months. Their great theme was God's call to rebuild Jerusalem's fallen temple (see Ez 5 for punishment foretold). Note that reinstatement of worship of the one true God was a national issue, for them and for us. They rebuilt the temple first. See Prov 14:34 *Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach.*

The temple was rebuilt, and was then destroyed by the Romans (AD 70). Zechariah's prophecies went further though, and looked to the first and second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But first Israel and Babylon.

Babylon had allowed some of its captives to return to their homeland. So 18 years before a small band had returned at the command of Cyrus in 537 BC. That same Cyrus had prevented building. He had died and his mad son Cambyses had ruled and been murdered. Cyrus' son-in-law, Darius had ascended the throne just as God led Zechariah and Haggai to stir up the High Priest Joshua (or Jeshua) and the governor Zerubbabel to get the people to the work of building.

Haggai said, “You have had a bad harvest yet still have built fine houses! Put God first and He will put you first.” They did, and He did! See Haggai 1:1-8

*1 In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest:*

*2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'*

*3 Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai:*

*4 Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?*

*5 Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: Give careful thought to your ways.*

*6 You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.*

*7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: Give careful thought to your ways.*

*8 Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured, says the LORD.*

Zechariah's message was much deeper and reached further into the future. His message went beyond the temple being rebuilt, beyond the period of the Maccabees just before Jesus, beyond the ministry of Jesus on earth which would end in death and the price paid, beyond the resurrection, beyond the Middle Ages, and the scattering of the Jews, beyond the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the restoration of the nation of Israel which happened in 1948, beyond the gathering of all nations against Israel and the last battle of Armageddon. His message went all the way to the glorious bodily return of Jesus coming in the clouds of the sky, seeing the feet of Jesus touching the Mount Olivet which will split from east to west along a geological fault that surely Zechariah could not have know about!

Today we just begin!

- 1) The Prophetic Prologue
- 2) Vision 1 – The horsemen in the valley
- 3) Vision 2 – The four workmen/craftsmen

### **1) The Prophetic Prologue 1:1-6**

Years before Zechariah, in 586 BC Jerusalem had been invaded by Nebuchadnezzar and the temple had been destroyed by fire. The state ceased to exist, the priesthood stopped functioning, the people were taken into exile to Babylon. See 2 Chron 36:11ff

There were three approaches to these awful events.

- 1) For those who thought God lived in the temple, God had left them or had Himself been defeated. The answer was to worship other gods and forget Him! They found it was not as simple as that, because they belonged to Him and could not easily forget it.
- 2) God was not defeated, He had used Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the temple as judgement against the nation. He had cast off Israel because of their sins. Cast off, they were to be rejected forever.
- 3) Zechariah and Haggai gave the true answer.
  - a) God was not defeated.
  - b) Nebuchadnezzar was a tool in God's hand.
  - c) It was because of their sin, but God had not cast them aside. The call was that they were still His people, they must turn to Him again (1:3 “return to me”), obey and build. God would restore as surely as He had destroyed those sinful ancestors. This time they were to rise repentant and renew their covenant with Him.

### **2) Vision 1 – The horsemen in the valley – 1:7-17**

Each of these visions covers stages in Israel's restoration. One step the Jews needed to take was that of trust and belief. God is not a local deity but Lord of all the earth.

His servants the horsemen travel through the earth and report that the nations are at peace, they have prospered.

God had raised them as an instrument to judge Israel, but they had gone too far and had even thought their gods had done it for them. God tells the Jews that before He blesses them He will first deal with these wicked nations.

The horsemen went out and got started. In the opening years of Darius 1st reign there was hardly a part of the empire that was not broken in warfare.

God was aware of the way Israel had been treated.

### **3) Vision 2 – The four workmen/craftsmen – 1:18-21**

In the night God gives Zechariah a vision (1:8).

A horn, in prophetic symbolism, is a kingdom or a king. He is shown that four great kings, powers or kingdoms that rose against Israel will be limited by God (the workmen). As we will see in a future week, this picture concerned the past but also the future, as at the end times four horns will again rise against Israel. Perhaps one of those will be Babylon. In that day these four powers will will find Israel to be more than they expected, See Zech 12:3.

Workmen/craftsmen. A process of judgement and punishment.

In this vision God is declaring He can cope with any enemy.