

# Unzipping Zechariah

A Preaching Guide by [Phil Campbell](#)



ZECHARIAH IS PROBABLY one of the least read and least understood of all the Old Testament prophets - and yet in terms of the ministry of Jesus, he may also be the most programatic. Why does Jesus ride into Jerusalem "*on the colt of a donkey*?" It's to announce himself as the one Zechariah spoke of - the Lord himself, coming into Jerusalem.

The arrival in Jerusalem is just a small part of the complex picture painted by Zechariah, who writes in the midst of Israel's return from exile. He dates the first part of his work as the eighth month of the second year of Darius, a date coinciding with the resumption of work on the temple (Ezra 4:24) ; by chapter 7 we reach the fourth year of the reign of Darius.

There's a confusing movement from an entirely positive picture of the future blessing of Jerusalem to one of ambivalence - by chapter 11 to 14, there are hints of turmoil to come. This may be in part due to the fact that Israel's unfaithfulness becomes increasingly more obvious. The crisis evident in Nehemiah and Ezra - intermarriage with the nations, and a refusal to remain "pure" as God's people - is reflected in the final words of Zechariah; when God finally puts everything right, "there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty."

On another level though, the ambivalent picture of blessing and mourning is a great way into the gospel - because it's only by "*mourning for the one we pierced*" that "*the fountain is opened for the forgiveness of sins*."

## Themes

### GLORY FOR JERUSALEM

In the midst of the rebuilding of a desolate Jerusalem, Zechariah continually points to the future glory that awaits the city of God. "This is what the Lord almighty says: "My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem" (1:17). Jerusalem's future is a theme that continues through the book, with the name "Jerusalem" occurring 40 times.

### GOD IS COMING TO VISIT

Fundamental to the concept of Jerusalem's glory - and ultimately, the reason for it - is the fact that God is planning to come and dwell there. At some points, it's the Davidic Messiah on view - "I am going to bring my servant, the branch" (3:8) - at others, God himself. (Shout and be glad O daughter of Zion. For I AM COMING, and *I will live among you*," declares the Lord in 2:10) The Lord will "return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem... save his people from the east and the west... and bring them back to live in Jerusalem." (8:3,7)

### THE COMING DAY

Zechariah often packages his descriptions of the visitation of God and the new glory of Jerusalem under the term "that day." It's a phrase that occurs 20 times, and can probably be identified with the common prophetic concept of "the day of the Lord" - a term which appears once in a summarising capacity in Zechariah 14:1. "On that day" is the catchcry that echoes right through chapters 12 to 14, with a vivid and often confusing description of the day to come.

- The day of the Lord is a day of great battle, in which the nations are gathered around Jerusalem to destroy her. (12:3)
- The day of the Lord is a day of great victory - because God steps in and fights for his people. (12:4)
- The day of the Lord is a day on which the Lord himself will stand on the mount of Olives, and cast it away (14:4)

#### **and yet**

- The day of the Lord is a day in which the sun is darkened (14:6,7cf Amos 8:9)
- The day of the Lord is a day when the *weeping in Jerusalem will be great*, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. (12:11)

#### **because...**

- *They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.* (12:10)

#### ***It's the day when the Shepherd will be struck...***

- "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. *"Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered,* and I will turn my hand against the little ones. (13:7)

#### ***In short...***

- The day of the Lord is the day on which a "fountain is opened for the forgiveness of sins." (13:1)

#### ***In fact, as God said right back in chapter 3,***

- "...I am going to bring my servant, the Branch... and I will remove the sin of this land *in a single day.*" (3:8-9)

## **PREACHING ZECHARIAH**

Looking at the summary above, you might be tempted to think preaching Zechariah will be a piece of cake. After all, you may have noticed certain hints that seem to lead towards the gospel. It's almost too obvious to say it - the day of the Lord is the day of the CROSS! The arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem is the long awaited visitation of Yahweh himself.

The big packaging problem, though, is that references like these are scattered amongst so much stuff that doesn't seem to lead towards Jesus at all. Okay - Matthew tells us the words "Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered" are fulfilled - but what about the armies around Jerusalem? And the warhorses struck blind? And... the list goes on. The fact is, Zechariah uses full-on apocalyptic language - which is another way of saying, use the clear bits to interpret the confusing bits, and when the confusing bits don't fit, say they're symbolism. Which in fact they are... if it really is apocalyptic.

The early chapters are the easiest - in fact, there's plenty of solid and practical stuff to get you rolling. You'll need to work hard to set the scene, and build a picture of the devastated Jerusalem the refugees find on their return. Playing off this idea creates a good tension with

the pictures of coming grandeur, which in turn creates a tension with the seemingly humble fulfilment found in the carpenter on the cross.

## OUTLINE 1 - Zechariah 1-2

### A Fresh Start

**KEY IDEA:** God isn't just calling the Israelites back to Jerusalem - he's calling them to come back to HIM.

#### 1. Coming home to nothing...

- Friends of mine from Sydney were on holidays on the Central Coast when they got a phone call from the Police. Their neighbours had reported there was a burglar in their house. The police had gone around, and they'd found the front door was busted open, there'd been a burglary. Not only that, said the policeman on the phone, we've got bad news. They ransacked the whole place. There's stuff everywhere. The house is an absolute mess. At which Barbara said, HOW EMBARRASSING... that's the way we left it! (If you've got four kids, you'll know exactly what it's like!)
- Which makes them a lot better off than the woman from western Australia I saw interviewed on TV the other night after a cyclone had devastated a whole. Standing outside the ruins of her house. The roof had blown off, the place was absolutely trashed. She was putting on a brave face for the cameras. But you could hear the quavering in her voice. Her home was a write off. Bits of building were strewn all around the street. And I don't know what you reckon, but I reckon it would be no fun at all to come home to something like that. To come home to no home at all.

#### 2. Enter ZECHARIAH....

Zechariah is a book set in a time when Israel are coming home to nothing. But there's more to it than meets the eye. Because "coming home" isn't just returning to a desolate city. It's a restored relationship with God. His message is (v2) ... GOD SAYS RETURN TO ME AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU.

##### 1. Pictures from God

##### VISION 1 (1:7-11) ...

We're often tempted to make too much of visions, by making up things to fit every detail. Instead of that, just try to get the "big picture." Which in the case of this vision of the men on their horses is dead easy, cause you can see it in verse 10 and 11. The guys on the horses are the messengers of God, and what they do is they take a look at the state of the world, and report back on how things are going. These days we've got CNN news to do the same sort of thing. They didn't. They couldn't just switch on George Negus on Foreign Correspondent or Jana on Witness to find out what's going on in the world. So here's the simple point of vision number 1. It's there in verse 11. They come back and they says "We've gone through out the whole earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace." And that means it's time for God to act on behalf of Israel.

##### VISION 2 (1:18-21) ...

Four horns scattered and destroyed Judah and Israel and Jerusalem - now it's time for four craftsmen who put it all back together. And the very people who set out to wipe out Israel will one day be paying homage to Israel's king.

##### VISION 3 (2:1-5) ...

MEASURING JERUSALEM - the NEW JERUSALEM'S going to be a city without walls. It's going to be too big. It's going to be a place for all the nations to gather.

### CONCLUSION

## The importance of coming back to God in genuine repentance

We're looking BACK at the things Zechariah was promising for the future. The New Jerusalem is a Kingdom for all the nations - even people like us. That's fulfilled in the Kingdom of Jesus. Zechariah tells the Israelites to REPENT AND TURN BACK TO GOD cause there's something great to look forward to. He tells them to stick with it. To stay faithful. Cause there are great days coming. And in Jesus those great days came - God's visitation. So REPENT! Come back to God!

## OUTLINE 2 - Zechariah 3-6

### Dressing the Symbolic Man

**KEY IDEA:** Zechariah says there's a day coming when sins will be forgiven. The priest Joshua, "symbolic of one to come" demonstrates what this means as his filthy clothes are replaced with spotless ones.

#### 1. Sins Forgiven?

Every week in the TV guide that comes with the Sun Herald, in among the movie reviews, there's a little column with the TELEVISION QUOTES OF THE WEEK. Three or four of the funniest, or most unusual things that have been said on TV in the week gone by. And along with a half funny quote from MAD ABOUT YOU, and another one from WATER RATS, the top of the list a couple of weeks back was a quote from TODAY TONIGHT on channel 7.

They'd been interviewing a guy called FRANKLIN GRAHAM. Billy Graham's son, who was in Australia running a mission. They'd asked him what he thought the difference was between him and the people he was trying to reach. And here's what he said. Quote of the week from the Sun Herald TV guide. He said "The difference between me and the people watching this is that I have been forgiven. GOD HAS FORGIVEN ME FOR MY SINS."

Now I don't know what sort of reaction Franklin Graham got when he said that on the show. But the question I want to ask is, why is saying that SO REMARKABLE that it tops the list of quotable quotes from a whole week of TV. I mean, I know there's not much worth quoting on the telly these days, but what's so surprising about saying GOD HAS FORGIVEN ME FOR MY SINS?

Maybe the editor of the quotes column thought Franklin Graham was being ARROGANT. To say so definitely that HE'D BEEN FORGIVEN. Or OLD FASHIONED, to talk about sins being forgiven? I'm not sure. But if nothing else, the fact that people sit up and take notice when an American Evangelist says God's forgiven his sins, tells you one important thing. And that is, FORGIVENESS OF SINS is still a big issue.

But it was an even bigger issue for the people of Israel who we meet here in the book of Zechariah. They're looking around the ruins of Jerusalem. And not one stone is left on another. And they know that the reason it's like that goes back to how the Israelites have treated God. They know the reason they're standing in the middle of a pile of rubble is that God had called them to be HOLY. God had called them to be people of JUSTICE. And INTEGRITY. And LOVE. And they've been just the opposite. So can they say the same words as Franklin Graham... GOD HAS FORGIVEN US OUR SINS?

#### 2. An issue for Israel...

- a shady past full of failure
- two new leaders:

Joshua the Priest

Zerubbabel the Governor-Prince

#### 3. Forgiveness will flow...

- and sins will go

#### 4. Symbolic Men

- forgiveness and us

In the end Zechariah's visions aren't just about a high priest and a governor in Israel in the year 5 hundred and 19 BC. The vision's God gives him are looking forward to something more.

And we're told that very clearly in chapter 3 verse 8. Have a look. **"Listen O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, WHO ARE SYMBOLIC OF THINGS TO COME; I'm going to bring MY SERVANT, THE BRANCH."**

Joshua the Priest ... God says he's somehow symbolic of something to come. Symbolic of the MESSIAH. Symbolic of Jesus, the branch from the line of King David, the one who the book of Hebrews in the New Testament calls the GREAT HIGH PRIEST.

In other words, when the people of Israel look at Joshua, they'll see something of what Jesus is going to be like. When you look at the vision of the Joshua standing before God dressed in the filthy rags of the sins of the people and then re-dressed like a king; when you turn over to chapter 6 and read about him crowned like a king - you can catch a glimpse of what the Messiah's going to be like.

Can you see that at the cross, God's done what he says he's going to do at the end of verse 9 in chapter 3? And it's important that you read it. And if there's nothing else you've understood this morning, if you reckon Zechariah's all too hard and you're looking forward to starting something else in a few weeks time that's easier, at least get this. God's promise through Zechariah is this. And all the visions and symbols are visions and symbols of this. God says, here's what I'm going to do. End of verse 9. He says I WILL REMOVE THE SIN OF THIS LAND IN A SINGLE DAY.

### **3. The Word from the Lord for us...**

Your sins - forgiven?

## OUTLINE 3 - Zechariah 7-8

### The Tradition Trap

**KEY IDEA:** The returned Israelites want to know whether they should keep up the annual fasting they started in Babylon to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem. Zechariah says **NO** - the way they lived showed their tradition was meaningless anyway; and it's time to celebrate the **NEW THINGS TO COME**. Godliness is more important than tradition.

#### 1. Introduction

- the famous Peter Cameron story of the cat in the Buddhist temple that used to sit in the corner waiting for its master. Generations later, the temple still has a cat - by popular demand.
- the story of the young bride who always cuts the end off the roast before she puts it in the pan. Why? Not sure. Her mother does it. Why does the mother do it? Don't know. Her mother did it. Ask Grandma. Why? The roasting dish was too small for the meat.

#### 2. A burning question

- asked in 7:3... should we keep up the TRADITION of fasting
- answered in 8:16 and 19

#### 3. A Two Part answer...

- . a) Was it ever genuine anyway?
- what about the way you lived?
- b) It's time to Celebrate!

#### 4. Traditions and Us

- watch the use-by date
- be REAL - be GODLY!



## OUTLINE 4 - Zechariah 9-10

### The King who Came by Donkey

**KEY IDEA:** Sometimes things are more than they seem - a "King on a donkey" seems surprisingly humble and insignificant. This sermon starts at the entry to Jerusalem and the cross, and works backwards to Zechariah, who fills in the significance of what we're seeing.

#### 1. Sometimes things are more than they appear

eg the genuine Michelangelo statue found in the Italian embassy in New York. People had walked past and ignored it every day until it was recognised by a visiting Art Professor. Now people go there to see it.

#### 2. Look at this man on a donkey

an unimpressive sight. Imagine it.

#### 3. Look at this man on a cross

imagine the scene - ordinary. Unpleasant.

#### 4. But what's going on behind the scenes?

- Zechariah 9:9. Who comes by donkey? God himself comes to rule his people - not by force but with salvation
- Zechariah 10. A picture of a victory by the donkey rider

#### More than meets the eye

John 12, Ephesians

be part of the victory!

the devil is defeated

the world is passing away

God's kingdom for all the nations will stand for ever.

## **OUTLINE 5-Zechariah 11:4-17**

### **Thirty Pieces of Silver**

#### **The Value of God?**

**KEY IDEA:** The leadership of God's people is **IMPORTANT**. Those who present themselves as "people of God" have a long track record of rejecting Godly leadership - eg Zechariah and Jesus. We need to accept the lordship of Jesus, and we need to encourage and respect Godly Christian leadership today.

#### **1. Leaders...**

Could you imagine a real-life situation where "Christians" would prefer ungodly leadership to godly leadership? Consider Archbishop Hollingworth's pronouncements on ordaining homosexual clergy. "I don't enquire about their private lives." In other words, anything goes.

#### **2. Shepherding God's Flock**

**Zechariah is called on to take over the reigns - either in metaphor or reality. Israel are like "sheep without a shepherd" (cf Mt10)**

- the flock on death row
- self seeking shepherds

#### **3. Zechariah the Shepherd**

- faithful
- rejected
- thirty pieces of silver
- left to the fate they deserved

#### **4. The Lord Is My Shepherd**

- another shepherd comes to the sheep without a shepherd
- another shepherd rejected
- another thirty pieces of silver

#### **5. What will YOU do with Jesus...**

- and his faithful under-shepherds?

## OUTLINE 6 - Zechariah 12-13

### GOOD NEWS DAY?

**KEY IDEA:** The "day of the Lord is coming" - but there seem to be some conflicting signals about it. On the one hand, it's great news - a day of God's forgiveness and victory. On the other hand, it's going to be a day of mourning for the one they pierced. It all fits together at the cross.

#### 1. Some good news and some bad news...

Start with an "I've got some good news and some bad news joke" - like Australia vs Ireland Rugby league match. We only send two players. We're leading 38 nil at half time. One player goes to the pub. At the end, the one who stayed says "I've got some good news and some bad news." The bad news - I got sent off two minutes into the second half. The good news? We still won, 38-12.

This is a passage with good news. And with bad news. And it's about a victory against all the odds.

#### 2. On that day... (Zech 12:3,4,6,8,9,11, and 13:1,2,4,6 etc)

*The Good News*

Jerusalem the immovable (12:3)

*The Bad News*

Mourning for the one they pierced (12:10)

*The Good News*

Sins washed away (13:1)

*The Bad News*

the Shepherd struck (13:7)

#### 1. Good News for YOU?

## OUTLINE 7 - Zechariah 13-14

### A Tale of Two Mountains

**KEY IDEA:** Zechariah uses a powerful metaphor of the rearrangement of the countryside to describe the glory coming to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where the most important event in the history of the world is going to happen. God is going to fight for his people here and have a great victory. the Mount of Olives will be picked up and thrown aside when the Lord comes; living waters will flow from here, and He will be king over all the nations. An event that looks like a small foothill in history is actually Mount Everest. The cross is central in history. But is it central to YOU?

#### Introduction:

In the movie "The man who went up a hill and came down a mountain," Hugh Grant plays a surveyor who shatters the pride of a small Welsh village by telling them the proud mountain just outside their town is technically a hill - at 980 feet, it falls 20 feet short of the gazetted standard. Rather than have their mountain recorded on the maps as a hill, the people of the town set to work with shovels and wheelbarrows, and add the required height. It's amazing that a bit of dirt can be so exciting - but the final scene, with Hugh making the new measurements, is breathtaking. And the celebrations are intense.

This is a story about another town. And another mountain. In fact, two mountains. Jerusalem. And Mount Zion. Small. And just out of town, the Mount of Olives; looking down, overshadowing Jerusalem. Zechariah says the landscape needs re-arranging. Because in the end, NOTHING will look down at Jerusalem. And NOTHING will stand in the way of the LIVING WATERS that are going to flow from here.

#### The Battle Zone (ch 13-14)

Chapters 13 and 14 present a picture of a huge battle - the world gathered against the people of God. But there's a turning point in 14:3. Because God steps in to fight for his people.

#### What Happens?

- the Lord stands on the Mount of Olives, which will be split and thrown aside (v4)
- a day of darkness, then light in the evening (v6)
- living waters will flow out from Jerusalem (v8)
- the Lord will be King over the whole earth (v9)

#### A FINAL LOOK BACK

A quick review of what Zechariah's been saying before we move to the NT...

- 2:10 "SHOUT AND BE GLAD, O Daughter of Zion. (Throw a party Jerusalem.) FOR I AM COMING, and I will live among you, SAYS THE LORD."
- 3: 9 "I WILL REMOVE THE SIN OF THIS LAND IN A SINGLE DAY."
- 9: 9 "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion, shout daughter of Jerusalem. See - here he comes! Your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
- 12:8 A great day when God will shield his people
- 12:10 They're going to look on the one they've pierced; and mourn for him like a firstborn son.

- 13:1 On that day a fountain is going to be opened; to wash them clean from their sin; to take away their impurity.
- 13:7 And yet the SHEPHERD is going to be STRUCK. And the sheep scattered.
- 14:6 The Lord himself, standing on the mount of olives, which is removed.
- 14:7 Living water will flow out from either side.
- 14:9 The Lord will be king over everything. And ultimately, people will bow the knee. Or else face destruction, as they come face to face with the consequences of rebelling against the God of all creation.

## COMING TO JESUS

**Julie Andrews sang "the hills are alive with the sound of music." Were they really? The Psalmist said "the hills jumped like lambs" when Israel was brought out of Egypt. Did they really? We often use symbolism. Zechariah is interested in something much more important than moving piles of dirt!**

- Jesus, the one they call the Christ, comes riding into Jerusalem in a very public procession; on a donkey. Matthew says it's fulfilling the words of Zechariah. And that as Jesus comes, GOD HIMSELF COMES. In the flesh. To rule his people.
- A few days later, he's standing on the Mount of Olives. The mountain Zechariah's talking about in his figurative symbolism; the mountain that's going to make way for the glory of Jerusalem. And Jesus says to his disciples, TRUST ME. And PRAY. If you have faith, you'll see it happen. The mount of Olives lifted up and thrown away, just like Zechariah says it will.
- Next day, he's betrayed. And flogged. His disciples shoot through in a flash. Matthew says it's fulfilling the words of Zechariah. The shepherd struck and the sheep scattered.
- A day of strange darkness. Jesus is on the cross. And at noon the sun disappears. And there's a strange gloom. As he hangs there, the perfect life of the perfect son of God, paying for sin. In the agony of separation from his father. Fighting the fight for his people. Paying the price.
- Opening up the fountain of perfect forgiveness. On the cross. And he says in John's gospel, streams of living water are going to flow. The Holy Spirit who comes when I go. Who shapes you, and comforts you and changes you, and grows you. John says it's fulfilling the words of Zechariah. The mountain moved aside so streams of living water can flow out from Jerusalem. From a place just outside the city walls near the rubbish dump. Surrounded by a bunch of soldiers. Women crying. Two dead criminals. Three crosses. And the one in the middle with the Son of God on it. The promised messiah.

When Zechariah says the landscape's going to be rearranged, when Zechariah says Jerusalem's going to be lifted up above everything else in the world, my guess is, he's saying THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT EVER HAPPENS IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD IS GOING TO HAPPEN THERE. And it has. Because God came there in the flesh. And he died there. And he rose there. And forgave sins there. Once and for all.

## CONCLUSION

The cross is the centrepiece of history. But is it the centre-piece of YOUR history? Coming to Jesus is an earth shattering event - everything changes. You move from death to life. Your sins are forgiven. No matter what they are. You're heading for heaven. Not hell. The cross should be at the very CENTRE of your life.