

The Burden of Disillusionment
The Message of the Post-Exilic Prophets
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Preface

Possibly the most neglected portions of the Christian Scriptures are the prophets of the Old Testament. Among these, the writings of the post-exilic prophets receive considerably less attention than the pre-exilic ones. Other than the eschatology buffs, who dip into the latter part of Zechariah, or pastors who preach from Malachi because they wish to encourage tithing or discourage divorce in their congregations, the writings of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are almost unknown among Christians.

This neglect is unfortunate on two counts. First, it betrays a tendency in the church toward Marcionism, the ancient heresy which considered the Old Testament to be superfluous. Second, it deprives the church of some very important ideals which are echoed in the teaching of our Lord. In fact, it may well be the case that many of the ideas in the sermon on the mount were first expressed in the post-exilic prophets, ideas such as seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness, rather than "all these other things," and Jesus' warning not to put undue importance on what one eats or wears (Hg. 1). The call for social justice, which was thematic in the eighth century prophets and which eventually surfaces in the teachings of Christ are very much evident in the post-exilic prophets also (Zec. 7; Mal. 3). Very important, too, is the idea that God's most important works often begin in small ways, a spiritual truth significant for the building of the second temple and repeatedly expressed in Jesus' parables of the kingdom (Hg. 2; Zec. 4). Jesus' teaching concerning faith that can move mountains has its older counterpart in Zechariah (cf. 4:7). The eschatology in the Olivet Discourse has striking parallels with the vision of the triumph of God's kingdom (Zec. 14). Jesus' teaching on divorce must surely have reflected upon Malachi's oracles concerning the sanctity of the marriage covenant (Mal. 2). Finally, the Lord's explanation of John the Baptist's ministry directly interacts with the predictions of the coming of Elijah (Mal. 4).

All of these reasons and more make a study of the post-exilic prophets worthwhile. Their messages to a discouraged, disappointed remnant were indeed a burden, just as they labeled them (cf. Zec. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1), and hence the title of this exposition. If these commentaries can help foster a new appreciation for these voices from the past, I shall be satisfied!

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Background to the Post-Exilic

Prophets

The sacred history of the Old Testament moves between two polarities, the exodus from Egypt and the exile to Mesopotamia. One is an event of redemption, the other of judgment. The meaning of Yahweh's covenants with Israel which were established through Abraham, Moses and David all hang upon these two historical events. To Abraham, God had promised blessing and progeny (Ge. 12:1-3). In particular, his family was to be blessed by receiving the land of Canaan as a divine grant (Ge. 15:18-21; 17:1-8). It was the exodus and conquest which made this promise a reality (cf. Ex. 6:6-8). Through Moses, Yahweh gave to Israel the Torah at Sinai. Within the Torah was the inexorable Deuteronomic code of blessings and cursings attendant upon the nation's obedience or disobedience (cf. Dt. 27-30). This code became the theological determinant for Israel's national history, and it lay behind the historical vicissitudes of the Tribal League, the United Monarchy and the Divided Kingdom. Later, to David God also made grants through a promissory oath (2 Sa. 7:4-17; 2 Sa. 22:51; 23:5; Ps. 89:19-37). As in the earlier covenants, this covenant included the perpetual ownership of the land of Canaan. It also guaranteed the perpetual regency of David's sons. Of course, after the nation divided upon Solomon's death, the northern kingdom turned away from the Davidic covenant, apparently deciding that it was invalid (1 Kg. 12:16). Still, they insisted that the land of the northern kingdom should be theirs perpetually, since it had been given to Abraham by grant. In the southern kingdom, especially because of the nature of the covenant with David, the Judahites counted on the land being theirs forever. While the nations might rage, Jerusalem and her temple were eternally secure, guarded by the holy presence of Yahweh who had taken up residence in the Most Holy Place on Mt. Zion (cf. Ps. 46:1-7; 48:4-14; 125:1-2).

The Prophets and the Exile

It is against this smug over-confidence that the prophets troubled Israel (Am. 3:7). If the popular theology of the people did not go much further than the divine grants of blessing and land envisioned in the covenants of Abraham and David, the theology of the writing prophets called the two kingdoms to account through the covenant of Moses, especially in terms of the covenant blessings and cursings. There was no unconditional security for the land or the Davidic king.

The northern kingdom came under judgment because of flagrant disobedience (Am. 2:6-16). Contrary to popular opinion (cf. Am. 7:12-13; 7:10-13), the land was not unconditionally secure (Am. 3:11-12; Ho. 8:14). The people could and would be

removed from the land (Am. 4:2-3; 7:11; Ho. 5:14; 9:17). The population would be destroyed (Am. 5:3; 6:8-10; Ho. 10:13-15). The complacency of northern Israel would come face to face with the terrible judgment of God within history (Am. 5:18-19; 6:1; 9:1-4; Ho. 13:7-9).

Though the southern kingdom lasted nearly a century and a half longer than her northern counterpart, Judah, too, was a kingdom under judgment because of covenant disobedience (Is. 3:13-14). Jerusalem's and Zion's false sense of security would be exposed to the withering attack of the enemy (Mi. 3:12; Is. 28:18b-22; 29:1-4; Zep. 1:2-7, 12). Yahweh's righteous anger would not be turned back (Is. 5:25; 9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b; 14:27). Such a prophetic message was unwelcome, of course. Most people in the southern kingdom did not believe such a thing could happen (Mi. 3:11b; Je. 22:21), and it is not unlikely that such preaching was treated as theological heresy (Mi. 2:6-7; Je. 26:4-11). When the northern kingdom went into exile, its demise did not frighten those in Jerusalem (Je. 3:6-10). After all, northern Israel had rejected the covenant of David and the temple, so they had received no more than they deserved. Since the southern kingdom remained faithful to both David and the temple, was their security not guaranteed by God?

Not according to Jeremiah! The temple on Zion would be destroyed as surely as Shiloh had been destroyed in the days of Eli (Je. 7:1-15)! The sons of David's line were not exempt (Je. 22:1-9; 36:30-31; 22:18-19, 24-30). While Zedekiah, the last of the Davidic kings, hoped against hope that at the last minute there might be a miracle to save him, Jeremiah scorned his optimism as foolish speculation (Je. 21:1-7).

So, both Israel and Judah went into exile (2 Kg. 17, 25), Israel at the hands of the Assyrians and Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. The exile of Judah was accomplished in three deportations of citizens (Je. 52:27b-30). The first included the best of Jerusalem's citizens as well as her king (2 Kg. 24:10-16). A puppet king was set up to govern Jerusalem as a vassal of Babylon (2 Kg. 24:17). Because Jerusalem was still standing, many believed that the first deportation was only a temporary hardship. Court prophets in Jerusalem even predicted a quick reversal of Judah's fortunes (Je. 28:1-4, 10-11). Among the exiles in Babylon of the first deportation there was also optimism. Though Ezekiel, a priest among the exiles, predicted that Jerusalem would be totally destroyed (Eze. 7) and that Yahweh would vacate the temple on Zion (Eze. 10:4-5, 18-19; 11:22-23), his compatriots dismissed his predictions as either false or irrelevant (Eze. 12:21-22, 26-27; 20:49). False prophets among them preached optimism (Eze. 13:1-7, 10-12; cf. Je. 29:15-23), just as did false prophets remaining in Jerusalem (Je. 6:14; 8:11). Such optimism notwithstanding, the doom of Jerusalem was sealed. Yahweh declared that even if intercessors arose like Noah, Daniel and Job, or even Moses and Samuel, they could

save only themselves (Eze. 14:14, 20; Je. 15:1-2). The fire of divine judgment was coming upon Jerusalem and Judah, and nothing could avert it (Eze. 20:45-48). Jerusalem would be cooked like a stew in the coming judgment (Eze. 24:1-14).

So, according to the words of the prophets, the Babylonian armies again laid siege to Jerusalem. This time, the city was completely devastated. The temple was torched, and all the valuable and sacred objects were looted (2 Kg. 25:1-21). The second deportation took from Jerusalem many of the remaining citizens (2 Chr. 36:20; Je. 39:9-10; 52:24-27). Sometime later, for reasons which are not entirely clear, there was yet a third deportation of Jews to Babylon (cf. Je. 52:30).

Scattered Among the Nations

The scattering of the Israelites among the nations was the direct fulfillment of the Deuteronomic code (cf. Dt. 28:64-68). Deportees from the northern kingdom were settled in various parts of the Assyrian Empire (2 Kg. 17:6, 23). The poor of the land intermingled with the colonists which the Assyrians settled in Samaria (2 Kg. 17:24).¹ The deported upper class lost, to a large degree, their distinctive identity through intermarriage and amalgamation into the populations where they were settled.²

The citizens of the southern kingdom were also scattered when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. Those citizens taken to Babylon in the three deportations settled in communities of their own. Ezekiel and those in the first deportation lived in Tel-Aviv near the Kebar Canal (Eze. 1:1; 3:15; cf. Ps. 137:1-3).³

¹The people who were allowed to stay in the land took the name "Samaritans" after Samaria, the capital city of the former northern kingdom. The former kingdom was now reduced to the status of an Assyrian province under the name Samaria, and an Assyrian governor was appointed to administer the area and to exact tribute, cf. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 66. The incoming colonists were instructed in proper worship, though with only limited success (cf. 2 Kg. 17:25-41). It is usually assumed that the resident Israelites and foreign colonists intermarried and became indistinguishable. By the time of Ezra, there was a clear demarcation between the Samaritans and the Jews who returned from captivity (Ezr. 4).

²Of course, the resettlement of the northern kingdom's upper-class citizens in Media and upper Mesopotamia has given rise to the notion of the "lost ten tribes" which figure in Mormon theology and British Israelism. These clans are believed to have remained distinct and to have appeared later in history (or are expected yet to appear later in history). However, support for such theories is scant, and it is clear that any surviving distinctive elements of the northern clans are to be found among those northerners who fled south as refugees to Judah during the final days of Israel (cf. 2 Chr. 30:1--31:1). Archaeological evidence indicates that Jerusalem underwent a major expansion in the 8th century B.C. by a factor of three or four times its former size, cf. M. Broshi, "Part of the Lost Ten Tribes Located," *BAR* (Sept. 1975) 27, 32, and "The Expansion of Jerusalem in the Reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh," *Israel Exploration Journal*, 24 (1974) 21. It is clear that by the time of the New Testament period, Paul envisioned a remnant of the entire twelve tribes to be found in the Diaspora (cf. Ac. 26:6-7). Also, Luke's Gospel describes a woman from the tribe of Asher as living in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' birth (cf. Lk. 2:36).

³The "River Kebar" is probably the canal mentioned in two cuneiform texts from Nippur which describe an obscure body of water, cf. M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 40.

Jeremiah even wrote to them a letter advising them to settle in their new homes and seek to live normal lives (Je. 29:4-7). Later, of course, Jeremiah was removed from Jerusalem by a group of refugees fleeing to Tahpanhes, Egypt (Je. 41:16--43:7).⁴ Other Jewish deportees settled in various Babylonian locations (Ezr. 2:59; 8:15-17), some as far east as Persia (Est. 2:5-7). So, the center of gravity for the nation Israel had shifted from Palestine to the community of exiles.

A Remnant Shall Return

While it was the prophets who prepared the Israelites for the exile, and indeed, who made it possible for them to survive the theological emergency of the exile, it was also the prophets who called the remnant to look toward the future with hope. Exile, while it was God's strange therapy (Is. 28:21-22), was not his last word. Even the Deuteronomic code spelled out the possibility of restoration after Israel had been scattered among the nations (cf. Dt. 30:1-10). This theme of restoration resounds in the oracles of the prophets again and again.

Beginning with the eighth century prophets, the promise that a remnant would return was held forth as the hope beyond exile (Am. 9:13-15; Ho. 1:10-11; 2:21-23; 11:10-11; Is. 10:20-22; 11:11-12, 16; Mic. 2:12-13; 4:6-8; 7:8-11). Isaiah of Jerusalem even named one of his sons *She'ar-yashuv* (= a remnant will return) as a sign of this future (cf. Is. 7:3). The prophets of the seventh century continued to predict the regathering and restoration of the people to the land following judgment (Zep. 3:20; Je. 30:1-3; 31:16-17, 21-25; 33:7, 10-26; 50:18-19). As a sign of the future repossession of the land, Yahweh even instructed Jeremiah to buy a piece of property near Jerusalem, sealing the deeds for the future, because the land would once more be the home of Israelites (Je. 32:6-15, 36-44). Jeremiah specified that the length of exile would be seventy years (Je. 25:8-14). After the first deportation of people from Jerusalem, Ezekiel preached to the exiles in Babylon that there was yet a future for Israel in the land (Eze. 11:16-17; 20:34-38, 41-42; 34:11-16; 36:24, 28, 33-38; 37:12-14, 20-21; 39:25-29). Though Jerusalem would be utterly devastated, and though more exiles would join those of the first deportation in Babylon, in a relatively short period of time the exiles would be allowed to go back home (Eze. 36:8-12; Is. 40:1-2). A new tool of Yahweh would arise, Cyrus, the Persian, and he would allow the people to return (Is. 41:2b-4, 25; 44:28; 45:1, 4, 13). That the prediction of a seventy-year exile by Jeremiah was taken seriously is evident from Daniel's

⁴Tahpanhes, Egypt was in the northeast Delta, and it may be that a community of Jews had already been established there (cf. Je. 44:1). Jews who were left in the devastation of Jerusalem continued to migrate to Egypt to start life anew, cf. B. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 376.

awareness of it while in Babylon (Da. 9:1- 3).

Associated with the predictions of a return from exile were a multitude of breath-taking promises about a new commonwealth for Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Idolatry would be purged from the Israelites (Eze. 11:18; 37:23), divine forgiveness for their former sins would be extended to them (Is. 44:21-23; Je. 31:34; 33:8; 50:20; Eze. 36:25-26, 29, 33), and the gift of the Holy Spirit would be poured out (Is. 32:15; 44:3; 59:20-21; Eze. 11:19-20; 36:27; 37:14, 23; 39:29; Jl. 2:28-32). A new covenant would be established (Je. 31:31-34; 32:40-41; Eze. 16:60, 62; 34:25; 37:26), and a new Davidic king would rule in justice (Is. 55:3-5; Je. 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:17-26; Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24-25). No longer would there be a northern and southern nation, but Israel would be united forever (Ho. 1:11; Eze. 37:15-23). New tribal divisions would be made (Eze. 47:13--48:29) so that the entire people of Israel could surround a rebuilt Jerusalem (Is. 44:24-26; 45:13; 52:1-12; 54:11-17; 61:4-6; Je. 31:38-40; Eze. 36:33, 36, 38) and a second temple (Is. 44:28; Eze. 37:26; 40:1--43:27; Jl. 2:32). Mt. Zion would become the spiritual center for all the nations of the earth (Is. 2:2-4; 49:14-23; 51:3-6; 60:1-22; 62:1-12; Mic. 4:1-2). The crops would thrive (Am. 9:13; Ho. 2:21-22; Is. 41:17-20; Eze. 34:26-29; 36:29-30, 34-35). There would no longer be any war (Is. 2:4; Mic. 4:3), but rather, universal peace (Is. 11:6-9).

The Decree of Cyrus

Isaiah had prophetically named the benefactor of the exiles as Cyrus, the Persian (cf. Is. 44:28; 45:1, 13). After the Persians had swallowed up the Babylonian Empire,⁵ Cyrus, in the very first year of his reign in Babylon, issued a decree authorizing the repatriation of the Jewish exiles (cf. 2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezr. 1:2-4; 6:3-5). His policy toward conquered peoples was markedly different than that of Assyria and Babylon, who had filled their empires with bitter, displaced persons (cf. Ps. 137:8-9). It was relatively easy to win the gratitude of these resident aliens by rescinding his predecessors' edicts of deportation. Leadership of the returning group of Jews was entrusted to Sheshbazzar, a prince of Judah (Ezr. 1:8) and probably the son of the deposed former king of Judah, Jehoiachin.⁶ Sheshbazzar's official position is unclear, though he is called a "governor" under appointment by Cyrus (Ezr. 5:14). He was permitted to take with him all the holy vessels of the temple which had been looted several decades earlier by the Babylonian army (Ezr. 1:7-11; 5:13-15; 6:5).

Of course, there was no requirement for any of the exiles to return. Many, if

⁵Details of the weakening of Babylon and the rise of Cyrus may be found in J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 351-354, 360-361.

⁶If Sheshbazzar is to be identified with Shenazzar (cf. 1 Chr. 3:18), as many scholars think, then he was the son of Jehoiachin and the uncle of Zerubbabel, cf. R. Pratt, Jr., *ISBE* (1988) IV.475.

not most of them, had been born in Babylon, and few retained memories of the old land. They had done what Jeremiah had suggested in his letter to them--established communities of their own and developed livelihoods in Mesopotamia. Furthermore, a trip back to Jerusalem would be hazardous, to say the least. Thus, it is not surprising to find that many of the Jews chose to remain in Babylon as part of diaspora Judaism. Some Jews were willing to financially assist the venture of those returning though they did not participate in it personally (Ezr. 1:4, 6). It was a hardy group which determined to leave Babylon and journey to the unknown dangers of the old land. Doubtless, it was the glowing promises of the prophets that inspired them to do so at all.

Four primary leaders figure in the return from exile, Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.⁷ It is with Zerubbabel that the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah were closely associated (Ezr. 5:1-2). The oracles in Malachi are more difficult to date, but for reasons to be taken up later, an approximate date of 450 B.C. (some seventy years after Haggai and Zechariah) is acceptable.

Reviving the Work - The Book of Haggai

The hopes and dreams of the exiles returning from Babylon were built upon the glorious promises of restoration given by the earlier prophets. The opening of Psalm 126 captures the jubilant mood of the some fifty thousand (cf. Ezr. 2:64; Ne. 7:66) who made the trek westward from Babylon.⁸ However, the first blush of excitement soon degenerated into disillusionment and apathy. Though both Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were in the lineage of David, they were hardly the stuff of fulfillment regarding the dazzling promises of a Davidic king who would rule Israel as the jewel among the nations of the world. Certainly the ruins of Jerusalem did not qualify as the spiritual center for all nations. The great altar for sacrifice was erected (Ezr. 3:1-6), but even this achievement was completed in the midst of intimidation from the

⁷Some interpreters have supposed that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are the same person. The Ezra account is somewhat confusing, for both persons seem to have had authorization to rebuild the temple (Ezr. 1:8; 3:2, 6-7) and both are credited with laying its foundations (Ezr. 5:16; 3:8-11). Also, the two leaders are both called "governor" (Ezr. 5:14; Hg. 1:1). Accordingly, some have suggested that Sheshbazzar was a Babylonian name while Zerubbabel was a Jewish name (though this theory falls due to the fact that both names are Babylonian). However, in the Apocrypha the two are clearly distinguished (1 Esdras 6:18). If Sheshbazzar is the same as Shenazzar, then he was Zerubbabel's uncle (cf. 1 Chr. 3:18). In any case, most scholars consider them to be two individuals.

⁸Older interpreters have identified this psalm as post-exilic, and specifically, as expressing the joy of the captives who returned from Babylon. More recent interpreters have indicated that this identification is not necessarily correct, cf. M. Dahood, *Psalms 101-150 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 217-218. Nevertheless, regardless of the date of the psalm, it must surely reflect the same kind of emotion accompanying the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, for Haggai clearly says that they "expected much" (Hg. 1:9a).

surrounding inhabitants of the land (Ezr. 3:3a). It was a tribute to the Jews' courage that the altar was completed at all.

Pressing ahead under the governorship of Zerubbabel⁹ and the spiritual influence of Joshua ben Jozadak, the priest, the people began the foundation for the new temple (Ezr. 3:7-11). The base for the new edifice was a far cry from the temple envisioned by Ezekiel, however, and those who could still remember the first temple wept with disappointment (Ezr. 3:12-13; cf. Hg. 2:3). When the local populace offered to help in the construction, they were turned down abruptly (Ezr. 4:1-3). For spite, they set about discouraging and intimidating those who were trying to go on with the work (Ezr. 4:4-5). Since the rebuffed locals were remnants of the northern tribes, it is clear that the vision of a united Israel would not at this time materialize in the way the prophets had predicted. In the end, the construction came to a standstill. It remained checked for the balance of Cyrus' rule (who died in 530 B.C.) and that of his successor, Cambyses II (530-522), and on into the rule of Darius I (Ezr. 4:24).¹⁰

The times were particularly discouraging. The community of returned exiles combated a series of droughts and crop failures, which in turn produced economic hardship (cf. Hg. 1:6, 9-11; 2:15-17, 19). It was indeed a day of "small things" (cf. Zec. 4:10). Within a few years, the governor of the Trans-Euphrates region of Persia could not even remember Cyrus' edict giving permission to the Jews to rebuild their temple (cf. Ezr. 5:3-4). A search had to be made before the work could go on (Ezr. 5:5--6:12). It is not surprising that the people were ready to give up altogether (Hg. 1:2). They needed spiritual focus and leadership. It is in response to this crisis that Haggai and Zechariah played their critical prophetic roles.

The Prophet Haggai

Little is known about the prophet Haggai's personal life. That he was a contemporary of Zechariah is clear enough (Ezr. 5:1; 6:14). Since his ministry coincided with the recommencement of the temple project, we can place his preaching in 520 B.C. Jerome, in the Christian era, maintained that Haggai was of priestly descent. In the Septuagint, Syriac and Vulgate, he, along with Zechariah, is credited with the authorship of some psalms (Ps. 138, 146-149).¹¹ All his oracles are

⁹Sheshbazzar mysteriously disappears from the accounts of the rebuilding project. Only Zerubbabel is described in any active leadership role, along with Joshua, the priest. Later, Sheshbazzar will be given credit for laying the foundation of the new temple (Ezr. 5:14-16), but what became of him or why his disappearance is an enigma. Perhaps, as Bruce has suggested, he returned to Persia, when he felt that his commission had been fulfilled, cf. Bruce, 101. Perhaps he died, cf. Bright, 366-367.

¹⁰Cambyses' rule was relatively short. He went insane, committing suicide, cf. Anderson, 438.

¹¹R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 944.

precisely dated within a four month period, and these can be correlated with the modern calendar system as follows:

<i>1:1</i>	= <i>August 29, 520 B.C.</i>	<i>2:10</i>	= <i>December 18, 520 B.C.</i>
<i>2:1</i>	= <i>October 17, 520 B.C.</i>	<i>2:20</i>	= <i>December 18, 520 B.C.</i>

Because the dated introductions of Haggai's oracles are given in the third person, some have supposed that the prophet did not himself record them, but this conclusion seems unnecessary.

Haggai's First Oracle (1:1-15)

The dating of the first oracle obviously coincides with the situation in which work on the temple had been stopped for many years (1:1). The disillusionment of the returned exiles had caused them to lapse into hopelessness, as is evident by the apathetic excuse, "It's not time for Yahweh's house to be built" (1:2).¹² Leaving off work on the temple, the repatriates preoccupied themselves with building their own homes, and Haggai challenged this reversal of priorities (1:3-4). The prophetic promise and the decree of Cyrus had been for the rebuilding of the temple. The building of personal homes was secondary.

Haggai challenged the people to contemplate why they had been plagued with drought, bad crops and economic deprivation (1:5-6). Was it not because they had neglected the truly important thing, God's house, by turning aside for personal advancement? They ought to have been logging timbers for the temple, not paneling their own homes (1:7-8). So now, because they had neglected their primary responsibility, God was speaking to them through the difficulty of economic failure (1:9-11).

Haggai's sermon had striking results! It spurred on Zebubbabel and Joshua in leading the people to resume work on the temple. They put away their careless indifference and "feared Yahweh" (1:12). Once they had done so, Haggai gave to them the further reassurance that God would be with them in their work (1:13). The spirits of all the people were stimulated toward reaching their goal, and hardly more

¹²The title Yahweh Tsabaot (= Lord of hosts) is commonly used in Haggai (10 times), Zechariah (36 times) and Malachi (23 times). The NIV renders this name as "LORD Almighty," thus emphasizing Yahweh's sovereignty. Such a rendering is acceptable, but it deprives the reader of the more vivid idea that Yahweh is the master of all powers, seen and unseen, on earth and in the heavens. Whether "hosts" refers to armies, angels or stars is a moot question and beside the point. Yahweh is the Lord of all powers of whatever sort, and this truth the discouraged exiles needed to hear!

than three weeks after Haggai's oracle, they had once again marshaled their efforts to rebuild the temple (1:14-15).

Haggai's Second Oracle (2:1-9)

If Haggai's first sermon startled the people into action, his second one, nearly a month later, reassured them of the worthiness of the project. The seventh month would have delayed the work due to the Feast of Trumpets on the first day, Yom Kippur on the tenth day, and the week-long Feast of Booths beginning on the fifteenth day (cf. Lv. 23; Dt. 16). Nevertheless, at the close of the Feast of Booths Haggai again addressed the leaders and people to encourage them (2:1-2). Probably not many of the returned exiles had seen Solomon's temple, but the few who had done so were disheartened with the new effort. Possibly the recent holy celebrations had reminded them of more glorious days before the first temple had been destroyed. What they were doing now seemed so insignificant by comparison (2:3). But Haggai encouraged them all to be strong, because Yahweh, who was sovereign over all the powers of the universe, was with them (2:4). His Holy Spirit was among them still. The exile may have ended in the loss of the land, the temple and the dynasty of David, but it had not destroyed the covenant (2:5)! God was still faithful, so they need not fear.

To give added weight to the importance of their task, Haggai predicted that soon God would bring convulsions upon the whole earth (2:6).¹³ Every nation would be shaken. That which all nations treasured would come to the new temple,¹⁴ and the glory which had been in the first temple, the glory that Ezekiel had seen leaving with the exiles and then returning in a wonderful reappearance (Eze. 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-

¹³It is apparent that the New Testament writers understood this shaking to be the cataclysmic close of human history (cf. He. 13:26-29).

¹⁴The traditional rendering, "the desire of all nations" (KJV; Vulgate), appears more simple than it is. The Hebrew sentence has a singular subject and a plural verb, and because of the plural verb, many modern translators have reointed the subject to make it plural also. Hence, there are the translations, "treasures of all nations" (RSV, NAB) and "precious things" (ASV). The NIV, apparently unwilling to give up the clear messianic nuance, translates it as "the desired of all nations." Those who take the phrase in the plural sense do not interpret it as a reference to the Messiah. Rather, the "treasures of the nations" refer to the wealth of the nations which will be brought to Jerusalem (cf. Is. 60:5). Those taking the full force of the singular, of course, see it as a prediction of the coming Messiah, as in the English carols, "O come Desire of Nations..." from *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, "Dear Desire of every nation" from *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*, and "Seek the great Desire of nations" from *Angels, from the Realms of Glory*. It must be conceded that plural verbs with singular subjects are not unknown in the Hebrew text, and it should also be recognized that the messianic interpretation began with the Jewish rabbis, not Christians. It was passed on to Christians via St. Jerome. At the same time, the passage is not quoted or alluded to in the New Testament, so the opinion of the early church is inaccessible, cf. R. Alden, "Haggai," *EBC* (1985) VII.586-587. Even if the subject is taken as a plural, there still may be overtones of the messianic age, so the messianic nuance should not be dismissed too readily.

23; 43:1-5; 44:4), would surely take up residence once more (2:7). Though there might be economic stress for the returned exiles, God's resources were not impoverished (2:8)! In the end, the splendor of the second temple would be greater than the splendor of Solomon's temple (2:9).¹⁵ It would be a sanctuary of peace (cf. Eze. 34:25; 37:26).

Haggai's Third Oracle (2:10-19)

Two more months passed before Haggai addressed the community again (2:10). This time he used an illustration to convey his message by asking for a ruling on the law from the priests. The theme is very much on the order of his first sermon, that is, that the former apathy of the people toward God's house had polluted their labor, resulting in hard times (2:14). Holy things do not create a chain of consecration for mundane things (2:11-12; cf. Lv. 6:25-27), but rather, mundane things pollute holy things (2:13; cf. Lv. 11:28; 22:4-7; Nu. 19:11-16). A consecrated sacrifice temporarily might make holy the garment that it touched, but the garment could not then make holy some other mundane object. Holiness could not be transmitted by second degree contact. However, whatever is ceremonially unclean defiles whatever it touches, and that which has become unclean by contact can pass on this contagion by secondary contact.

The point of this illustration is that the disillusionment and apathy of those who were ready to give up had contaminated the whole group. It had gone from one to another to another. The people had deserted their mandate to rebuild the temple, and they had turned aside in order to pursue personal advancement. Because the attitudes of the people were contaminated with this apathy, the offerings which they brought to the great altar were also contaminated (2:14b). What had been spreading among the people was not holiness, but indifference towards God's work and preoccupation with their own affairs. The New Testament counterpart to this teaching comes from the Lord Jesus, who said, "Seek first the Father's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6:33).

Thus, Haggai called the people to remember their previous listless condition. There needed to be a clear line of demarcation between the old period of inactivity and the new period of energetic work. Previously, before any stones in the new temple had been laid, the economic conditions of the community had progressively deteriorated (2:15-17). Grain had only given a fifty percent yield, and grapes even less. The crop failures were judgments upon the community, because they forsaken

¹⁵It may be that this verse has more messianic content even than 2:7, for the splendor of the second temple was surely due to the fact that the Lord himself came to it (cf. Mt. 12:6; Jn. 2:13-22).

their primary calling. Now they were pressing ahead with God's work. Their spirits had been stirred (1:14), and they had renewed their dedication. So, December 18, 520 B.C. was to be recorded as the date separating the past from the future (2:18).¹⁶ God's blessing upon them in the future would reverse the crop failures of the past (2:19). The seed for the next harvest had already been taken from the grain pits and sown in the soil.¹⁷ God would not fail them! They could expect a change in their fortunes because they had put his work first!

Haggai's Fourth Oracle (2:20-23)

The final word of Yahweh through Haggai came personally to Zerubbabel later on the same day as the third oracle (2:20). It repeated the eschatological prediction that the entire universe would be shaken (2:21; cf. 2:6-7). The potentates of foreign nations would be overthrown, and their armies would be turned against each other (2:22). On the day of this apocalyptic climax, God would establish Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel as his chosen executive (2:23). This favored status was expressed in the metaphor of a signet ring, the ring engraved with the king's seal which was used to endorse all official documents.¹⁸

The fact that Zerubbabel died without seeing this great honor bestowed upon him raises the question of a failed prophecy. Was the prophecy to be taken literally, and if so, why did it not occur? Was it conditional, either by divine schedule or Israel's response?¹⁹ Would it be fulfilled by Zerubbabel *redivivus*? Or was the promise more on the order of the prediction about the coming of Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6),

¹⁶There exists an apparent discrepancy between Hg. 2:18 and Ezr. 3:10-13. Both appear to describe a foundation-laying ceremony, but on widely different dates. The early date would be in about 537-8 B.C., while the later one is in 520 B.C. Some critical scholars have charged one or other of the accounts with error (usually the Ezra account), see discussion and refutation in P. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987)129-130. Others suggest that there may have been two foundation-laying ceremonies, or else, that the one described in Haggai was a ritual purification--in effect, a rededication, cf. D. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 93. Still others, on linguistic grounds, argue that what is envisioned in Haggai is not necessarily a foundation-laying, but rather, the commencement of the work of restoring the temple, work that began in 538 B.C., fell into a hiatus for many years, and then was begun again as recorded in Haggai, cf. J. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1972) 52-53; C. and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987) 63-64.

¹⁷The ground was usually ploughed and the seed sown in late fall for the next season. Thus, the answer to the question, "Is there any grain left in the barn?", is negative.

¹⁸Earlier, Jeremiah had used the same metaphor in his judgment against Jehoiachin (Je. 22:24). Jehoiachin, Zerubbabel's grandfather, had been removed from the position of being God's signet ring. Now, the judgment would be reversed.

¹⁹So, B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 471. Childs makes the interesting observation that if the prophecy was conditional, then the prophetic word became the criterion by which to judge history, rather than the other way around.

which according to Jesus, was fulfilled by John the Baptist (Mt. 17:10-13; cf. Lk. 1:16-17). Would someone else, a Zerubbabel-like figure, arise to fulfill the prediction? Was the promise messianic, and was it fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, as many older interpreters have thought inasmuch as Zerubbabel was in the messianic lineage (Mt. 1:12)? Is there yet an eschatological fulfillment to be accomplished at the end of the age (cf. Zec. 4:2-14; Rv. 11:3-4)? In the opinion of this writer, Zerubbabel serves as a typological link between the promise and the coming Messiah. This link will be further reinforced by Zechariah's preaching (cf. Zec. 6:9-15).

Reinforcing the Spiritual Renewal

Zechariah 1-8

That Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai is clear from the close association of their names and ministries in the Book of Ezra (Ezr. 5:1-2; 6:14). Also, the dates of their oracles closely coincide, though Zechariah's sermons extended a couple of years later than Haggai's:

Haggai

Zechariah

1:1= August 29, 520 B.C.

2:1= October 17, 520 B.C.

2:10= December 18, 520 B.C.

2:20= December 18, 520 B.C.

1:1= October 27(?), 520 B.C.

1:7= February 15, 519 B.C.

7:1= December 7, 518 B.C.

What happened to Haggai after December 18, 520 B.C. is unknown. He disappears from the scene as abruptly as Sheshbazzar for reasons unknown. Zechariah, his contemporary, continued the prophetic ministry.

The Prophet Zechariah

Scarcely more is known of Zechariah than Haggai, though at least his

genealogy is given (1:1, 7).²⁰ His name means "Yahweh has remembered." We would assume from the use of the word *na'ar* in 2:4 that he was relatively young at the time of his ministry.²¹ While there are no less than thirty-one people bearing the name Zechariah in the Old Testament, thus demonstrating the popularity of the name,²² there is the possibility, perhaps even the likelihood, that Zechariah was a priest as well as a prophet (cf. Ne. 12:4a, 12a, 16). If so, then he followed in the tradition of Ezekiel, who was also a priest and a prophet.²³

The Book of Zechariah

The Book of Zechariah falls naturally into two sections, chapters 1-8, containing dated prose oracles (1:1, 7; 7:1), and chapters 9-14, containing undated oracles in both poetry and prose. While these two sections have some clear factors of continuity with each other,²⁴ there is widespread agreement among critical scholars that the second section was not written by the Zechariah who is mentioned in the first section (1:1; 7; 7:1, 8).²⁵ The first section specifically says that its author was Zechariah ben Berekiah. The second section contains no mention of its author, though since it appears in the Hebrew Bible as a part of the literature under Zechariah's name, it has traditionally been assumed to have been by the same writer.

Doubt about this traditional assumption began as early as the 17th century due to the fact that Matthew clearly attributed a passage in this second section to

²⁰We assume that in Ezr. 5:1 and 6:14 the idiom "son of Iddo" (also 1 Esdras 6:1) is to be taken in the common Hebrew sense of grandson. Indeed, the NIV renders it "descendent of," thus harmonizing the two books in the translation.

²¹The Hebrew word *na'ar* refers to a young man anywhere from childhood to marriageable age. One tradition indicates that Zechariah lived to be very old and was buried alongside his colleague, Haggai, cf. W. LaSor et al., *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 489.

²²T. Mauch, *IBD* (1962) IV.941-943.

²³The post-exilic Zechariah ben Berekiah should not be confused with the pre-exilic priest, Zechariah ben Jehoiada, who was murdered in the temple court (cf. 2 Chr. 24:20-21). The fact that Matthew's gospel speaks of a Zechariah ben Berekiah who was murdered between the porch and the altar (cf. Mt. 23:35), something unknown from the history of the Old Testament, raises this question. Some scholars conclude that Matthew conflated the two Zechariahs on the basis of Jewish tradition, which also conflated them, cf. R. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 471. Others suggest that perhaps there may have been more than one Zechariah ben Berekiah, one who was murdered and another who was the post-exilic prophet, cf. C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987) 194-195.

²⁴i.e., the necessity of repentance and cleansing (1:4; 3:3-4, 9; 12:10; 13:1), the return of the nation from exile (2:6; 8:7-8; 9:12; 10:6, 8-10), the subjugation of Israel's enemies (1:21; 12:3-9; 14:12-15), and the absence of any allusion to an exilic king in Israel. In addition, there are similarities of literary style, cf. R. Harrison, 953-954, as well as similarities in other themes, cf. B. Childs, 482.

²⁵In fact, many commentaries do not even treat chapters 9-14 in the same volume as chapters 1-8, cf. D. Petersen and C. and E. Meyers. Carol and Eric Meyers of Duke University label Zechariah 1-8 as "First Zechariah," and it is not uncommon for Zechariah 9-14 to be labeled as "Deutero-Zechariah."

Jeremiah.²⁶ Later critical scholars concluded that chapters 9-14 were to be dated considerably after the time of Zechariah, and in fact, might also come from the hand of more than one writer.²⁷ Some Jewish rabbis, as reflected in the Talmud, concluded that these latter oracles were attached to the known work of Zechariah in order to avoid having them lost.²⁸ Against this general consensus there still stands various scholars who argue for the unity of the book under one author, the Zechariah who was contemporary with Haggai, Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezr. 5:1; 6:14; Ne. 12:1, 4, 16).²⁹ Probably safest is Fensham's observation that "a definite conclusion must await the discovery of new evidence."³⁰

Whether or not Zechariah is the author of both sections, it must be conceded that there is a strong compatibility between them.³¹ Both sections speak of Yahweh's regathering of his people (8:7-8//10:9-12) and his special protection of Jerusalem (2:3-5//9:8; 14:11). Both describe the return of a paradise-like condition to the land (3:10; 8:12//14:6-8). Both describe a restored covenantal relationship between the people and Yahweh (8:8//13:9). The former describes the curse of divine judgment (5:3), while the latter describes its removal (14:11). Both sections envision a divine judgment on the nations (2:8-9//14:3), their eventual conversion (2:11, 13; 8:22//14:16-19), and their collective worship of Yahweh (8:20-23//14:16-19). Both describe changes in cultic ritual (8:19//14:20-21). Both speak of the gift of the Holy Spirit (4:6//12:10). Both anticipate a punishment of law-breakers (5:4//13:2-3). Finally, both describe a messianic figure who triumphs, not by might, but in humility (3:8; 4:6-7//9:9-10).

A Divine Reflection on the Covenant (1:1-6)

Zechariah's preaching began with a reflection upon the covenant violations that had led to the exile. According to Haggai 1:15, work on the temple had already begun a month or so earlier. Just days before, Haggai had given his second sermon

²⁶Mt. 27:9-10 roughly quotes Zec. 11:12-13 and cites it as being from Jeremiah. Various solutions to this problem have been offered, cf. D. Carson, "Matthew," *EBC* (1984) VIII.562-566. Various early critical scholars built a case for chapters 9-14 or parts of them to be regarded as the pre-exilic work of Jeremiah, cf. E. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 278, but this position has been abandoned by all recent scholars.

²⁷O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 435-440.

²⁸D. Ellis, "Zechariah," *IBC* (Marshall Pickering/Zondervan: 1986) 965.

²⁹Young, 278-281; Harrison, 950-956; G. Robinson, *ISBE* (1943) V.3139-3140; J. Baldwin, 62-70; G. Barker, "Zechariah," *EBC* (1985) VII.596-597; G. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 425-430.

³⁰F. Fensham, *ISBE* (1988) IV.1185.

³¹Childs, 482-483.

(cf. Hg. 2:1). Now Zechariah added his support to the spiritual renewal of the community (1:1).

He reminded the people how angry Yahweh had been with their ancestors who had broken the covenant (1:2). The prophets did not hesitate to ascribe to Yahweh anger. Every prophet to the Israelites in both nations had warned them of the impending anger of God for their repeated covenant violations. While Yahweh was "slow to anger" (cf. Ex. 34:6), and while his anger was momentary compared with his faithfulness (cf. Ps. 30:5), it was hardly foreign to his nature.³² God's love was neither permissive nor blind; it was holy love, and as such, it was inseparably related to his wrath. Therefore, at some point the exile was inevitable if the nation did not turn from its faithless rebellion.

Zechariah's message to the remnant was to repent. The verb *shuv* (= turn, return) is one of the primary expressions used by the earlier prophets to urge the people toward repentance.³³ However, they did not listen (1:4-5). Yahweh was faithful to his word of judgment (1:6a), just as he would be faithful to his word of salvation when they repented (1:6b). Zechariah's call to them, then, was to "turn" to Yahweh so that he would "turn" to them (1:3).

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

About four months after his opening reflection on the broken covenant and his call to repentance, Zechariah again received a prophetic word from Yahweh (1:7). This time, the message was couched in eight night visions (1:8; 4:1).³⁴ The accounts follow a stereotypical pattern, including introductory words, a description of the vision, questions to the angelic guide as to the meaning, and the corresponding explanation. Three of the visions, the first, third and fifth, also include oracles.

³²Various Hebrew expressions describe God's anger, such as, *'anap* (= to blow violently), *'ap* (= nose), *hemah* (= heat), *yaham* (= warm), *qetsep* (= outburst) and *'ebrah* (= overflowing), cf. E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 114.

³³Especially in the writings of the eighth century prophets, there is an extended play on this word *shuv*. The stubborn intent of Israel had been to "turn away" from God (Ho. 11:7; 14:4). Therefore, Yahweh's word was that they must "turn" back to him (Ho. 12:6; 14:1-2; Is. 31:6-7). Since they did not "turn back" to him (Am. 4:6b, 8b, 9b, 10b, 11b; Ho. 5:4; 7:10, 16; 11:5; Is. 6:10; 9:13), his anger would not "turn back" from them (Am. 2:4, 6; Is. 5:25; 9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b; 14:27). Because of their stubborn rebellion, the people would "return" to slavery (Ho. 8:13; 9:3; 11:5). The future hope, of course, was that after they had been exiled, they would "turn back" to God (Ho. 3:5; Is. 10:20-21; 19:22). Then God's anger would "turn away" from them (Ho. 14:4; Is. 12:1). In the end, they would be allowed to "return" from exile (Am. 9:14; Is. 1:27; 7:3; 10:22; 35:10; Mic. 5:3; 7:19). All these passages are built around the verb *shuv* and its various forms.

³⁴We assume that these visions were not dreams, since the Hebrew dream vocabulary is not used. The verb used in 1:8 is *ra'ah* (= to see), the classical language of visionary experiences. This is made doubly clear in 4:1, where Zechariah, who had been asleep, is awakened before the next vision.

Scholars have observed that the eight visions are arranged in a chiasmic structure (*a b b c c b b a*).³⁵

A) First Vision: The Four Horsemen

B) Second Vision: The Horns which Scattered the People in Exile

B) Third Vision: The People Reinstated in the Holy Land

C) Fourth Vision: Joshua, the Cleansed High Priest

C) Fifth Vision: Zerubbabel, the Anointed Governor

B) Sixth Vision: The Law-Breakers Banished from the Holy Land

B) Seventh Vision: A Woman in a Basket Depicts the People in Exile

A) Eighth Vision: The Four Chariots

As one can see, the four horses in the first vision parallel the four chariots in the last one. The second and third vision are a pair, showing both the exile of the nation and its restoration, and they match the seventh and sixth, which are also a pair dealing with exile and restoration. The theological climax is in the central two visions, the fourth and the fifth, which assure the community that their two leaders are backed by divine authority.³⁶

The genre of the visions is highly symbolic, similar to the genre of apocalyptic which developed somewhat later in Jewish literature.³⁷ Like the visions one finds in other such writings (i.e., Daniel and Revelation), the interpretive challenge is not only to understand what is described but to interpret the meaning of what is described.

The First Vision: Four Horsemen (1:7-17)

In the first vision, Zechariah saw a rider astride a red horse, accompanied by other horses (presumably with riders), which were red, sorrel, and white (1:8).³⁸ The first rider and horse was standing in a thicket of evergreen shrubs. The riders represented divine dispatches, similar to the Persian surveillance and courier patrols

³⁵Chiasm is a poetic device in Hebrew poetry, and it is also to be found in Akkadian and Ugaritic literature in the ancient Near East, cf. W. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (Sheffield, England: JSOTS, 1986) 201-207. A primary feature of chiasmic structure is that the climax appears in the middle rather than at the end.

³⁶Baldwin, 80, 93.

³⁷For a short introduction to apocalyptic literature, see L. Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), and for a more thorough treatment, see D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

³⁸This vision and the eighth one were obviously the inspiration for John's four horsemen in the Apocalypse (cf. Re. 6:1-8).

well-known throughout the empire (1:9- 10). They reported to the Angel of Yahweh³⁹ that political and military conflict had subsided in the earth (1:11). However, this state was at best an uneasy peace, for it had not resulted in justice for the world, particularly justice with regard to the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah (1:12). The seventy years of exile predicted by Jeremiah had been fulfilled (cf. Je. 25:11-12; 29:10), but the gracious promises of restoration had not.

So, Yahweh reassured his messenger that his divine passion was deeply stirred for the sake of Jerusalem and Mt. Zion (1:13-14). He was furious at the nations who were at ease while continuing to oppress his people. In delivering the nation over to exile, God's chastisement had been minimal compared with the suffering which the nations had inflicted upon the Jews (1:15).⁴⁰ Therefore, God had turned toward his people in mercy so that they could rebuild the temple on Mt. Zion along with the city of Jerusalem (1:16). Once more, the land would be prosperous (1:17a). Just as Yahweh had once chosen Jerusalem as his holy city and Mt. Zion for his sanctuary in the time of David (cf. Ps. 68:15-18; 78:67-72; 132:13-18), he would do so again (1:17b).

This message about God's passion to rebuild the temple reinforced Haggai's preaching against the apathy of the people (cf. Hg. 1:3-4, 7-11). Surely God's people could not remain unconcerned about his purpose for them when God himself was so aroused!

The Second Vision: Four Horns and Four Smiths (1:18-21)⁴¹

Immediately following the vision of the divine patrols, Zechariah saw four horns⁴² representing the nations which dispersed the Israelites in the exile (1:18-19).⁴³

³⁹The figure of the *Mal'ak Yahweh* (= Messenger of the Lord) is reoccurring in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis. In many texts, the *Mal'ak Yahweh* is indistinguishable from Yahweh himself (cf. Ge. 16:7, 9, 10-11; 16:13). In other passages, as here, he is distinct from Yahweh (2 Sa. 24:16). This fluidity helps to explain how Yahweh, who is ineffable, can at the same time reveal himself in theophany. Not a few readers have interpreted the figure to be the pre-existent Christ, cf. J. Wilson, *ISBE* (1979) I.125. While such an interpretation can only be made in light of the New Testament, it does help explain how the figure can in some instances speak as God and on other occasions speak for God.

⁴⁰It will be remembered, of course, that anti-Semitism was so intense in Persia that a concerted effort was made to annihilate the Jews (cf. Book of Esther).

⁴¹There is a discrepancy in verse numbering between the English versions and the Hebrew text beginning with 1:18 and extending through the end of chapter 2. The respective enumerations are as follows:

English Versions:	Hebrew Text:
1:18-21	2:1-4
2:1-13	2:5-17

⁴²Horns are a well known symbol in the Old Testament for political strength (cf. 1 Sa. 2:10; Ps. 132:17; 148:14; Je. 48:25; La. 2:17)

He then saw four smiths coming to dehorn these political powers (1:20-21). The four smiths were divinely appointed to carry out Yahweh's purposes of judgment. They may represent the successive destroyers of the various world empires which oppressed God's people. If so, then the four smiths are Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Babylon overthrew the Assyrians, the Persians overthrew the Babylonians, the Greeks would overthrow the Persians, and the Romans would conquer what was left of Alexander's empire.⁴⁴ Of course, if this approach is followed, then the vision is prophetic as well as historic. Against this view is the fact that the passage seems to be speaking of past entities rather than future ones. If the number of smiths are taken to be symbolic only, then they refer to the Persian Empire which conquered Babylon.

The Third Vision: The Man with the Measuring Cord (2:1-13)

In the third vision, Zechariah observed a man with a measuring cord on his way to survey Jerusalem, presumably with the intention of beginning the work of rebuilding the city (2:1-2). The measuring of the site graphically depicted the anticipation that Jerusalem would be restored. The vision recalled, probably intentionally, Ezekiel's similar vision of the bronze man with the measuring rod, who measured the various dimensions of the new temple (Eze. 40-42). An angel appeared and instructed Zechariah's guide to inform the surveyor that Jerusalem would be so heavily populated that it could have no walls (2:3-4). Instead of the conventional protection of ramparts and gates, the city would be divinely protected by a "wall of fire" around it, not unlike the pillar of fire which protected the Israelites in the desert (cf. Ex. 13:21-22; 14:24; 40:38); Nu. 14:14; Dt. 1:33). It would have the divine glory within and divine protection without (2:5).

Perhaps this vision was intended to answer the question, "Was it safe to rebuild the temple while the city was defenseless?"⁴⁵ Some had been saying that it was not the right time to build (cf. Hg. 1:2). If so, then the message was clear. They should have no fear, but complete the work which God had called them to do. God would

⁴³The number four simply may be symbolic of the totality of the nations which devastated Israel and Judah, a typical usage of the number in apocalyptic. However, if the four horns are taken to refer to four specific political entities, they may be either Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece (if the oppression has reference to both the northern and southern nations) or Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome (if the oppression has reference to the southern nation only). Of course, Persia, Greece and Rome were not responsible for the original deportations. Still, a pogrom among the Persians sought to annihilate the Jews (Book of Esther), and the sacrilege of Antiochus Epiphanes in the Greek period and of Titus in the Roman period are well known.

⁴⁴This view has been especially attractive because it seems to parallel Daniel's prophecies of the same world empires (Da. 2, 7). If only the southern nation is in view, and particularly if parallels are sought with the Book of Daniel, the listing has sometimes been given as Persia, Greece, Rome and the Messianic Kingdom. Persia overthrew Babylon, Greece overthrew Persia, Rome overthrew Greece, and the Kingdom of Christ conquered Rome.

⁴⁵Baldwin, 106.

guard his sanctuary!

The speaker of the oracle which follows the vision is unnamed, but it was probably Zechariah himself. First he addressed the Jews remaining in Babylon and Persia. To those still in the land of exile, he gives a trenchant call to come out (2:7).⁴⁶

The land of Babylon, now ruled by Persia, was a kingdom under judgment! Zechariah had been commissioned to proclaim a message of judgment against the nations which had plundered Jerusalem,⁴⁷ for when they plundered Jerusalem, they had plundered something very precious to Yahweh (2:8).⁴⁸ Now, these nations would be plundered themselves (2:9).

Turning to the remnant which had returned to Jerusalem, Zechariah encouraged them to rejoice, because the advent of Yahweh to live among them was on the horizon (2:10)! When he came, Jerusalem would become a place where all the nations could be joined with the Jews as a single people worshipping the one, true God (2:11-12). God had roused himself to begin his work of restoration (2:13), a work that would extend to all the nations. The remnant who had returned from exile had a special part in that work!

The Fourth Vision: Joshua, the Symbol of Things to Come (3:1-10)

The next vision concerned Joshua, the high priest. In a description reminiscent of Job 1-2, Zechariah saw a celestial court scene with Joshua standing before the *Mal'ak Yahweh* as judge, and Satan, the prosecutor, standing ready to accuse him (3:1). It is apparent that Joshua serves as a representative of the remnant community and that his accuser wishes to discredit him. His filthy clothes symbolized the sins of the nation which led to the exile, for as the high priest, he bore the uncleanness of his people (3:3). But the prosecution of Satan was thwarted by God, who rebuked him (3:2).⁴⁹ Satan may have wished to destroy the Jews completely, but God had chosen

⁴⁶Once again, John has borrowed this call in the Apocalypse to warn God's people to come out of spiritual Babylon (Re. 18:4).

⁴⁷Translators have struggled with the Hebrew in the first part of 2:8. The most natural translation of the phrase, "Thus says Yahweh Tsabaoth after glory he sent me against the nations," is unclear. Scholars have approached it in basically two ways. The word *kavod* (= glory, heaviness) might refer to Zechariah's original commission to preach against the nations, a commission in which he received a vision of God's glory, like Isaiah (so KJV, RSV, NAB), or in which he was sent on a glorious mission (so NEB). Alternatively, if the word *'ahar* (= after) is taken in the sense of "with" (which occasionally happens in Hebrew), then the word *kavod* might refer to the intensity (or "heaviness") with which the prophet was to preach to the nations (so Chary and Baldwin, contra Ellis).

⁴⁸The "apple of the eye" is an old English expression referring to the pupil, and hence, something very precious and jealously protected, cf. R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1979) I.215. The Hebrew phrase in 2:8 is obscure and may mean "the *bavah* (= 'gate,' 'opening' or 'child') of the eye," *BDB*, 93.

⁴⁹Yahweh's words, "Yahweh rebuke you," employs the language of theophany in which God speaks of himself in the third person. As mentioned earlier (see footnote #40), there is a fluidity in the figure of the *Mal'ak Yahweh*.

Jerusalem, and he would not be deterred in his plans. Joshua and the remnant had been rescued from the threat of destruction by a divine act. The high priest was cleansed from his sin, re clothed with new garments, and reinstated in his office, a symbol of the cleansing and reinstatement of the people (3:4-5).

In his new commission, Joshua was charged to keep the laws of Torah. If he did so, he would be established as the judicial authority over the new temple. Even more important, he was promised immediate access to God, just as the celestial beings in God's heavenly court (3:6-7). Formerly, the high priest had access to God's immediate presence only one day each year on *Yom Kippur*. Now, he was promised open access like the angels.⁵⁰ Joshua and his fellow priests were symbols of a blessing still to come, the blessing of the advent of God's Servant, the Branch. The coming of the Servant of Yahweh had been a major theme in Isaiah 40-55, and the coming of the one called the Branch first had been predicted by Isaiah (Is. 4:2-6; 11:1ff.) and later by Jeremiah (Je. 23:5-6; 33:15-16). Joshua and his fellow priests were to have a privileged role in preparing for the coming of this messianic figure (3:8).

Changing focus to a stone, possibly the diadem in the high priest's turban (cf. Ex. 29:6), Joshua was informed that it was full of seven eyes⁵¹ and had an inscription.⁵² This stone and its inscription anticipated a time when God would cleanse the land from sin on a single day (3:9). That cleansing would make possible a time of unprecedented prosperity (3:10). If Joshua's leadership in the rebuilding of the temple was the first step toward this glorious future (cf. Ezr. 5:2), then surely the work must go on without delay!

The Fifth Vision: The Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees (4:1-14)

Apparently, Zechariah dropped off to sleep after the fourth vision, and he had to be awakened before the next one began (4:1). In this vision, the prophet saw the

Sometimes the Angel is distinguished from Yahweh, and sometimes the two are coalesced. Here, the latter is the case. Other examples of this special self-distinction between Yahweh and Yahweh within the Divine Nature appear in Hosea 1:7 and Genesis 19:24. While it is too much to say that such expressions directly depict the doctrine of the Trinity, it can at least be said that in the Old Testament the Divine Nature is depicted in multi-dimensional language.

The expression, "Yahweh rebuke you," parallels the similar expression used by Michael the archangel (cf. Jude 9).

⁵⁰This seems to be the plain meaning of the phrase "these standing here" (cf. 3:4).

⁵¹The eyes in the stone are reminiscent of the eyes in the wheels of Yahweh's chariot throne, as described by Ezekiel (cf. Eze. 1:18; 10:12). In the next vision, Zechariah will be informed that they represent the eyes of Yahweh which symbolize his omniscience (cf. 4:10b). Much later, of course, John will identify the seven eyes as the seven spirits of God which traverse the earth (Re. 5:6).

⁵²The engraving on the traditional high priest's turban was a golden plate with the words "Holy unto Yahweh" (Ex. 28:36-38).

golden lampstand which normally would stand on the inside south wall of the holy place (4:2).⁵³ Also, he saw two olive trees, one on either side of the lampstand (4:3). So he inquired concerning the meaning of the lampstand and the olive trees (4:4-5). Instead of answering his question directly, Zechariah's angelic guide temporarily put it aside and responded with an oracle directed to Zerubbabel.⁵⁴ Yahweh's word to Zerubbabel was that his task would be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit rather than his own human resources (4:6).⁵⁵ What seemed to be a mountain of opposition, a mountain which is here personified and addressed in an aside, would be reduced to a plain by the power of the Spirit (4:7a).⁵⁶ Opposition notwithstanding, Zerubbabel would finish the temple and lay the capstone as the final component in the new structure, and when he did, all the people would shout their blessings upon the work (4:7b). The same hands which began the work would also finish it (4:8-9). There might be those who would despise the new temple as insignificant (cf. Hg. 2:3), but when Zerubbabel stood with the final stone in his hand,⁵⁷ everyone would rejoice (4:10a).

Returning to the original question about the lampstand and olive trees, the angelic guide informed Zechariah that the seven lights in the lamp represented the

⁵³In the original Tent of Meeting, a single lampstand was constructed for the sanctuary (Ex. 25:31-40; 37:17-24). It was placed on the south inside wall of the holy place (Ex. 40:24-25). In Solomon's temple, this single lampstand was replaced by ten lampstands, five on each side (1 Kg. 7:48-49; 2 Chr. 4:19-21). Now, Zechariah was shown a single one again.

The traditional shape of the seven-branched *menorah* may not have been what is envisioned here. Such lamps are unattested earlier than the 1st century B.C., Baldwin, 119. Nevertheless, this familiar image has affected the translations. The NIV, for instance, translates the word *mutsaqah* (= lip) as "channel," suggesting tubing. The NEB renders the word as "piping." A more likely construction is that there were seven small lamps on the rim of a large bowl, cf. *IDB* (1962) III.66, or else, the rim of the bowl had seven pinched flutes for seven wicks, such as the one found at Tel el-Kheleifeh from about the 6th century B.C., cf. E. Blaiklock, *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. Blaiklock and Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 285.

⁵⁴The lack of transition into this oracle and the fact that the answer to Zechariah's question does not begin until the middle of 4:10 has led many scholars to suggest a displacement in the text. In fact, some translations even rearrange the textual order, placing the oracle of 4:3-10 immediately after 3:10 (so NEB, NAB, JB). However, there is no textual support for such a dislocation, and while as it stands the interjection of the oracle into the original vision seems awkward, such an interjection does not seem impossible in light of the genre of the work.

⁵⁵It will be remembered that the tabernacle was also constructed by Spirit-filled individuals (cf. Ex. 31:1-5; 35:30-33). Thus, Zerubbabel's role in building the second temple was comparable to theirs in the building of the original Tent of Meeting.

⁵⁶Jesus' statement in the gospels, "Say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,'" was probably an intentional allusion to this passage (cf. Mt. 17:20).

⁵⁷The Hebrew expression *ha'eben habbedi'yl* ("the tin stone" or "the separated stone") is difficult to know how to translate. The older English Versions, on the basis of early Greek, Latin and Aramaic versions, have rendered it as "plumbline." This rendering is at least questionable. (Tin does not have sufficient weight for a good plumbline.) Better, perhaps, is the idea of a "separated stone" or a "select stone," in which the stone of 4:10b is the same as the capstone in 4:7, cf. C. Stuhmueller, "Zechariah," *JBC* (1968) I.393.

seven eyes of Yahweh which see all that is in the earth (4:10b; cf. 3:9 and footnote #52). They form a symbol of his divine omniscience. The two olive trees, which stand on either side of the lampstand, supply oil for the lamps through two "pipes" (4:11-12).⁵⁸ They, in turn, represent the two leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua (4:13-14). They were anointed by God⁵⁹ to serve in this work. Zerubbabel, in the family line of David, was the royal candidate for such anointing, and Joshua, in the family line of Aaron, was the priestly candidate. Together, they were the means to supply for God the temple he had commissioned. Their empowerment for this work was through the golden oil of the Holy Spirit which flowed through them (cf. 4:6). Thus, the fourth and fifth visions clearly authenticate Joshua and Zerubbabel in their leadership roles.

The Sixth Vision: The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)

In the next vision, Zechariah saw a large, rectangular flying scroll (5:1-2).⁶⁰ On one side of the scroll was written a curse for violating the third commandment (cf. Ex. 20:7; Dt. 5:11), and on the other was a curse for violating the eighth commandment (cf. Ex. 20:15; Dt. 5:19). Together, the two curses demonstrate God's displeasure with those who disregard him and who wrong their neighbors (5:3-4).

It is clear, then, that God expected his ancient laws to prevail. However, since no executor of the curses is described, the vision seems oriented to the restoration when God shall himself expel from his kingdom all that offends (cf. Mt. 13:41; Re. 21:27). In the day of renewal, God's word shall accomplish a righteous purge. In the meantime, of course, the community of exiles who had been given a share in preparing for God's future must also be careful to observe his laws.

The Seventh Vision: The Woman in the Basket (5:5-11)

The seventh vision revealed an ephah barrel with a lead cover (5:5-6a).⁶¹ The barrel symbolized the moral condition⁶² of the people in the land (5:6b). In the barrel

⁵⁸The Hebrew word *tsanetterot*, translated "pipes," is a *hapax legomenon*, so the translation is only an educated guess.

⁵⁹Lit., "the sons of oil"

⁶⁰The size of the scroll, 20 cubits by 10 cubits, match the dimensions of the Holy Place in the tabernacle, cf. *ISBE* (1988) IV.701 and the portico of Solomon's temple (cf. 1 Kg. 6:3), though whether this is intentional or incidental is unclear. Some interpreters see this as a symbolism of God's holiness embodied in the Torah.

⁶¹An ephah barrel was used for measuring grain, and normally, it held about 1/2 a bushel.

⁶²The Hebrew text reads "this is their appearance" (lit., 'their eye,' so KJV, NASB, ASV), but the LXX and Syriac versions read "this is their iniquity." Many translations follow the latter (so NIV, RSV, NAB, NEB), since it makes the passage more intelligible. The difference between the two words in Hebrew is only a matter of substituting a *waw* for a *yodh*, a rather common displacement.

sat the figure of a woman representing the power of evil (5:7). Inasmuch as she had a shrine (or "house") in Babylon, it may well be that she represents a goddess figure from Mesopotamia, such as, Ishtar.⁶³ The fact that she was in the barrel indicated that the moral character of the population was corrupt. The woman tried to escape the confines of the barrel, but the angel overpowered her (5:8). Then, two winged women lifted the ephah barrel and transported it to Babylon, where it was set up in a house (5:9-11).

The meaning of this vision seems to be that God would send into exile the goddess religions of Babylon, which previously the Israelites had invited into their lives. As in the vision of the flying scroll, the purging of evil from the land would be a divine act. The winged females, like the four smiths of the second vision, represent Yahweh's agents who carry out his purposes.

The Eighth Vision: Four Chariots (6:1-8)

In the final vision, Zechariah saw four chariots emerging from a mountain pass between two peaks of bronze (6:1). Each chariot had different colored steeds, the first having red horses, the second having black ones, the third with white, and the fourth with dappled (6:2-3).⁶⁴ The chariots and horses, like the horsemen of the first vision, represent divine couriers sweeping through the world (cf. 1:11). Here, they are specifically described as the four winds (or spirits) of Yahweh (cf. Ps. 104:4; Re. 7:1) who report on the happenings in the north, west, south, and presumably the east, though the jurisdiction of the red horses is not given (6:4-6).⁶⁵ These storm troopers of Yahweh's sovereign purposes strained at their harnesses as they plunged toward their compass destinations (6:7).

The chariot and horses going into the north country receive special comment, for they had accomplished Yahweh's purpose by securing peace there (6:8). This statement probably refers to the completion of God's work in Babylon in which the wars of Persia and Babylon were now over. The Persian victory had enabled the exiles to return home to rebuild their temple and capital city in Judea. The nations which abused the Israelites had been conquered, and now the divine Spirit could rest.

⁶³See discussion in Meyers, 302-303.

⁶⁴While there are obvious similarities between the horses in this vision and the first one, it is unclear whether the color differences are due to differences in sunlight. Some scholars have suggested that the first vision was at sunset while this one was in the early morning, thus accounting for color differences due to the times of day, cf. G. Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) II.286-287; Baldwin, 138-139.

⁶⁵Some translations emend the text here and include the red horses going to the east because it seems to be implied, even though not in the text (so NEB).

The Meaning of the Eight Visions

Given the bizarre nature of the eight visions, some comment should be offered on their combined significance for the members of the post-exilic community who were attempting to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. However strange the visions might seem to us, Zechariah was not merely prophesying into the air. He intended his visions to inspire the community to complete its task.

To this end, he assured the remnant that their return from exile had been divinely directed. Yahweh's angelic couriers, in the form of variously colored horsemen and horses with chariots, had accomplished the divine purpose by creating the events necessary to facilitate the return home. Those nations which had ravaged the Israelites had themselves come under the sentence of divine judgment. God's avenging messengers, in the form of the four smiths and winged women, were even then in the process of carrying out Yahweh's judgment against her oppressors. The land of Babylon was a kingdom under judgment. Those Jews living in Babylon must flee home to Judea, where God was already beginning the work of restoration. He would protect his remnant with a wall of fire. Evil would be purged from among them by his powerful action. The relics of Babylonian wickedness would be sent back from where they came. In the forefront of the restoration were two anointed leaders, Joshua and Zerubbabel. These men must be trusted and followed. They would accomplish the purpose God had set out for them, not by their own power or goodness, but by the power and vindication of God himself. Though the forces of evil, and Satan himself, be arrayed against them, they would not fail. The remnant could utterly depend upon Yahweh, their sovereign Lord!

Joshua's Crown, the Symbol of the Coming Priest-King (6:9-15)

The night visions end at 6:8, and the introductory formula in 6:9 makes the transition into a non-visionary, historical setting.⁶⁶ The three oracles which follow directly relate to the role of the post-exilic community in God's far-reaching eternal purposes for Jerusalem. While the post-exilic remnant might think that their work was a rather small and insignificant thing, it was necessary that they realize their role in a larger scheme. God's purposes for a glorious future were even then being inaugurated in the building of the second temple.

In the first oracle, Zechariah was instructed by God to make a crown of honor for Joshua. More Jewish exiles had recently arrived from Babylon by caravan, and

⁶⁶Actually, some scholars take the oracle in 6:9-15 as belonging to the eighth night vision; however, the introductory formula and the nature of the oracle seems to distinguish it from what precedes (contra Baldwin).

the names listed in 6:10 were probably the leaders of the group, Josiah ben Zephaniah being the most prominent of the four (6:10). From these new arrivals, Zechariah was instructed to receive silver and gold with which he should make a crown⁶⁷ for Joshua ben Jehozadak, the high priest (6:11).⁶⁸ In a crowning ceremony, he was to announce to Joshua that the temple would surely be built as ordered by the one called "the Branch" (6:12). Earlier, the advent of the one called "the Branch" had been announced (cf. 3:8; Is. 4:6; 11:1ff.; Je. 23:5-6; 33:15-16), and now this figure is again in view. The Hebrew text simply reads, *Behold, a man. His name is Branch.*

Most interpreters take these words to refer to Zerubbabel, pure and simple. However, while Zerubbabel is certainly in view, since he was the leader of the temple-building project, it seems to this writer that Zerubbabel was not intended to exhaust the meaning of the title "the Branch." Rather, he served as a typological figure, which tied the Isaiah and Jeremiah prophecies together with a messianic ideal, Zerubbabel being the typological link. In fact, the whole temple-building project was itself typological of something in God's long-range redemptive purposes.

The one called "the Branch," then, would accomplish the task God had set out for him. He would direct the rebuilding of the temple.⁶⁹ Furthermore, he would rule from his throne in majesty as a priest-king. The ideals of priesthood and kingship would come together in him (6:13).⁷⁰ As a memorial toward this messianic future, the crown of Joshua was to be placed in the rebuilt temple, with the four leaders, Heldai,⁷¹ Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah,⁷² as its guardians (6:14). Ultimately, people would come

⁶⁷The word *'atarot* (= crowns) is plural, possibly indicating that the crown was to be a composite of circlets, cf. Baldwin, 133.

⁶⁸Some scholars have conjectured that the text originally indicated that the crown was meant for Zerubbabel rather than Joshua. A rather tortured explanation is offered for this conclusion, but it lacks the one conclusive element necessary, that is, even a single textual witness to such an emendation. As such, it must be rejected, cf. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) II.343.

⁶⁹The message about building the temple is a double entendre on the order of Nathan's promise to David that he would have son who would build God a house (cf. 2 Sa. 7:13). In one sense, this prediction referred to Solomon, yet in a larger sense, it referred to Jesus, the Messiah. Similarly, the statement here that "the Branch" would build the temple applies to Zerubbabel, but also to Jesus of Nazareth.

⁷⁰Because of the messianic overtones inherent in first the priestly figure, represented by Joshua, and then in the royal figure, represented by Zerubbabel, some Jewish interpreters of the intertestamental period envisioned the possibility of two messiahs, a religious one and a political one. In *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* the central eschatological figures are Levi and Judah, the priestly and royal agents of redemption and the conqueror of Belial, the power of evil, cf. J. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) II.779. This idea of two messiahs was more fully developed within the Qumran community, 1 QS 9:11, cf. E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 438.

⁷¹The NIV follows the Syriac here (so also JB, NEB, RSV), though the name in the Hebrew text *Helem* is more likely. In any case, there is no doubt that the same person is in view. The two names may only be due to a spelling difference (cf. 1 Chr. 11:30; 2 Sa. 23:29; 1 Chr. 27:15).

⁷²The Hebrew text has *Hen* rather than Josiah. It is apparent that Josiah is meant, and the term *Hen* (= grace) could

from far away lands to help build Yahweh's temple (6:15). This reference could hardly be to what was then happening in Jerusalem, since the edifice must have been well on its way toward completion. Rather, it must be an eschatological prediction of the messianic future (cf. 2:11; 8:22; 14:16-21; Is. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-5). It is not impossible that Jesus' words, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days" (Jn. 2:19), is rooted in such a messianic theme.

True Fasting (7:1-14)

Zechariah's next oracle was given nearly two years later in December of 518 B.C. (7:1; cf. 1:7). By this time, the temple project was probably over half finished. The rebuilding project, though it had fallen into a hiatus for many years after the foundations had been laid (cf. Ezr. 4:23-24; Hg. 1:2), had been resumed in the fall of 520 B.C. due to the preaching of Haggai. It would be completed in the last month of 516 B.C. (cf. Ezr. 6:15). So, by the time of this oracle, the work was well advanced.

The occasion prompting the oracle was the arrival of a delegation to Jerusalem with a question about the liturgical calendar.⁷³ While in Babylon, the exiled Jews had apparently maintained their allegiance to their Palestinian heritage by observing two months each year for fasting. One of these fasts was held during the fifth month, apparently in commemoration of the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians (cf. 2 Kg. 25:8-11). Another was held in the seventh month, apparently in commemoration of the assassination of Gedaliah, a Jewish noble who had been appointed governor over those Jews not taken to Babylon in exile (cf. Je. 41:1-3).⁷⁴ The delegation's question was whether or not it was appropriate to continue the fast of the fifth month, the one which recalled the temple's destruction, since the second temple was near completion (7:2-3). Zechariah's oracle was given in response to this question.

be either a description of Josiah ben Zephaniah's character or else a title of honor due to his gift of silver and gold.

⁷³The term Bethel is difficult to decipher grammatically. Most translations take it as the place from which the delegation came, a town some 12 miles to the north of Jerusalem (so RV, RSV, JB, NIV, ASV, NASB). If this is correct, then the liturgical question was raised by a local group. However, the Hebrew text reads *and he sent Bethel Sharezer and Regem Melech*, and as it stands, it is unclear whether the name Bethel is intended as the local town, a part of the name Sharezer (so NAB) or a reference to the "house of God," which is the lexical meaning of the word Bethel (so KJV, NKJB). If it does not refer to the town Bethel, the delegation may have come from as far as Babylon. This view is strengthened by the fact that there was a three and a half month interval between the date of fasting about which they inquired and the date of their arrival in Jerusalem. We know that it was about a three and a half month trip from Babylon to Jerusalem (cf. Ezr. 7:8-9).

⁷⁴Other periods of fasting, also connected with the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem, were observed during the fourth and tenth months (cf. 8:19). In the fourth month, the wall of Jerusalem had been breached, and Zedekiah, the last king, was captured (cf. Je. 52:6-11). The tenth month was when the siege against Jerusalem had first begun (cf. 2 Kg. 25:1).

Ignoring for the moment the specific issue raised in the question, Zechariah launched into a dialogue about a more fundamental issue, the issue of the character of fasting. The delegation was interested in the technicalities of the ritual; God was interested in the spirit of the ritual. Why were they fasting, and to whom were they directing their times of solemn mourning? Were they really fasting out of respect for Yahweh, who had divinely ordered the destruction of his temple because of the nation's sins (7:5), or were they merely expressing regret for their loss. Similarly, when they were not fasting, but rather eating and drinking, did they not consume their meals so as to merely please themselves (7:6)? This selfish interest was precisely the problem which had existed among the Jews before the fall of Jerusalem, and it was a problem regularly addressed by the pre-exilic prophets (7:7; cf. Je. 14:11-12; Is. 58:3-9).⁷⁵

Thus, Zechariah's response to the delegation was a call for social justice, a call which echoed the oracles of the earlier prophets. What God desired was for them to show justice, mercy and compassion to each other, showing concern for the powerless and disadvantaged in society (7:9-10; cf. Am. 5:21-24; Ho. 6:6; Is. 1:12-17; Mic. 6:6-8). In the past, the Israelites had ignored such mandates from their prophets, thus inciting God's anger against them (7:11-12). When he called to them, they did not listen to him (7:13a; cf. Je. 7:25-26; Is. 65:1-2). Thus, in their hour of need, when they called to him, he did not listen either (7:13b; cf. Is. 1:15). Instead, he scattered his people to the winds through the exile (7:14; cf. Ho. 4:19; 8:7).

The City of Truth and the Holy Mountain (8:1-23)

The third oracle following the night visions reaches a crescendo of hope for the future of Jerusalem and Mt. Zion. It is composed of ten divine promises describing the blessedness of the final restoration, each promise beginning with the introductory formula, "This is what Yahweh Tsabaoth says" (8:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 19, 20, 23).

In the first (8:2), Yahweh once more assured the remnant that he had chosen Jerusalem and Zion (cf. 1:17; 2:12; 3:2), and his zeal for their restoration was burning hot (cf. 1:14).

In the second (8:3), the divine promise was held forth that Jerusalem would be called the City of Truth (cf. Is. 1:26), while Mt. Zion, the site of the second temple, would be called The Holy Mountain (8:1-3). These titles are intended to demonstrate the radical change in Jerusalem and Zion from their former days of faithlessness and

⁷⁵On one fast day, when Jeremiah instructed Baruch, his scribe, to address the people with the message he had dictated (Je. 36:5-7), King Jehoiakim burned the scroll containing Jeremiah's message and issued orders to arrest both Jeremiah and Baruch (Je. 36:22-26).

defilement.

In the third (8:4-5), the blessedness of the future is described by the peacefulness of the aged and the joyful play of the young. Fear would no longer threaten the city's inhabitants. Similar visions of prosperity and peace are to be found in the earlier prophets (cf. Is. 11:6, 8; 29:22-24; Je. 30:18-22; Eze. 37:25).

In the fourth (8:6), Yahweh poses an enigmatic question. The force of the question seems to be that if the fulfillment of these promises might appear to be extraordinarily difficult to the remnant of the future, must Yahweh also consider them to be difficult?⁷⁶ As wildly extravagant as they might seem, the promises were not too hard for God to fulfill (Ge. 18:14; Je. 32:26-27)!

In the fifth (8:7-8), Yahweh promised to save his people from east and west, regathering them back to Jerusalem from the lands of their exile. He would dwell among them as their God (cf. Je. 31:31-34; Eze. 36:22-38; 48:35).

In the sixth (8:9-13), God issued a mandate to continue the work. At the laying of the foundation of the temple, the times had been difficult and the intrepid Jews had faced considerable opposition and deprivation (cf. Eze. 3-4). Now, God would now reverse this trend. The droughts would end, and their crops would produce well. Where the remnant had once been cursed by their enemies, they would now be blessed. These promises were cause for boldness and courage in completing the work of the temple!

In the seventh (8:14-17), God promised to reverse the terrible judgment of exile. Because of the people's sins, he had shown them no mercy, but now he had turned his favor once more toward Jerusalem. In response to his grace, the people must live according to his covenant expectations.

In the eighth (8:18-19), God finally provided a clear answer to the question posed earlier by the delegation concerning the liturgical calendar (7:3). The answer is, "Yes, you may continue to observe the seasons of the liturgical calendar." However, the character of these observances will be changed. Whereas before, they were times of mourning and grief, now they would become occasions for festivity, because God had restored all that they had lost!

In the ninth (8:20-22), God promised that in the full restoration, Jerusalem and Mt. Zion would become the center of worship for the nations of the world (cf. 2:11; 14:16-19; Is. 2:2-4; 66:18-21; Mic. 4:1-5; Re. 21:24-27).

In the final promise (8:23), God announced that there will be universality of

⁷⁶The *AB* translation of this question is helpful: "Though it will seem difficult to the remnant of this people in those days, should it also seem difficult to me?" The piel verb *palle'* (= to be hard, difficult; to be extraordinary, marvelous) expresses the miraculous nature of the fulfillment.

faith in him. Long ago God had promised Abraham that in his seed all nations would be blessed (Ge. 12:3). Now, the Jewish people⁷⁷ would be universally recognized as those entrusted with God's Word (cf. Ro. 3:1-2).

These promises point to the great redemptive work which Yahweh would do in the earth. In rebuilding the temple, the remnant community had a crucial role to play in this redemptive future.

The Future of World Powers and The Kingdom of God

Zechariah 9-14

For introductory comments about the relationship between Zechariah 1-8 and Zechariah 9-14, [see The Book of Zechariah](#).

Literary Structure

The more obvious structure of Zechariah 9-14 is that it is presented in two oracles, 9:1--11:17 and 12:1--14:21. A relatively recent discovery has been that chapters 9-14 were written in a chiasmus.⁷⁸ This structure, that is, a series (a, b, c...) and its inversion (...c, b, a) is present in many literatures, both modern and ancient, including Akkadian, Ugaritic and Hebrew.⁷⁹ Joyce Baldwin points out a chiasmus in Wesley's hymn, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."⁸⁰

A) Just and holy is thy name

B) I am all unrighteousness

B1) False and full of sin I am

A1) Thou are full of truth and grace

⁷⁷Incidentally, this is the second time the word "Jew" is used in the Hebrew Bible, the first being in Je. 34:9. The term is used extensively in Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

⁷⁸P. Lamarche, *Zacharie IX-XIV, Structure Littéraire et Messianisme* (Paris: Gabalda, 1961). Furthermore, there is a case to be made that the entire book is structured around a chiasmus, and if so, this would argue for the unity of the book, cf. Baldwin, 74-81.

⁷⁹W. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (Sheffield, England: JSOTS, 1986) 201-207.

⁸⁰Baldwin, 75-76.

Numerous examples in the Hebrew Bible can be found (e.g., Zec. 1:7--6:8; Is. 22:22; Song 2:14b) as well as in the New Testament.⁸¹ The chiasmic structure of Zechariah 9-14 seems to have been laid out in the following pattern:

- A) *Judgment and salvation of neighboring peoples (9:1-8)*
- B) *Arrival and description of the king (9:9-10)*
- C) *War and victory of Israel (9:11--10:1)*
- D) *Presence of idols; judgment (10:2-3a)*
- C1) *War and victory of Israel (10:3b--11:3)*
- B1) *The shepherds are rejected by the people (11:4-17)*
- C2) *War and victory of Israel (12:1-9)*
- B2) *Yahweh's representative is pierced; mourning and purification (12:10--13:1)*
- D1) *Suppression of idols and false prophets (13:2-6)*
- B3) *The shepherd is struck; the people are tested, purified and turned to God (13:7-9)*
- C3) *War and victory of Israel (14:1-15)*
- A1) *Judgment and salvation of the nations (14:16-21)*

The First Oracle: Zechariah 9:1--11:17

One of the significant differences between the first and second sections of the Book of Zechariah (chapters 1-8 and 9-14) is that in the first there is a sense of immediacy about the promises relating to the reconstruction of the temple, while in the second, there is a much stronger apocalyptic and messianic tone. The first section (1-8) addresses the more definite horizon of the near future, while the second (9-14) looks ahead to the indefinite horizon of a future age.

In the second section, the two oracles (9:1--11:17 and 12:1--14:21) both begin with the expression *massa'* (= burden) of the word of Yahweh, that is, a message given to the prophet which would not be easy to deliver.⁸² As the reader approaches these two oracles, he/she must bear in mind that the genre of the oracles is apocalyptic

⁸¹The entire Gospel of Luke, for instance, is structured as a chiasmus, cf. K. Wolfe, "The Chiasmic Structure of Luke-Acts and Some Implications for Worship," *SWJournTheol* 22 (2, 1980) 60-71.

⁸²The NIV rendering "oracle" (see also RSV, NAB, NEB) does not capture the heavy nuance of the word *massa'*, which indicates a hardship, such as would be imposed by masters, despots or deities upon their subjects or beasts, cf. Baldwin, 162-163. This burden is something which the prophet is constrained to carry, not something he might choose for himself.

and poetic. This means that there is an extensive use of imagery and symbolism which should not be dissected like a newspaper report written in prose. Apocalyptic and poetic literature often is painted in broad strokes, so that a powerful impression is left without necessarily revealing all the specific data for which one might hope. To speculate about details may be permissible, but such speculation must be recognized for what it is and not be allowed to overrule the strong general impression which the genre seeks to evoke.

Judgment and Salvation of Neighboring Peoples (9:1-8)

There seems to be a deliberate play upon the warnings of Jeremiah in the opening passage of this First Oracle of Zechariah. The Jeremiah literature began with two visions, one of a boiling pot and the other of an almond branch (Je. 1:11-15). The boiling pot represented an invasion by a terrible enemy from the north (cf. Je. 1:13-14; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 25:9, etc.). The almond branch, through a play on words in the Hebrew text,⁸³ represented the watchful eye of Yahweh which had not failed to see the wickedness of his people (Je. 7:11; cf. 44:27). Because of their wickedness, the scalding judgment of the northern enemy would be poured out upon Judah through the exile.

Now, even though the exile had been completed, these two themes of a northern invasion and the watching eye of Yahweh reoccur in Zechariah. This time, however, the invasion from the north would be conducted by Yahweh himself as he conquered every city on his way to Jerusalem. Each opposing power would fall before the holy war of Yahweh as he marched southward, taking control of all his people's northern enemies. These enemies included Hadrach (northern Syria), Damascus (the capital of Syria), Hamath (on the Orontes River), Tyre and Sidon (coastal cities in Phoenicia), and Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod (cities in the Philistine plain).

There is a surprise element in this description of Yahweh's war, however. The prophet does not look forward to the extermination of the Philistines, but rather, to their conversion. These ancient enemies would embrace the dietary laws of Israel (cf. Ge. 9:4; Lv. 11:2-23; Dt. 14:3-20) and would be included as part of God's faithful remnant, even serving as God's leaders. Just as the ancient Jebusites, the original Canaanite population of Jebus (Jerusalem), had been assimilated into the Israelite nation (cf. 2 Sa. 5:6; 24:18), so the Philistines would also become part of the people of God under conditions of full equality.⁸⁴ During all this time of holy war, Yahweh

⁸³The word *shaqed* (= almond tree) is phonetically similar to the word *shoqed* (= watching).

⁸⁴R. Dentan, "Zechariah," *IB* (1956) VI.1094-1095.

would protect his temple and his people, and never again would he allow the oppressor to overrun them.

The final phrase of 9:8b picks up Jeremiah's theme of the watchful eye of Yahweh over his people, this time not to punish them, as in former days, but rather, to protect them.

Arrival and Description of the King (9:9-10)

The conquest and conversion of Israel's traditional enemies was to be associated with the arrival of a new king. Jerusalem and her surrounding villages⁸⁵ would rejoice at his arrival. He would come as a righteous, gentle king to bring deliverance. Fortifying his image as a peaceful ruler is the fact that he would ride on a young donkey, a description that immediately brings to mind the anticipated ruler from the tribe of Judah who "will tether his donkey to a vine, and his colt to the choicest branch" (cf. Ge. 49:11).

In establishing the peaceful rule of his king, Yahweh would clear the war chariots from Ephraim, the northern nation, as well as the war horses from Jerusalem, the capital of the southern nation. The instruments of war would be destroyed, and peace among the nations would be proclaimed from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.⁸⁶

War and Victory of Israel (9:11--10:1)

Now that the scene had been set for the coming of Yahweh's king and the establishment of worldwide peace, the prophet turns to Judah's deliverance. The passage is filled with the imagery of war--prisoners, a fortress, the battle bow, the warrior's sword, arrows, the battle trumpet, and slingstones. In faithfulness to the covenant made at Sinai (Ex. 24:8), Yahweh would free the Judahites from their waterless pit of oppression. They would be set free in order to return to their own fortress, and they would be bountifully restored. Both the northern and southern nations would become Yahweh's instruments of victory, Judah as a bow, Ephraim as an arrow, and the sons of Zion as a warrior's sword against the distant nations.⁸⁷

⁸⁵The expression "daughter of Jerusalem" may refer to the small villages near the great city, cf. Is. 23:10, 12; Zec. 2:7. See insightful discussion in I. Hopkins, "The 'Daughters of Judah' Are Really Rural Satellites of an Urban Center," *BAR* (Sept./Oct. 1980) 44-45.

⁸⁶If this expression is to be interpreted from the vantage point of Jerusalem, "from sea to sea" would mean from the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea. Other alternatives are from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean or from the Nile to the Euphrates. However, as Barker has said, the expression is probably idiomatic for a universal rule of peace, cf. K. Barker, "Zechariah," *EBC* (1985) VII.663.

⁸⁷Much comment has been made about the reference to *Yawan* (= Greece, so NIV, NASB, RSV, ASV, KJV). The expression is simply transliterated in some versions (NAB, JB) and omitted in others (NEB), since some scholars

Yet, as is always true in the holy wars of Israel, the real military factor is Yahweh himself who fights in defense of his people. In a striking theophany, Yahweh will appear in the storm to protect his people and win the battle.⁸⁸ He will deliver his people as a shepherd saves his flock from the scavengers. After the battle is done, God's people will shine like jewels. Prosperity and blessing will be their lot.

Presence of Idols and Judgment (10:2-3a)

The brief shift from the victory of the future to the problems of the present is abrupt and without transition. The far flung future might indeed be bright with hope, but in the here-and-now the prophet decries the aimlessness of people who consult the *tereaphim* (= household gods), the diviners and the dreamers. Without sound leadership, the people wandered spiritually like lost sheep. What leaders they had were worthless and destined for divine punishment.

War and Victory of Israel (10:3b--11:3)

But the struggles of the present in no way dimmed the hopes for the future. If the earthly leaders were woefully inadequate, Yahweh himself would lead his people. He would produce a true and stable leader. Drawing upon images from the past, the prophet describes this future leader as a cornerstone (cf. Is. 28:16; Ps. 118:22), a securely fastened peg (cf. Is. 22:22-23), a battle bow (cf. 2 Kg. 13:17; Zec. 9:13) and the source of every ruler (cf. Ge. 49:10). The rulers who would be commissioned by this future leader would march like a mighty army, and Yahweh would guarantee their victory.

The effects of this victory would result in a restoration for both the northern and southern kingdoms.⁸⁹ The despair and rejection of exile would be completely erased as though it had never existed. The scattered sheep of Israel would be gathered as a shepherd gathers his flock with his peculiar pastoral whistle.⁹⁰ The entire nation would be redeemed and multiplied. Though dispersed in distant lands,⁹¹ they would

regard it as an explanatory gloss, cf. P. Ackroyd, "Zechariah," *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. M. Black and H. Rowley (Hong Kong: Nelson, 1962) 652. There is no clear textual reason for omitting it, however, and it should be understood that the name is generally understood to refer to Greece, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Cyprus, Rhodes and at least part of Syria. As an idiomatic symbol, the name *Yawan* represents the nations which were distant from Israel. Still, it need not be treated with an unwarranted specificity.

⁸⁸The translation of 9:15 is quite difficult, and various alternatives have been offered (see the commentaries and versions). However, the general picture of Israel's victory through Yahweh's power is clear enough.

⁸⁹Joseph in 10:6 refers to the northern kingdom, since Joseph was the father of Ephraim, who became the namesake for the kingdom of Israel during the divided monarchy.

⁹⁰The NIV rendering "signal" in 10:8 follows the LXX, but the Hebrew text is more picturesque in describing the sound as *'eshreqah* (= I will whistle).

⁹¹Lit., the Hebrew in 10:9 reads "though I sow them..."

survive and return from Egypt (Je. 42-43) and Assyria (2 Kg. 17) to fill the holy land even to its borders in Gilead and Lebanon. With Yahweh leading them just as he did in the exodus, the people would pass through the sea of affliction which would dry up before them, while their oppressors, Egypt and Assyria, would be crushed.

The war scene ends with a taunt song, much like the songs of Moses and Miriam at the Red Sea (cf. Ex. 15) and the taunt song of Deborah (Jg. 5:28-31). The cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan, both symbols of great strength, would be cut to the ground in Yahweh's victory over his enemies.

The Shepherds are Rejected by the People (11:4-17)

The final passages of this First Oracle shift from poetry to prose, except for the brief stanza in 11:17. Though the passage is one of the most obscure in the Old Testament, two things are clear. The flock is Israel, and the shepherds are the leaders of God's people. The passage develops in three movements.

In the first movement (11:4-6), Yahweh calls upon the prophet to act out the role of a good leader. He was to shepherd the flock which was threatened by enemies and marked for death.⁹² The flock had been ravaged by the butchers and betrayed by poor shepherds, and Yahweh had abandoned them to their fate.

In response to this call, the prophet took up his commission to pastor the oppressed flock. His tools were his shepherd's staves, which he called Favor and Union, symbols of the gracious style of his pastoral care and his intent to bring harmony within the flock. In a single month, he dismissed three undershepherds, because they were unworthy leaders who did not have a heart for their charges.⁹³ In spite of his gracious care, the flock rejected this good shepherd so that he determined to abandon them to their fate. To symbolize the termination of his leadership, he broke the staff called Favor, revoking his covenant of protection.⁹⁴ The afflicted sheep among the flock, probably those faithful few who recognized the true word of

⁹²The vocabulary, "I will no longer have pity," is a deliberate play upon the words of Yahweh to the northern nation centuries earlier (cf. Ho. 1:6; 2:23).

⁹³The attempt to historically identify the three shepherds who were dismissed has been extremely varied. By the early 1950s, well over 30 identifications had been proposed by scholars, cf. Dentan, *IB* (1956) VI.1102, and there have doubtless been more since then. It is probably better to view this dismissal of the inadequate shepherds as merely part of the imagery stressing how the good shepherd was gracious and caring for the sheep.

⁹⁴It is unclear how the phrase in 11:10, "...the covenant I had made with all the nations," should be taken. The Hebrew text reads *ha-'amim* (= the peoples), not *ha-goyim* (= the nations). Thus, some scholars see the reference as being Yahweh's covenant of protection with the scattered Jewish exiles resident among the nations, cf. Baldwin, 184; Ellis, 983. Others view the reference as being Yahweh's covenant of restraint with the nations so that they must forbear in their attacks upon Israel, cf. Dentan, 1104; Barker, 677. In either case, the covenant is certainly a device for Israel's protection, and that security was now to be removed.

Yahweh, saw clearly what was happening. Then, the good shepherd asked for his wages, and in turn he was paid the price of a slave (cf. Ex. 21:32). This "handsome price" (a biting sarcasm) the good shepherd threw to the potter in the temple.⁹⁵ Then, the prophet broke his second staff called Union to symbolize the breaking of the brotherhood between the northern and southern nations, Israel and Judah.

In the third movement of the narrative, the prophet was instructed to play the role of a worthless shepherd so as to symbolize what would happen to the flock after they had rejected the good shepherd. In the future, Yahweh predicted that a worthless shepherd would come to power who would be ruthless and self-serving. The final word of the passage (3:17), which is a curse upon the worthless shepherd, once more shifts to poetry so as to conclude the oracle with vivid and powerful imagery.

The Implications of the First Oracle

It is one thing to exegete the meaning of a prophetic oracle, paying careful attention to its language, grammar, genre, historical circumstances, and so forth, but it is quite another to extrapolate from that exegesis the far-reaching implications of a passage, particularly one which is so thoroughly imbued with symbolism. The predictions of this first oracle can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Yahweh would invade the countries to the north of Israel; the Philistines would convert to the faith of Torah. Yahweh would protect his temple on Zion and never again allow an oppressor to overrun his people.
- 2) A great king was coming to Jerusalem who would bring deliverance and establish peace among the nations.
- 3) Both Ephraim and Judah would wage holy war against the nations, and Yahweh would give them victory and establish and restore them in the land.
- 4) The leaders of the Israelites were unsound and were destined to be punished by God.
- 5) To replace the unworthy leaders, Yahweh himself would lead his people. He would give them victory in holy war and restore both Ephraim and Judah, regathering their scattered members from their dispersion in Egypt and Assyria.
- 6) In an acted out allegory, the prophet successively played the roles of a good shepherd, who was rejected by the Israelites, and a worthless shepherd, who

⁹⁵Potters were possibly connected with the temple service, because the sacrificial rituals created a need for a continual supply of new vessels to be used in the regular performance of the sin offering (Lv. 6:28), cf. Baldwin, 185.

would ravage the flock of Israel.

Scholars all agree that, for the most part, these predictions are among the most difficult in the Old Testament to place with any certainty.

The Future of Israel and the Nations

The entire oracle is interspersed with the language of war, but when do these wars occur? There are several possible approaches. The historical approach is to attempt to locate them in the post-exilic period, usually in the intertestamental period. As such, the war in 9:1-8 is sometimes taken to describe Alexander the Great's invasion of the levant, while the war in 9:11--10:1 is taken to be fulfilled, or at least partially fulfilled, in the Maccabean conflict with the Seleucids in the 2nd century B.C.⁹⁶ A thoroughgoing futuristic approach, on the other hand, seems to relegate all of the wars to the close of the age, and thus, they are still future.⁹⁷ A spiritual interpretation might attempt to treat the wars as symbolism of the spread of the Christian gospel.⁹⁸

Each of these positions have both strengths and weaknesses. Certain historical parallels between the predictions in Zechariah and the wars of the intertestamental period do, in fact, exist. However, the conversion of the Philistines certainly never happened (cf. 1 Macc. 3:41)! Furthermore, the temple was not protected, since it was violated in 167 B.C. by Antiochus Epiphanes and destroyed in 70 A.D. by Titus. The Israelites, far from being restored and established forever, were overrun by both the Greeks and the Romans.

To relegate everything to the end of the world is not satisfactory either, for although the wars themselves might be parallel, in some degree, to the apocalyptic visions of John, various problems remain. The Philistines, for instance, have long since disappeared. The references to the dispersion of Israelites in Assyria and Egypt seem to be obvious references to the Old Testament exile, not some modern situation. Furthermore, some associated predictions, particularly predictions about the coming of the new king, are specifically treated in the New Testament as being fulfilled in the first advent of Christ.

The spiritual interpretation is even more tenuous, since it resorts to a massive allegorization of details without any direct authority for doing so. Thus, since none of

⁹⁶Barker, 657ff., 666.

⁹⁷ In the dispensational work by Dwight Pentecost, the passages in Zec. 9-11 are all relegated to the millennial reign of Christ and/or the events surrounding it, cf. the "Scripture Index" in *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 622.

⁹⁸This seems to be the interpretation of commentators like Matthew Henry, cf. *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (rpt. 1845 Marshallton, Delaware: The National Foundation for Christian Education, n.d.) II.1484.

the above approaches is fully satisfactory, it is appropriate to refrain from dogmatism.

It should be pointed out, however, that these passages in Zechariah exhibit the general characteristics of prophetic-apocalyptic literature.⁹⁹ This means that in addition to the extensive use of symbolism, the writer combines images of the end of the age superimposed over allusions to contemporary or intermediate events. Above all, prophetic-apocalyptic seeks to assure the readers that the victory of God and of God's people is certain.¹⁰⁰ This approach is not at all the same thing as a systematic and consistent eschatological outline. It does not move from point "A" to point "B" to point "C" in logical fashion. Rather, it is a genre which aims at conveying an intense belief in God's divine intervention before the end so as to accomplish his redemptive purposes. To be sure, it does so by depicting a host of images. All of the images may not be immediately clear, however, and some of them may only become more precise as they are fulfilled, while others must be kept in reserve until one sees what God's future might bring.

New Testament References to the First Oracle

There are at least two clear references in the New Testament to images in this first oracle. One of them is the famous messianic interpretation of the righteous king who makes his entrance into Jerusalem riding upon a donkey (Zec. 9:9//Mt. 21:4-5//Jn. 12:14-15). The theological connection between the prophet's description and Jesus' triumphal entry did not immediately dawn upon Jesus' followers, but later, the connection was made after the whole complex of events surrounding the death of Jesus had been accomplished (Jn. 12:16).

The second direct reference is concerning the betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Just as in the Zechariah oracle the good shepherd was rejected and paid off with the price of a slave (Zec. 11:8b-12), so Jesus, the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10), was rejected by his own people and betrayed by one of the twelve for thirty pieces of silver (Mt. 26:14-16). Judas Iscariot, in despair, cast this same blood money into the temple treasury, and it was subsequently used to buy the potter's field as a burial ground for foreigners (Mt. 27:3-10; cf. Ac. 1:18-19). The first of these two references is more on the order of simple prediction and verification. The second, however, is more obscure, and it falls under the fulfillment category of what has been

⁹⁹G. Ladd, "Why not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?", *JBL* (1957) 192ff.; Baldwin, 73-74. For a concise overview of the characteristics of apocalyptic literature, see L. Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) and G. Ladd, "Apocalyptic Literature," *ISBE* (1979) I. 151-161.

¹⁰⁰D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 106.

called "the clarification of enigmatic passages."¹⁰¹

Possible New Testament Allusions to the First Oracle

A number of New Testament passages, though they are not direct quotations, may well allude to this first oracle. Certainly the concept of the Good Shepherd in John's Gospel is similar to the prophet's role playing of a good shepherd and his consequent rejection by the flock (11:4-11). The universal reign of peace, which would be established by the new king in Jerusalem (Zec. 9:10), is certainly similar to the New Testament vision of peace ultimately to be established through Jesus Christ (Lk. 2:14). The imagery of Jesus Christ as the Cornerstone, though quoted in the New Testament from Psalm 118:22 (Mt. 21:42//Mk. 12:10//Lk. 20:17; Ac. 4:11; 1 Pe. 2:7) and Isaiah 28:16 (1 Pe. 2:6), may also draw from Zechariah (10:4).

The wars of God's people against the nations may well find their final resolution in the wars of the Apocalypse of John, where the woman becomes the object of war for the great red dragon (Re. 12:17) and the kings of the earth gather to oppose Jesus Christ and his armies (Re. 19:19; cf. 16:14). The Jewish diaspora, which was scattered throughout the world and then promised regathering and restoration (Zec. 9:12, 9:16--10:1, 6-12, may possibly find a parallel in the church, which is God's diaspora scattered among the nations (1 Pe. 1:1-2; Ja. 1:1), though this is less clear.¹⁰² Yahweh's defense of the temple and his people (9:8) may possibly find fulfillment in the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. The predicted conversion of the Philistines (9:7) may also hint at the future opening of the commonwealth of Israel to all peoples (cf. Ep. 2:11-13).

Finally, the vision of the unworthy shepherd, who would ravage the flock (Zec. 11:15-17), has been understood by many to be a vision of the eschatological anti-christ.¹⁰³ In fact, during World War I this passage was used by some to suggest that Wilhelm II, the German Kaiser, was the anti-christ.¹⁰⁴ Such an identification

¹⁰¹See the insightful essay by R. Longenecker, "'Who is the prophet talking about?' Some reflections on the New Testament's use of the Old," *Themelios* (Oct./Nov. 1987) 4-8.

¹⁰²The meaning of Israel in prophetic literature has created a great polarization among evangelicals between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists. Dispensationalists generally maintain that all prophetic passages concerning Israel must be treated in the context of physical Jewishness, cf. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 158-159. Non-dispensationalists allow for some amount of spiritualizing in the prophecies concerning Israel so that they have a fulfillment in the church, cf. G. Ladd, *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 19-28. This polarization is felt in the interpretation of Zechariah inasmuch as the oracles describe a future for Israel. Since no direct allusion is made in the New Testament to many of these prophecies, how they are to be interpreted is moot.

¹⁰³Barker concedes that it may have a partial fulfillment in the Bar-Kokhba revolt of 135 A.D., but maintains that the complete fulfillment awaits the rise of the final anti-christ, cf. 679-680.

¹⁰⁴The interpretation was aided by the fact that he was paralyzed in one arm (cf. Zec. 11:17).

obviously proved to be incorrect.

The Second Oracle: Zechariah 12:1--14:21

The second and final oracle continues many of the themes of the previous oracle, such as, war, victory and restoration. Jerusalem would be invaded by her enemies but saved by Yahweh's divine intervention. A remnant of Israel would be purified, and the beseiging nations would all stream toward Jerusalem to worship on Mt. Zion.

This oracle, like the preceding one, begins with the term *massa'* (= burden). However, whereas the former oracle began in poetry and ended in prose, this one begins with prose and only has a short poetic section (13:7-9). Also unlike the preceding oracle is the fact that there does not seem to be the distinction between the northern and southern nation.¹⁰⁵ Here the terms "Israel" and "Judah" seem to be used interchangeably, and Jerusalem is the focal point for the whole.

War and Victory of Israel (12:1-9)

The next war scene is cosmic in dimension. It begins with a declaration of Yahweh, the Creator of the universe,¹⁰⁶ who announces that Jerusalem will become the center of a universal conflict. In two striking metaphors, Yahweh describes Jerusalem, first as an intoxicating cup of wine which the nations will drink until drunken, and second, as an immovable rock which will lacerate anyone who tries to dislodge it. The eyes of the enemy's horses will be blinded. By contrast, Yahweh's eyes will continue his watchful care over his people (cf. 9:8). Judah and her leaders are described in equally striking similes. The leaders, taking courage from the strength of the people, will zealously consume the surrounding enemies like a brazier under logs and like a firebrand among cut sheaves of grain. Yahweh will fight on the side of his people, preserving both Judah and Jerusalem. The weakest of the people will be as strong as the warrior David, and the house of David will be as powerful as the *Mal'ak Yahweh*, the personal emissary of God who marched ahead of the Israelites in their trek through the Sinai desert during the exodus (cf. Ex. 23:20; 32:34). All the nations attacking Jerusalem will be destroyed.

¹⁰⁵In the preceding oracle, Ephraim and Judah, the northern and southern nations respectively, are clearly distinguished (9:10, 13; 10:6; 11:14). In this oracle, the term "Israel" is only mentioned once (9:1), and it seems to be synonymous with the other frequent mentions of Judah (12:2, 4-7; 14:5, 14, 21).

¹⁰⁶The hymnic style of 12:1 is very evident due to its use of Hebrew participles, i.e., "spreading out," "laying," and "forming," and it shows a relationship to several other hymnic creation texts (cf. Is. 40:22; 42:5; Ge. 2:7), cf. C. Stuhlmueller, "Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi," *JBC* (1968) I.396.

Yahweh's Representative is Pierced: There is Mourning and Purification (12:10--13:1)

The aftermath of war was to be followed by a divine outpouring which would create an attitude of grace and prayer among the survivors.¹⁰⁷ This attitude, in turn, would produce great mourning for one who had been pierced. The identity of the pierced one has long been a bone of interpretive contention, exacerbated by the uncertainty of translation.¹⁰⁸ Three major lines of interpretation are possible. First, following the translation "him," it could refer to some historical figure who was killed but whose death was a cause for regret by those who murdered him. Various historical candidates have been suggested. Second, still following the rendering "him" (and this is the view most acceptable to evangelicals), the wounded figure is taken to be similar to the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, that is, one who has suffered vicariously for his people. Third, if the LXX is followed (with the rendering "insulted" rather than "pierced") and the pronoun "me" is accepted, the passage might refer to the fact that the Israelites had insulted Yahweh through their idolatry but were now expressing penitence.¹⁰⁹

In whatever way the original passage is to be taken, John certainly understands that ultimately it points to Christ (cf. Jn. 19:37). The deep mourning of the people would be so intense that it would be equivalent to the grief experienced at the loss of an only son (cf. Je. 6:26; Ex. 11:5-6). It would be comparable to the ritual wailing of the pagans in the Plain of Megiddo on behalf of their fertility gods.¹¹⁰ Each clan would mourn separately,¹¹¹ their women also mourning separately.¹¹² A cleansing fountain for purification, a beautiful metaphor for forgiveness, would be opened to all

¹⁰⁷Some commentators understand the term *ruah* (= spirit) to refer to the Divine Spirit, much in the character of other prophetic predictions of the coming of the Spirit, and this outpouring in turn produces an awareness of sin and a supplication for forgiveness, cf. C. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets [KD]* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) II.387.

¹⁰⁸Following the MT, some English versions read, "They will look upon *me*..." (so NIV, NASB, ASV, KJV). Other versions, following the reading of some Hebrew manuscripts, quotations by the early Fathers, Theodotus (late 2nd century) and Jn. 19:37, read, "They will look upon *him*..." (so RSV, NAB, ASVmg). The LXX, on the other hand, reads, "They will turn towards me because they have insulted me..."

¹⁰⁹Ackroyd, *PCB* (1962) 654.

¹¹⁰Hadad was the storm god Ba'al, and Rimmon was the chief deity of Damascus who was mourned each year at the return of the dry season, cf. R. Smith, *Micha-Malachi [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1984) 278-279; Stuhlmüller, *JBC* (1968) I.396.

¹¹¹The clan separations included the royal house of David, his son Nathan (cf. 2 Sa. 5:14), the clan of Levi, the levitical sons (cf. Nu. 3:17-18, 21), and "all the rest." It should be remembered that David's son Nathan figures in the genealogy of Jesus (cf. Lk. 3:31).

¹¹²It was customary for the men and women to mourn separately, cf. J. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (rpt. Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1972) 328.

in Jerusalem.

Suppression of Idols and False Prophets (13:2-6)

In this great time of purification, all traces of idolatry would be removed from the people. Prophecy, particularly false prophecy of the sort condemned by Jeremiah (cf. Je. 23), would cease. In fact, the effort to censure false prophecy would be so determined that parents would not hesitate to execute their own children, if necessary, in order to purge the land of this evil. The entire body of people would dedicate themselves unreservedly to Torah's instruction to purge from among themselves false prophecy (cf. Dt. 18:20). The hairy mantle, a symbol of prophethood (cf. 2 Kg. 1:8), would no longer be used, and those who were formerly prophets would emphatically disclaim their profession. If someone noticed any suspicious wounds on the prophet's body, such as might have been self-inflicted in order to induce a prophetic ecstasy (cf. 1 Kg. 18:28-29; 20:35ff.; Lv. 19:28; 21:5; Dt. 14:1; Je. 16:6; 41:5; 48:37), he would merely claim that they were the marks of a scuffle between friends.¹¹³

The Shepherd is Struck: The People Are Tested, Purified and Turned to God (13:7-9)

Sometimes called the "Song of the Sword," this poetic interjection resumes the theme of the shepherd which is found in the first oracle (cf. 9:16; 10:2-3; 11:3-17). The shepherd in view is one who stands as the associate of Yahweh, though he is not identified further. The sword of divine execution is called forth, and this good shepherd is struck down. The flock scatters at this disaster, and two-thirds of them are also struck down. Only a third are left as a remnant to be brought through the fires of purification and refinement. After their crucible, the remnant of the flock will call upon Yahweh's name so that the relationship between the people and God will be restored.¹¹⁴

War and Victory of Israel (14:1-15)

The oracle now returns to the recurring theme of war as well as to a prose form. The section begins by describing the battle for Jerusalem as a "Day of Yahweh," a

¹¹³This passage has been taken by some to be a messianic foreshadowing of the wounds of Christ, cf. M. Unger, *Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 228-230. However, the context of the passage militates against such an interpretation, and it can hardly be correct. No New Testament writer tries to make such a connection, and as T. V. Moore has said long ago, contextually it would be the "grossest misapprehension of its meaning," quoted in F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 114.

¹¹⁴The divine expression, "You are my people," and the human response "You are my God," is quite possibly a deliberate play upon the same expression in Ho. 2:23, another passage depicting the rejection of the people and their final acceptance by Yahweh.

familiar image of war.¹¹⁵ The nations would surround Jerusalem and devastate it, sending half its citizens into exile. Jerusalem will be victorious in the end (14:1), but not without paying dearly. It is only by divine intervention that Jerusalem is saved at all. Yahweh, the consummate warrior, will stand on the Mt. of Olives and defend the city with all his angelic hosts (cf. 2 Kg. 6:17). The mountain itself will split, forming a valley running east and west.¹¹⁶ Depending upon how 14:5 is translated,¹¹⁷ the valley becomes either a way of escape for the fleeing survivors or else it is blocked up by the crumbling debris of the earthquake. In either case, the result will be comparable to the great earthquake which occurred during the reign of Uzziah.¹¹⁸ The daylight and temperature will be affected,¹¹⁹ with the apparent result that there will be no extremes in temperature and no divisions of day from night. Instead, there will result a continuous day (cf. Is. 60:19-20). Life-giving water will flow between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean, and unlike the seasonal wadis, it will flow continuously, summer and winter. The topography around Jerusalem will be changed from its native rugged hills to a land as level as the Arabah (here referring to the Jordan Valley).¹²⁰ Jerusalem, however, would be elevated (cf. Is. 2:2). It would be securely inhabited and never again destroyed.

In contrast to the bright hopes for Jerusalem is the devastation of those who fought against it. Yahweh will strike them down with a plague, just as he did the Assyrians in the days of Isaiah (Is. 37:36). In senseless panic, the armies of the nations will turn against each other, and the people in Jerusalem and Judah will take advantage of this confusion. The soldiers' livestock will also be struck with the plague, and in the end, the spoils of war will be left in great quantities for the

¹¹⁵The concept of a "Day of Yahweh" appears in several of the prophets. The most consistent imagery for that day is the imagery of divine wrath, war and judgment (cf. Ps. 110:5; Is. 2:11-12, 17; 7:18, 20; 13:9, 13; 27:1; 34:8; Am. 5:18, 20; Je. 46:10; Zep. 1:7, 14; 2:2-3; Eze. 13:5; Jl. 2:1, 11; 3:14; Ob. 1:15). However, also associated with the Day of Yahweh is the regathering of God's scattered people (cf. Is. 11:11; 27:12-13), cf. E. Jenni, *IDB* (1962) I.784-785.

¹¹⁶The imagery of the crumbling of the mountains at a theophany of God is familiar from other Old Testament literature as well, cf. Jg. 5:5; Hab. 3:6; Na. 1:5; Eze. 38:19-20. It seeks to express the awesome and terrible power of God's immediate presence.

¹¹⁷The Hebrew radicals can be taken to mean either *nastem* (= "to flee," so MT, NIV, KJV, NASB, ASV) or *nistam* (= "stopped up," so LXX, Targums, RSV, NEB, NAB, NIVmg, ASVmg).

¹¹⁸Amos mentions this same earthquake (1:1), and Josephus attributes the disaster to Uzziah's usurpation of priestly duties (2 Chr. 26:16ff.), cf. *Antiquities* 9:10.4. According to Josephus, Uzziah's sin was accompanied by an earthquake and a splitting of the temple. Half of the mountain at Eroge broke off and collapsed into the local roads and the royal gardens.

¹¹⁹The translation of 14:6 is very difficult, and most scholars agree that the text has been damaged. Even as it stands, it can mean several things, i.e., "there shall not be light, precious things shall be gathered together," cf. Ackroyd, 655; or, "in that day there will be no light, but cold and condensation," Ellis, 987.

¹²⁰S. Cohen, "Arabah," *IDB* (1962) I.177.

Jerusalemites (cf. 14:1).

Judgment and Salvation of the Nations (14:16-21)

The final scene of the oracle describes the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem and the sanctification of all things in Jerusalem. The survivors of the nations will join in the worship of Yahweh, celebrating at the Feast of Booths.¹²¹ Their attendance is compulsory, of course, but the nature of the feast is a joyful celebration.

Every utensil in the city will be consecrated as "holy." There will no longer be any separation between holy and profane, but everything will be holy, from the horses bells,¹²² to the cooking pots, to the incense bowls used in worship. The worship of Yahweh will be spontaneous and free, uncluttered by racketeering.¹²³

The Implications of the Second Oracle

As in the first oracle, it will be helpful to summarize the contents of the second oracle before addressing its implications.

- 1) Jerusalem will become the center for cosmic conflict when she is invaded by the nations of the world. Yahweh will fight for Jerusalem and destroy her enemies.
- 2) The survivors in Jerusalem will deeply mourn for an unidentified figure whom they had wounded.
- 3) False prophecy will be abolished, and all traces of idolatry will be removed.
- 4) The shepherd of Israel will be struck down, the flock will scatter, and two-thirds of them will be destroyed. A remnant of the flock will cry out to Yahweh, and he will restore them.
- 5) In the battle of the great Day of Yahweh, Jerusalem will be saved through Yahweh's divine intervention. The enemies of Jerusalem will be destroyed.
- 6) The survivors from among all the nations will worship in Jerusalem, and everything in the city will be holy.

Scholars and interpreters generally agree that the second oracle depicts a grand

¹²¹The Feast of Booths (also called Tabernacles or Ingathering) was an annual festival to which all Israelite males were required to go (Dt. 16:16; cf. Ex. 34:23). It recalled the nomadic character of the wilderness period (Lv. 23:33-43; Dt. 16:13-15), but even more importantly for this oracle, it was the feast associated with the end of the year (Ex. 34:22). As such, the Feast of Tabernacles seems intended to depict the transition from the present age to the future one.

¹²²Horses' bells were once used as a talisman to ward off evil spirits, Ellis, 987-988.

¹²³The reference to "Canaanite" in 14:21b should probably be taken in the sense of "merchant" (so NEB, RSV, NAB, NIVmg, NASBmg), for which it was a euphemism for traders, and in a more pejorative sense, a euphemism for racketeers, cf. A. Haldar, *IDB* (1962) I.494 (see also the Hebrew text in Ho. 12:7; Zep. 1:11).

apocalyptic vision of judgment and redemption. The same diverse lines of interpretation which scholars follow in the first oracle are also followed in the second, that is, historical, futuristic and spiritual. The themes which appear in the first oracle also continue in the second one, though if anything, there seems to be an even greater intensity.

New Testament References to the Second Oracle

Only two passages from the second oracle are clearly quoted in the New Testament, and they are the passages regarding the pierced one (12:10b) and the shepherd who is struck down (13:7b). The tragic figure of the pierced one is to be taken as messianic (12:10-14).¹²⁴ In the first place, if the Masoretic Text is followed, it speaks of Yahweh himself as the one who is pierced. Certainly the Apostle John understood the passage in a messianic way, inasmuch as he partially quoted it in reference to the piercing of Jesus on the cross (Jn. 19:33-37). If the passage is also alluded to in the Apocalypse of John (Re. 1:7), then the fulfillment of the passage will occur at the second coming of Christ, when those who pierced Christ will see him and mourn. In the Revelation, however, it is not only Israel who views the pierced messiah and responds in mourning, but all the peoples of the earth.

As for the shepherd passage, Jesus partially quoted Zechariah 13:7b in his final discourses with the Twelve on the night of his betrayal (Mk. 14:27//Mt. 26:31; cf. Jn. 10:11-12; 16:32a). He obviously saw himself as the shepherd of Israel, the one whom Yahweh described as "the man who is close to me!" The other phrases in the Zechariah passage are not used by the Lord, and their interpretation is unclear. The striking down of two-thirds of the flock might possibly have a fulfillment in the Jewish wars of 70 A.D. or even the various pogroms against the Jews, including the holocaust. The remnant which is tested and purified may possibly anticipate God's future for the Jewish people (cf. Ro. 11:23-29).¹²⁵

¹²⁴To be sure, the identification is unclear. The Syriac Version actually identifies this shepherd with Josiah, who was killed in Megiddo in 609 B.C. (2 Chr. 35:25), cf. Stuhlmueller, 396. Innumerable attempts have been made to identify the figure with some known historical personage, all with uncertain results. Many have noted that there are similarities between the pierced one and the suffering servant of Yahweh (Is. 53), though in the Zechariah passage, vicarious suffering is not specifically mentioned. Still, it should be pointed out that both the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds take the passage to refer to the messiah, cf. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 112.

¹²⁵How tightly this prophecy must be kept within the narrow confines of Jewry is a moot question, of course. Paul, on more than one occasion, takes passages that in their Old Testament contexts speak of Israel, yet he applies them to the Gentile church. For Paul, the Gentile church is a part of the prophetic remnant (cf. Ro. 9:23-30; also, 9:6-8, 4:11, 16-17, 23; Ga. 3:29), cf. G. Hasel, *ISBE* (1988) IV.134. Yet he seems to speak of a future for national Israel, too (Ro. 11). Dispensationalists tend to see the Old Testament predictions concerning Israel as only analogies to the Gentile church, not as fulfillments. For them, the Old Testament predictions must still be completely interpreted within the confines of Jewishness, and they are largely still in the future. Amillennialists tend to take the corpus of

It may be that Jesus alludes to Zechariah 14:8 when he speaks of "living water" (Jn. 7:38; cf. 4:10), though this is less clear.¹²⁶ It is also possible that in the cleansing of the temple Jesus may have alluded to Zechariah 14:21b in rebuking the exchangers for using the temple as a market (Jn. 2:16), though this, too, is obscure.

Eschatological Implications

While there are no other quotations of the second oracle in the New Testament, its visions are certainly at home in the apocalyptic environment of the Revelation of John. The wars described in 12:2-6, 9 and 14:1-5, 12-15 are certainly in the spirit of what John calls "the battle on the great day of God Almighty" (Re. 16:14, 16; 19:19). The fountain of cleansing for the family of David and the citizens of Jerusalem (13:1) is surely messianic, and the promise may also allude to the redemptive future which God has for the nation Israel (cf. Ro. 11:23-24, 26-27). Certainly the rise to prominence of the house of David is messianic (12:7-8), and it is a common enough theme among the prophets (cf. Is. 9:7; 16:5; 55:3; Je. 23:5; 30:9; 33:15-22, 25-26; Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Ho. 3:5; Am. 9:11). That the kingdom of God will be established over all the nations with Jerusalem as its capital (14:9-11) certainly resonates with John's vision of the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdom of God and his messiah (Re. 11:15; 19:16), with the New Jerusalem descending as the center of worship (Re. 21-22).

It is apparent by this time that the prophet does not foresee the New Testament division of the coming of messiah into a first and second advent. The images of both advents, the piercing and striking of the shepherd at his first advent and the woes of messiah preceding his second advent, are superimposed upon each other. This feature, sometimes called "prophet foreshortening," anticipates the tension in the New Testament between the present and the future. Since Christians live between the two advents of Christ, they live in an "already/not yet" tension. The prophecies of messiah have already been fulfilled to some degree. God has kept his messianic promises. At the same time, there is yet an eschatological future for the people of God. The

Old Testament promises to Israel as being spiritually fulfilled in the church rather than apart from it, cf. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 139-147. A mediating position is to affirm the possibility of both a spiritual fulfillment of the promises in the church as well as a literal fulfillment for national Israel, cf. Ladd, *Last Things*, 19-28. This latter approach draws upon the idea that prophetic fulfillment is often worked out in recapitulation, cf. Longenecker, 4-8.

¹²⁶See G. Beasley-Murray, *John [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 114; R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 322-323 and F. Bruce, *The Time is Fulfilled* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 46. The fact that the passage in Zechariah builds upon the Feast of Tabernacles (14:16) and that Jesus refers to "living water" on the last great day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:37) may indicate a direct allusion.

kingdom of God has been inaugurated, but it has not yet been consummated.¹²⁷ The fulfilment of the prediction in 13:9, "I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God,'" awaits a future day when the "the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live among them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Re. 21:3). Even so, come Lord Jesus (Re. 22:20b)! Maranatha!

Yahweh's Messenger

The Book of Malachi

While the oracles in the Book of Malachi certainly belong to the post-exilic period, they were apparently composed a considerable time after the oracles of Haggai and Zechariah. Unlike the books of Haggai and Zechariah, the book of Malachi contains no dates. Furthermore, there is dispute concerning the prophet's identity, since the term *mal'achi* (= my messenger, my angel) in 1:1 and 3:1 could be either a proper name or an acronym for an anonymous prophet.¹²⁸ What is clear is that the message in this book was directed to a disillusioned remnant who, after the second temple had been completed, were still living in conditions that fell far short of the anticipated messianic ideal. The book begins with the heavy term *massa'* (= burden), a term also to be found in the Book of Zechariah (cf. 9:1; 12:1).

The Historical Era

While no dates are given in the book, there is at least some information which helps us to locate the historical context. It is apparent that the second temple had been completed (1:10; 3:1, 10).¹²⁹ It is also apparent that the temple rituals had lapsed into perfunctory acts which, although they were carried out, were performed with laxity and contempt for Torah's requirements (1:13-14; 3:8-9, 13-14). The people were bitterly disillusioned. Some wept (2:13), while others were cynical and hostile toward

¹²⁷For a thorough treatment of this tension between the present and future aspects of the kingdom of God, see G. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) and *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 74).

¹²⁸The LXX *angelou autou* (= his angel, his messenger) has the same interpretive problem as the messages to the seven congregations in the Apocalypse of John (cf. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Does the title refer to an angel or a human messenger?

¹²⁹We also know that the period of the prophet was during Persian rule, since the term *pehah* (= governor) in 1:8 is the title of the Persian appointed governor (cf. Hg. 1:1; Ne. 5:14).

Yahweh (1:2; 2:17; 3:7-8, 13-14). The sins of occultism, adultery, perjury, exploitation and discrimination flourished as they once had flourished among the people before the exile (3:5). Some of the people were entering into mixed marriages with unbelievers (2:11-12), and the priests of the temple were failing in their duties of moral instruction (2:7-8).

Because these failures seem very similar to the ones described in the Book of Nehemiah (cf. Ne. 13), most interpreters put the oracles of the Book of Malachi at about that same time or slightly earlier than the time of Nehemiah. Since the reforms of Nehemiah consisted of some rather specific legislation, to which the Book of Malachi makes no reference, it is reasonable to assume that the oracles of Malachi were given prior to the Nehemiah reforms. We know that Nehemiah appeared in Jerusalem in about 445 B.C.,¹³⁰ so the time of the Malachi oracles may have been about 450 B.C.¹³¹

The Prophet's Identity

When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, the Septuagint translators did not treat the term *mal'achi* as a proper name. They simply translated it as "his messenger," thus leaving the book anonymous.¹³² A number of English versions have noted this possibility in the margin (so NIV, ASV, NEB, NASB). To complicate the matter further, the Jewish Targum of Jonathan, the Aramaic translation of the prophets, also adds the explanatory phrase to 1:1, "whose name is called Ezra the Scribe," a tradition accepted by Jerome in the Christian era.¹³³ Since the name Malachi appears no place else in the Old Testament, and since there is no genealogical information associated with it, many scholars have doubted that it is a proper name.

On the other hand, if this book is anonymous, it is the only anonymous book among *The Twelve*.¹³⁴ That the name Malachi is not found elsewhere is, at best, an argument from silence (the names Jonah and Habakkuk appear no place else but in

¹³⁰Nehemiah's trip to Jerusalem can be fixed by the archaeological evidence in the Elephantine papyri as it is correlated with the dates given in the Book of Nehemiah (cf. Ne. 1:1; 2:1), cf. Anderson, 446-447; Bright, 392.

¹³¹Of course, there is much debate about the exact chronology between the work of Ezra and Nehemiah. That discussion cannot occupy us here (see the biblical introductions).

¹³²They also changed the pronoun from "my" to "his" so that it would better agree with the rest of the sentence, cf. Baldwin, 211-212.

¹³³Harrison, 958.

¹³⁴Malachi is the last prophet in the larger corpus called *The Twelve*, that is, the writings of the prophets Hosea through Malachi in the Hebrew Bible. Since the late 4th century in the Latin church, these twelve prophets have been dubbed "the minor prophets," ostensibly because of their brevity (not their unimportance). However, the designation is an unhappy one inasmuch as it often tends to diminish their value.

their respective books). In any case, Old Testament proper names often have common meanings, so such an argument against the traditional view of Malachi as a proper name is not a particularly strong one. Without some corroborating evidence, the notion that Malachi is a surname for Ezra must be rejected. Thus, the question of the prophet's identity remains ambiguous. Since for convenience sake the prophet must be called something, the name Malachi serves very well, particularly since it might have been his real name.

The Literary Form of the Book

The oracles in the book are dialogical. They proceed as a conversation between Yahweh Tsabaoth and the post-exilic community in the form of questions and answers (e.g., 1:2, 6; 2:17; 3:8, 13). It is unlikely that the words the prophet puts in the mouths of God's antagonists were actually uttered; rather, they express the people's attitudes and inner resentments against God.¹³⁵

The Closing of the Prophetic Voice

Malachi is the final book in the Christian order of Old Testament books. Because of its closing passages concerning the coming of the future messianic messenger (3:1ff.; 4:5-6), it has served as a natural bridge into the New Testament. While the order of books in the Hebrew Bible is different,¹³⁶ it is apparent that the Jewish theologians also considered Malachi to have a closing function. In the intertestamental book 1 Maccabees, Malachi seems to be the last authenticated prophetic voice (4:46; 9:27; 14:41), and according to Jewish tradition, when the last of the prophets died (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi), the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.¹³⁷

Heading (1:1)

The content of the Book of Malachi consists of a heading, six oracles, and a conclusion. All but one of the oracles have a pronounced dialogical section. The introduction to the book describes the message of the prophet as a *massa'* (=

¹³⁵Baldwin, 214.

¹³⁶Malachi appears as the last of the Latter Prophets in the *Nebi'im*, the second of three major sections of the Hebrew Bible. The rearrangement of the documents of the Hebrew Bible in the Septuagint, and later, in the Latin Vulgate, a rearrangement which has been followed in the English Versions, has left Malachi as the final book in the Christian Old Testament.

¹³⁷*Apocalypse of Baruch* 85:3; *Tosefta Sotah* 13:2; *Sanhedrin* 11a. Josephus, also, mentions "the failure of the exact succession of the prophets," *Against Apion* 1:8, #41., see discussion in J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Scribners, 1971) 80-82.

burden).¹³⁸ It is a heavy, threatening message calling upon the post-exilic community to return to the covenant of Torah. Each of the oracles are given in the context of the covenant requirements.

Dialogue About Election-Love (1:2-5)

The first dialogue concerns Yahweh's election-love. The Hebrew verb *'ahav* (= to love) carries the nuance of love as the underlying cause of covenant. It is the love which chooses.¹³⁹ So, Yahweh says to his remnant, "I have loved you." The fact that God had sovereignly arranged international events so that the Jews were allowed to return from Babylon to Jerusalem indicated that he had chosen them out of election-love. They cynically responded that they did not see any evidence of his love. They had defined God's love as the indulgent bestowal of earthly benefits, and the hard times experienced by the post-exilic community was to them a sign that God, in fact, did not love them. In this mindset, they had missed entirely the nature of God's election-love, which was so clearly explained in the Torah. God's love was demonstrated in that he chose Israel to be his special people (cf. Dt. 4:37; 7:7-8; 10:15). Love was reciprocal, however. Israel was to love God in return (cf. Dt. 6:5; 11:1, 13). The kind of benefits which the remnant community wanted to see were conditioned upon their reciprocal obedience to the God who had chosen them (cf. Dt. 5:10; 11:13-15).¹⁴⁰ Since they were not living faithfully to the covenant, the covenant blessings were not being bestowed.

Nevertheless, the election-love of God stood firm in his choice of Israel to be his special people. He had chosen Jacob's family, not Esau's family (1:2).¹⁴¹ In fact,

¹³⁸The NIV rendering "oracle" (which also translates *massa'* in Zec. 9:1 and 12:1) is too mild. The term *massa'* normally refers to a load or burden, usually a heavy pack upon the backs of draft animals. While some scholars have attempted to connect this word with a hypothetical root *nasa'* (= to utter), evidence for the hypothesis is weak. See the insightful discussion in *TWOT* (1980) II.601-602.

¹³⁹The word is to be distinguished from *hesed* (= love), which is faithful love that is grounded in the prior existence of a covenant, see extensive discussion, N. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946) 119-120, 167-182.

¹⁴⁰The purpose of God's choosing Israel was that the nation might serve him. Election is for service, cf. W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990) 33-35.

¹⁴¹What is in view here is the corporate nature of election. The concept of corporate personality, in which individuals represent groups or nations, was typical of Hebrew thought, cf. H. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964, 1980). Jacob and his descendants were chosen as a nation in order to serve God in a special way. Esau and his descendants were not chosen in this way. Unfortunately, largely due to the Calvinist-Arminian issue, the corporate nature of election has been lost in the debate over individual election to salvation. The New Testament quotation of Malachi 1:2 in Romans 9:13 has led many interpreters to simply ignore the corporate implications of the Malachi passage. Nevertheless, it is the national entities which are in view, as is clear from the context in Malachi. The issue is not who can be saved or damned by God's predetermination, but rather, what nation had been chosen to serve Yahweh as an instrument of his covenant, cf.

the land of Edom had been severely condemned because of hostilities toward Israel (cf. Eze. 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Ob. 10-14; Ps. 137:7). Yahweh had fulfilled his sentence of judgment upon Edom. While the remnant of Jews had returned to rebuild Jerusalem, the land of the Edomites was still being ravaged by desert enemies. If they tried to rebuild, they would continue to suffer divine judgment because of their implacable animosity toward God's people (1:3-4). Yahweh's purposes in the earth, both in election and judgment, extended beyond the borders of Israel (1:5). If the remnant in the post-exilic community could only broaden their vision, they would see that God's election-love was powerfully evident in their opportunity to return and rebuild, an opportunity denied the Edomites.

Dialogue About Honorable Sacrifices (1:6--2:9)

The second dialogue begins with Yahweh Tsabaoth's indictment of the remnant for not honoring him as a son should a father or respecting him as a servant should a master. The priests, as spiritual leaders, were the first offenders (1:6). Their contempt for God was evident in that they presented to him sacrifices which were ritually unclean (1:7).¹⁴² The qualifications for sacrificial animals were clear in Torah (cf. Ex. 12:5; Lv. 1:3, 10; 22:17-25; Dt. 15:21, etc.), and the priests had become careless. Apparently anything was good enough for God. What they would never dream of sending to the governor, they showed no compunctions about offering to the Lord (1:8). To request God's blessing in the face of such insolence was intolerable (1:9). Better to lock the temple doors and leave the sacrificial fires unlit (1:10)!

It should be understood, of course, that the real issue was not ritual *per se*, but rather, the attitude which lay behind the ritual. God's eternal purpose, as expressed by all the former prophets, was for the nations to come and worship him (2:11). In fact, this was why Israel had been chosen by God in the first place, so that they might serve as priests to the nations (cf. Ex. 19:5-6; Is. 43:20-21). The vision of Haggai and Zechariah was that Jerusalem would be elevated as the center of worship for all peoples in the world (cf. Hg. 2:6-9; Zec. 2:11; 8:20-23; 14:16). The priests were demonstrating their contempt for this universal purpose through their defiance (1:12-13). God required that his chosen people give to him their best, and when they did not do so, they incurred the cursings of the Deuteronomic code (1:14)! Even worse, just as they did by their former covenant-breaking which led to the exile (cf. Eze. 20:8-9, 14, 22; 36:20-23; 39:7), they profaned God's name among the pagans, the

Klein, 173-175.

¹⁴²The expression, "the Lord's table," appears only here in the Old Testament. It is unclear whether this passage has influenced Paul's terminology (cf. 1 Co. 10:21), but it well may have done so, since in both cases the context is sacrificial, the former actual and the latter symbolic.

very ones they ought to have been pointing to the one true God.

Thus, God issued warning to his priests. If they did not honor him in their hearts, he would send cursing instead of blessing (2:1-2). Even the very blessings the priests uttered (cf. Nu. 6:22-27) would be turned to curses.¹⁴³ Normally, the offal of sacrificial animals, that is, the hide, legs, entrails and dung, was to be removed and burned outside the camp (cf. Ex. 29:14; Lv. 4:11-12; 8:17; 16:27-28; Nu. 19:1-8).¹⁴⁴ Contact with this *disjecta membra* rendered a person ritually unclean (Nu. 19:7-8). To have it smeared on one's face as a sign of divine rejection would be particularly revolting, for it signified that the priests were themselves to be discarded like the offal (2:3). God's covenant with the levitical clan,¹⁴⁵ a choice which meant for them life and peace in service to God's will (cf. Lv. 3:45; 18:22-23), demanded reverence and moral integrity (2:4-6). In the classical period of Israel's history, there had been priests of righteous character, and certainly this was the ideal (2:7; cf. Dt. 33:8-10). But the priests of Malachi's day had abandoned their integrity. Because they had done so, God would abandon them (2:8-9). Even the common people were not fooled by the priests' hypocrisy, for the people held their own priests in contempt.

Warning About Broken Marriage Covenants (2:10-16)

This oracle is not as clearly dialogical as the others, though it does have questions which can be taken in a dialogical way (cf. 2:10, 14). The passage is an extended comparison between the covenant of Yahweh with Israel and the covenant of a husband and wife in marriage. The opening two questions are probably posed by the prophet himself to his fellow Jews.¹⁴⁶ Since they all had the same father,¹⁴⁷ why were they rejecting the covenant of their ancestors by breaking faith with each other? Such unfaithfulness was a disruption in the family of God.

The specific form of this unfaithfulness was an actual disruption within Jewish families. Jewish men were divorcing their wives and marrying pagan wives (2:11,

¹⁴³It may be remembered that in the desert Yahweh turned Balaam's cursings to blessing, so he could surely do the reverse (cf. Nu. 22-24).

¹⁴⁴See translation and notes in J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16 [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 226, 239.

¹⁴⁵As in 1:2, the issue is corporate solidarity rather than Levi as a single individual.

¹⁴⁶It is for this reason that the NIV does not put the questions in quotation marks as it does the other dialogical questions which are posed by the remnant community (so also NEB, NKJV, RSV).

¹⁴⁷There has been much discussion about how to take the term '*ab*' (= father). This passage was a mainstay in the slogan of classical liberalism, "the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man," and as such, the word father could refer to either God or Adam. It may be that the term father does indeed refer to God (so NIV, NAB), but many translations do not capitalize the word (KJV, RSV, NEB, NASB, ASV). Jerome and Calvin considered the word to refer to Abraham (cf. Is. 51:2), and others have suggested Jacob. Any of these are possible, though Abraham is the choice of most scholars, because he fits the context best.

14). Such behavior was detestable,¹⁴⁸ for in God's eyes, marriage was not merely a legal contract but a covenant made before him. So, Malachi prayed for divine judgment to be visited upon those who broke their marriage covenants (2:12a).¹⁴⁹ Additional offerings and a flood of tears on their part could not make up for repeated covenant violations and unrepentant hearts (2:12a-13)! To divorce their wives, who were under God's covenant, so they could marry unconverted pagans was a flagrant covenant violation. Yahweh himself stood as a witness against such sin, for he had been the primary witness at their first marriage (2:14). In marriage, God united a man and woman as one flesh (2:15a; cf. Ge. 2:22-24; Mk. 10:6-9). Their unity in marriage was God's method of propagating godly children from godly homes (2:15b; cf. 1 Co. 7:12-14).¹⁵⁰ Mixed marriages between believers and pagans could hardly produce the kind of families God wanted. So, the people must guard their spirits and maintain their original marriages, for God hates divorce (2:15c-16). Divorce is like the sin of wanton violence.¹⁵¹

The Dialogue About Justice (2:17--3:5)

In the next dialogue, the issue concerns divine justice within history. Periodically in the Old Testament, this same issue was raised, especially when those who did not fear God seemed to be well and prosperous (cf. Jb. 21:7-15; Ps. 73:2-12; Je. 12:1-2; Ha. 1:2-4, 13).¹⁵² That God meted out judgment within history was painfully evident in the exile of Israel from her land. Now, however, the remnant community challenged God about his justice within history on other grounds. The prosperity of those who lived for evil seemed to imply that God was aloof and unconcerned. Thus, the people had become cynical (2:17).

Their cynicism was exacerbated by the fact that the promised return of Yahweh to his temple had not yet occurred. While still in the land of exile, Ezekiel had

¹⁴⁸The word *to'evah* (= detestable) is very strong, as any survey of the 117 times it is used in the Hebrew Bible indicates. It refers to what is morally repugnant to God, including sorcery, witchcraft, divination, sexual deviation and child sacrifice (cf. Dt. 18:9-14; Lv. 18:22; 20:13; 2 Kg. 16:3).

¹⁴⁹To be "cut off" probably means to have no progeny, cf. W. Gasque, *IBC* (1986) 993.

¹⁵⁰The Hebrew in 2:15 has many textual difficulties; grammatically, it is impossible to translate as it stands, either due to missing words or some other interference in the text. I have followed the sense of the NIV here, but the analytical commentaries explore several options, none of which are wholly satisfactory. However, one thing is clear: God did not want spouses to break their covenants of marriage!

¹⁵¹The Hebrew is very difficult here as well. Literally, the middle phrase reads, "'Violence covers over his garment,' says Yahweh Tsabaoth." The NIV has supplied the word "himself" in the text and "his wife" in the margin, neither of which are in the Hebrew text. Verse 15-16 are undoubtedly the most difficult passages in the book to translate. The versions and interpreters vary considerably.

¹⁵²Such questions, of course, still trouble the faith of many people, cf. P. Yancey, *Disappointment with God* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1988) 29ff.

predicted the return of Yahweh's glory to the Most Holy Place of a rebuilt temple (cf. Eze. 43:1-5). Over half a century earlier, Haggai and Zechariah had spurred the post-exilic community to complete their work on the second temple, because the promise had been held forth that Yahweh would surely return and take up residence there (Hg. 2:6-7; Zec. 1:16; 2:10). Yahweh's zeal for Zion was intense (Zec. 1:14; 8:2)! Now, another generation later, the remnant community was still "seeking the Lord to come to his temple" (3:b). Once more, disillusionment had clouded their relationship with God.

It was this coming of the Lord to his temple which would establish final justice in the land. However, the event was further in the future than the remnant had imagined. Before the return of the Lord, Malachi predicted that there would be a forerunner to prepare for his coming (3:1a).¹⁵³ Later, Malachi would name this forerunner as Elijah, the prophet (cf. 4:5). After the forerunner had done his preparatory work, the Lord, the "messenger of the covenant," would indeed come (3:1c)! This expression, "messenger of the covenant," which only appears here in the Hebrew Bible, probably alludes to the one who would establish the new covenant which had been foreseen by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (cf. Je. 31:31-34; 32:36-41; 33:19-26; Eze. 16:60-63; 34:25; 37:24-28). If so, then the "messenger of the covenant" refers to the Lord himself.¹⁵⁴

The promises of the Lord's return to his temple were still firm, then. The remnant community looked eagerly for the fulfillment, but in the meantime, they had become disillusioned and cynical about God's justice in the world. Their attitude was similar to that of the Ephraimites in the eighth century, who longed for the Day of Yahweh but did not realize that it would bring judgment upon them (cf. Am. 5:18-20). So, the question posed to the remnant community, who also longed for the appearance of Yahweh, is "Who can endure his coming?" (3:2). When the Lord comes, he comes not only to bring blessing but also judgment! He will come to purify his people, much like the metal workers or launderers who remove dross (3:3-4). Those who have been careless about God's laws would surely reap judgment (3:5).

Thus, the answer to the question of divine justice is an ultimate concern, not an immediate one. Injustice will characterize the era before the Lord comes. God's temporary tolerance for injustice was not an excuse to sin, but rather, an opportunity

¹⁵³While the phrase "my messenger" is identical to the prophet's name (cf. 1:1), it is unlikely that here he means himself.

¹⁵⁴Rabbinical interpreters either gave to the title "messenger" its full angelic connotation or else said it referred to Elijah, Baldwin 243. However, this does not seem likely inasmuch as the "messenger of the covenant" seems to be clearly distinguished from the messenger-forerunner.

to repent and a solemn warning that judgment would yet come (cf. 2 Pe. 3:9)!

Dialogue About Tithing (3:6-12)

The next dialogue is closely related to what preceded it, for this passage also addresses the issue of divine compensation within history. In fact, as the prophet explained, the only reason the nation Israel had not been completely destroyed was due to God's unchanging faithfulness to his covenant promises (3:6). The remnant community had been complaining about God's seeming injustice, because he was not delivering judgment upon the sinners (2:17). They had not stopped to consider that his patience in withholding destruction from others was the very thing that had saved them from destruction, also. The people of Israel certainly deserved to be destroyed for their repeated covenant violations, but God's patience had been shown to them as well (3:7a). What they needed, then, was to repent of their own sins rather than criticize God for being patient with others (3:7b). Malachi's message was the same as that of his predecessor, Zechariah: Return to God, and he will return to you (cf. 1:3-6).

Then comes the dialogue. How should they return? What did God want from them (3:7c)? Whereas earlier Yahweh had singled out the issue of blemished sacrifices (1:6-14), here he singled out the issue of tithing. Members of the remnant community were violating the covenant by refusing to pay tithes of their increase (3:8).¹⁵⁵ Because of such covenant violations, they were liable to the deuteronomic cursings (3:9; cf. Dt. 28:15-19). So, God issued a challenge. They could test the deuteronomic promise of blessings in Torah. If they would pay their tithes as required, God would bestow upon them material blessings, just as he had promised (3:10-12; cf. Dt. 28:1-14)!¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵The word *ma'aser* (= tithe, tenth) is derived from the Hebrew word for the number ten. It was required of the Israelites to give one tenth of their increase to the service of Yahweh. The tithing laws of Torah were set up in a three year cycle. Tithes of the first two years were to be saved for celebration. They were to be taken to the Tent of Meeting or temple to be used in an annual festival of thanksgiving for God's blessings (Dt. 12:5b-19; 14:22-27). In this festival, the Israelite families were to invite the Levites, aliens, orphans and widows from the various towns to share in the feast. The third year tithes were for the support of the Levitical clan, who had no land inheritance, and also for the aliens, orphans and widows who were naturally disadvantaged (Lv. 27:26-34; Dt. 14:28-29; 26:12-15; cf. Nu. 18:21, 24-32). Those in the community in the time of Nehemiah, had pledged themselves to pay their tithes, as the law demanded (Ne. 10:37-39), but apparently this pledge had not been honored by their children.

¹⁵⁶The habit of some Christians to use this passage to enforce mandated Christian tithing is misplaced. Tithing may indeed be a worthy Christian discipline, but it cannot be approached out of the mandatory statutes of the Mosaic covenant. The Christian ethic of giving is most clearly enunciated in 2 Corinthians 8-9, where Paul says that Christians ought to give voluntarily and generously. It is clear that Paul does not appeal to the tithing statutes of Torah.

Dialogue About the Fear of God (3:13--4:3)

The final dialogue in Malachi continued with the problem of disillusionment (3:13). Earlier, the people had complained that God was not just (cf. 2:17). Now, Malachi indicted them for their complaint that it was futile to serve God and follow his laws (3:14a). They had decided that keeping the requirements of Torah and following the way of repentance did not seem to bring them any gain (3:14b), while the most flagrant rebels seem to have gotten off entirely (3:15). Once again, the difficult question of justice in history had been raised.

Not everyone was ready to throw over faith, however. There was a remnant of faith among the larger remnant of returned exiles!¹⁵⁷ Those who maintained their faith banded together, not to utter complaints against God, but to encourage each other in the faith--and Yahweh heard them (3:16a)! He entered their names on a heavenly scroll, promising that in the day of ultimate justice, when judgment would be meted out to those who disregard God, his faithful people would be saved (3:16b-17)!¹⁵⁸ In that time, full justice would be served. The value of righteousness and the danger of wickedness would be plainly evident (3:18).¹⁵⁹ It would surely be a day of judgment, burning up the elements of wickedness like a furnace burns straw (4:1)!¹⁶⁰ Those who were faithful, however, would receive their just reward. The sun would rise upon them, and its rays would bring healing (3:2a).¹⁶¹ Like calves wild with excitement, they would burst forth from their confinement under the injustices of history, trampling down their former oppressors (3:2b-3). Justice would finally come!

Conclusion (4:4-6)

The Book of Malachi closes by anticipating the coming messianic kingdom. Though injustices would continue throughout history, God's faithful people must follow his laws (4:4). Before the Day of Yahweh came, the forerunner would appear

¹⁵⁷St. Paul voices a similar idea in the New Testament (cf. Ro. 9:6-8; 11:1-6).

¹⁵⁸The idea of a heavenly record which contains the names of God's faithful remnant appears in various passages (cf. Ex. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; 87:6; Da. 12:1b; Rv. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15).

¹⁵⁹As in Zec. 1:18--2:17, there is a verse numbering discrepancy between the English Bible and the Hebrew Bible. The respective enumerations here in Malachi are as follows:

English Versions:	Hebrew Text:
4:1-3	3:19-21
4:4-6	3:22-24

¹⁶⁰John the Baptist anticipated the fulfillment of 4:1 in the advent of the Messiah (cf. Mt. 3:11-12; Lk. 3:9, 16-17).

¹⁶¹The "sun of righteousness" with "wings of healing" is not necessarily a mixed metaphor. The "wings" of the sun in the ancient Near East referred to the rays of the sun, and a winged disk of the sun appears in various stelae and inscriptions representing a source of blessing and protection, cf. *IB* (1956) VI.1142-1143.

to prepare the Lord's way (4:5; cf. 3:1), a future prophet who would come in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (cf. Lk. 1:17). His work would be to prepare the hearts of the people for the advent of God, bridging the alienation between generations and serving as a moral catalyst to the entire community (4:6a). Only such spiritual revival would prevent the terrible curses of judgment (4:6b).

It is clear, of course, that the writers of the New Testament considered John the Baptist to be the Elijah-like prophet. John was so designated in the prophetic annunciation of the angel to his father Zechariah (Lk. 1:17), and Jesus clearly indicated that John had fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi (Mt. 11:13-14; 17:10-13; Mk. 9:11-13). While John may not have realized his role in this fulfillment (cf. Jn. 1:21, 25), according to Christ he was the "Elijah who was to come."