

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

The prophet Zechariah lived and prophesied in the early days of the Second Temple. His prophecies mention the prominent figures of his generation – Chaggai, Zerubavel and Yehoshua the high priest. Zechariah's first prophecy, in perek 1, was given two weeks after Chaggai called for the building of the Temple, and his last prophecy was given about two years later. Like Chaggai, Zechariah encouraged the building of the Temple – in his own unique prophetic style. The book of Zechariah is divided into two distinct sections – 1-8 and 9-14. The unique character of Zechariah's prophecy is prominent in the first section in which we are presented with a series of exceptional prophetic visions seen by Zechariah, with prophecies interposed between them. The second section of the book has visions which are mostly about the fate of the nations of the world.

1.

'Return to Me!' Zechariah's first prophecy (1:2-6)

Zechariah's first prophecy reflects his confrontation with the people about the redemption which is slow to come, and the repentance which is necessary to bring it. While Chaggai prophesied shortly before him and dealt with economic difficulties and the neglect of the Temple, Zechariah broadens the picture and deals with the sins which the people have been prone to since the days of the fathers, and to the more general repentance which is necessary in his generation. Zechariah compares the generation of the fathers to the generation of the sons in his prophecy, in order to teach the sons a lesson. The prophecy begins with a description of the wrath of God with the fathers – which led to the destruction of the Temple.

How does the prophet suggest that the anger be stopped? The root Sh.u.v. (to return) repeats four times in the prophecy: follow the times it is mentioned and think about the difference between the first pair (3) and the second pair (4, 6). How should they be different than their fathers in terms of their repentance?

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2.

The visions of Zechariah (1:7 -6:8)

From after the opening prophecy through perek 6 there is a series of prophetic visions seen by Zechariah. These visions are full of details and difficult to understand, as noted by Rashi:

The prophecy of Zechariah is extremely enigmatic, because it contains visions resembling a dream that requires an interpretation. We cannot ascertain the truth of its interpretation until the teacher of righteousness comes. Nonetheless, I will put my heart to reconciling the verses, one by one, according to the interpretations that resemble it...

a | The phenomenon of prophetic visions is not unique to Zechariah, we see it with Amos and Yechezkel as well, but it is certainly more obvious with Zechariah. Why is this? See the **Radak:**

I saw tonight – The visions of Zechariah are very difficult to interpret, like the visions of Daniel. The visions of other prophets are not like this, for the power of prophecy was becoming weaker from the time of the exile. Therefore they did not explain their words and they did not understand the visions as they saw them. He says *I saw tonight*, in the visions of the night I saw this vision that I saw.

b | We see the difference in Zechariah's level of prophecy from the name which he gives to the prophets who came before him: "the former prophets" (1:4, 7:7,12). What can we learn from this name about Zechariah's perception of himself? See also the Mishna and Gemara in **Sotah 48a-b:**

MISHNAH: When the former prophets died, the Urim and Tummim ceased.

GEMARA: said R. Nahman: Who are the former prophets? [The term 'former'] excludes Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi who are the latter [prophets].

Note as well the central role which angels play in the visions and the lack of revelation of God. See the **Ibn Ezra's** commentary on pasuk 5:


Know that the reason is that prophecy will end, and that is why it is written, "[But the prophets] - do they live forever?" Only the words of the Torah and laws "did they not overtake your fathers?" for in the Torah it is written if you return to God he will return your exile. Therefore it is written 'And they returned and were thankful.'

3.

The vision of the horses (1:6-17):

The first vision which Zechariah sees is the vision of the horses. In this vision the heavenly decision is made to redeem the nation.

a | Note the verbal and substantive connection between the vision of the horses and the opening prophecy, including the mention of wrath (*ketzef*) in both prophecies (2, 15). Examine

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the dialogue between the angel and God in pesukim 11-17: What is the reason for the redemption in these pesukim and how is this different than in the first prophecy? How do you think the difference between the prophecies can be explained?

b | What do the horses symbolize in the vision? To understand this, see the **Ibn Ezra**:

When angels take action for God, they follow His command, and this is a parable which people can understand – a king sitting on his throne sends his messengers, some of them spies riding on horses, so that they should come quickly to inform him of what is going on in his kingdom, and so it is.

c | Compare the description of the role of the horses (1:10-11) to the description of the angels and Satan in Iyov 1:7. Pay attention to the context of the description and the role of the angels there in connection to the concept of reward and punishment in this world. Based on this connection, explain the role of the angels in our perek.

4.

The vision of the horns and the craftsmen (2:1-4):

After the general decision that God will return to Jerusalem, come two visions which represent the implementation of this decision. The vision is divided into two stages which are interdependent - the vision of the four horns (1-2) and the vision of the four craftsmen (3-4). In the first vision, which is a preparation for the second vision, Zechariah sees the horns and in the second vision God shows him the craftsmen. How is this vision a fulfillment of the earlier decision? (15)

5.

The vision of the surveyor (2:5-9):

Like the previous vision, this vision is divided into two stages – the instructions of the first angel (5-6), and the correction by another angel (7-9). These two stages are alluded to in the first vision as well (1:16, 17). Why are these two stages needed and what do they each symbolize? Two reasons are brought by the angel as to why the original plan to build the wall should be cancelled. What is the difference between the reasons (what are the implications of the construction of the wall) and to which explanation does each relate? Think about the conceptual connection (*within ... within*) between the reasons.

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APPENDIX – The Kuzari

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for, behold! I will come and dwell in your midst, says the Lord. (Zechariah 2:14)

The Kuzari relates to this pasuk and explains the reason that it was not fulfilled:

Kuzari 2:24

The Rabbi: This is a severe reproach, O king of the Khazars. It is the sin which kept the divine promise with regard to the second Temple, *'Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion'* (Zechariah 2:10), from being fulfilled. Divine providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if they had all willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, whilst the majority and the aristocracy remained in Babylon, referring dependence and slavery, and unwilling to leave their houses and their affairs. An allusion to them might be found in the enigmatic words of Solomon: *'I sleep, but my heart wakes'* (Shir haShirim 5:2-4). He designates the exile by sleep, and the continuance of prophecy among them by the wakefulness of the heart. *'It is the voice of my beloved that knocks'* means God's call to return; *'My head is filled with dew'* alludes to the Shekhinah which emerged from the shadow of the Temple. The words: *'I have put off my coat'* refer to the people's slothfulness in consenting to return. The sentence: *'My beloved stretches forth his hand through the opening'* may be interpreted as the urgent call of Ezra, Nechemiah, and the Prophets, until a portion of the people grudgingly responded to their invitation. In accordance with their mean mind they did not receive full measure. Divine Providence only gives man as much as he is prepared to receive; if his receptive capacity be small, he obtains little, and much if it be great. Were we prepared to meet the God of our forefathers with a pure mind, we should find the same salvation, as our fathers did in Egypt. If we say: *'Worship his holy hill - worship at His footstool – He who restores His glory to Zion'* (Tehillim 99:9, 5), and other words, this is but as the chattering of the starling and the nightingale. We do not realize what we say by this sentence, nor others, as you rightly observe, O Prince of the Khazars.

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