

## **Zechariah 9-14: a King in solidarity with the poor will eliminate all oppression**

Zechariah 9-14, at times called “The Second Zechariah”, is anonymous, titled only as an “oracle” (*massa*’, ‘**carga**’; as also 12:1 and Mal 1:1). The recognition of such a division of the book began in 1653 when the English Biblicist Joseph Mede, in order to explain the attribution of Zechariah 11:12-13 to Jeremiah in the quote from Matthew 27:9-10, concluded that Jeremiah was the author of Zechariah 9-11. Given that Zechariah consists of two sections with the same title, some consider that Zechariah 12-14 represents a “Third Zechariah” (→ Isaiah). Probably written by more than one author, Zechariah 9-14 would mostly reflect the years 500-330 B.C. (cf. → Zech 1-8, 520-518 B.C.).

Although Zechariah abounds in obscure texts, it is one of the writings most quoted by the authors of the New Testament: <sup>1</sup>

Zech 9:9-11 → Mt 21:2-7 and John 12:14-15; your king is coming mounted on a donkey (see below);

11:12-13 → Mt 27:9-10; the absurd price of a slave (Ex 21:32);

12:10 → Jn 19:37 and Rev 1:7; “They will look on the one whom they have pierced”;

13:7 → Mk 14:27; “I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered”;

14:5 → 1 Thes 3:13; “at the coming of our Lord...with all his saints”;

14:8 → Jn 7:38; “rivers of living water” (see BJ, note Jn 7:38);

14:21 → Jn 2:16 “Stop making my father’s house a marketplace”.

See also 12:3 → Lk 21:24; Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles;

**Outline and message.** The Second Zechariah (9-14) follows the First Zechariah, perhaps to explain why the promises of Zechariah 1-8 were not fulfilled (e.g. the feasts of 8:18-23, with their joyful spirituality and material prosperity). It reflects the post-exilic community’s divisions and tensions between:

- (1) the exiled elite who returned and attempted to regain their lands from “the people of the earth” (mostly poor) who had stayed in Judah;
- (2) also between the exiled priests and the religious leaders (prophets?) who were not exiled
- (3) between the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the landowners of Judah; and

- (4) between the north and the south for control of Judah and Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 13; cf. today's exiled Cubans in Miami).

The obscurity of such texts from the Second Zechariah would result in part from the historical contexts of oppression and the sharp ideological divisions that obliged the prophets to keep the targets of their denunciations ambiguous, as is common in such situations (→ Mark, Jesus' "messianic secret").

### **Zechariah 9-11: The First Oracle (→ Jeremiah 23:33)**

9:1-9 Oracle against the nations: the future restoration of the monarchy over the ancient Davidic empire. This oracle would allude to Alexander the Great's conquest after the Issus, 333, when he marched over a route similar to the list of cities, but here interpreted as an action of Yahweh who draws near his House and protects from all oppressors (see the reference to the sons of Greece, in 9:13); cf. Cyrus of Persia as the "anointed/messiah" of Yahweh in Isaiah 45.

9:10-11 The just king comes to Jerusalem, in solidarity with the poor, in peace

9:12-17 The liberation of the exiled-captured "from the waterless pit" (symbol of Babylon).

10:1-2 The Lord who makes the storm clouds: against the diviners; lack of a shepherd-leader.

10:3-12 The Lord of history, Yahweh, the militant shepherd – the reunification of Israel (north) and Judah (south); cf. Korea and Germany today

11:1-3 The Lord of creation: Justice against Lebanon – a fire devours the forests and plains

11:4-17 Two shepherd and two staffs (→ 13:7-9; Ezek 34; John 10) the hopes are not fulfilled because of the selfishness of the shepherd/leaders

### **Zechariah 12-14, the Second Oracle: The Day of Yahweh, the Liberating God**

(+ "that Day": 12:3, 4, 6, 8, 8, 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4; 14: 4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 20; 17 times)

12:1-13:6 Jerusalem under attack (1): the Day of Yahweh – the freeing of Jerusalem

12:1-9 Jerusalem under attack: Jerusalem will not be more important than Judah

12:10-14 The future repentance of Jerusalem's elite

13:1-6 Purification: the (false) prophets eliminated

13:7-9 New oracle against a shepherd/leader (see 11:15-17)

14:1-21 Jerusalem under attack (2): its final Triumph – purified and font of blessings

**1 The poor.** While Zechariah 1-8 represents the perspective of a “central” prophet, related to the temple and supporting the priests and the cult, Zech 9-14 reflects a peripheral view, of marginalized persons and criticisms of Jerusalem’s oligarchy, being laymen, or perhaps priests who had lost their power and were replaced. As such, Zech 9, in a context which promises the liberation of the land (9:1-8) and the nation (9:11-17), dares to also proclaim the arrival in Jerusalem of the “humble” king, in solidarity with the poor, but commanding peace (9:10-11) – since any hopes of restoration of the Davidic monarchy had to be expressed with the caution and respect owing to the Persian kings.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
 Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
 Lo, your king comes to you;  
     triumphant and victorious is he,  
 humble and riding on a donkey,  
     a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
 He will cut off the chariot of Ephraim  
     and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
 and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
     and he shall command peace to the nations;  
 his dominion shall from sea to sea,  
     and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zech 9:9-10; see Mt 21:5; Jn 12:15).

David Pleins points out how the word ‘*ani*’ changes the meaning in Second Isaiah and Second Zechariah, since previously ‘*ani*’ signified “the poor”, oppressed by the elite of Israel, but when these elite suffered the Exile, they began to apply the term to themselves, as “humble”, Yahweh’s poor,<sup>2</sup> oppressed by foreign empires. I prefer to understand ‘*ani*’ in texts such as Zechariah 9:9 a meaning such as “in solidarity with the poor/oppressed” (see the ideal King in Psalm 72 and the “poor of spirit” in →Matthew).

In addition to the oracles that refer to the poor/oppressed (*ani*; see 9:9, 10, 11:7, 11), Second Zechariah contains no texts that speak explicitly of the poor – and nothing comparable to the strong exhortation of First Zechariah (7:9-10). However, reflecting the context of the marginalized authors and the people during the later epoch, much more than Zech 1-8, Zechariah 9-14 frequently refers explicitly to oppression. David Pleins titles his treatment of Zechariah 9-14 “No More Oppression”, since the oracles show how the zeal to be freed from foreign domination and oppression grew throughout the Persian epoch.<sup>3</sup> In Zechariah 9-14, as in Second Isaiah and the later oracles (“level C”) of the prophet Micah, the elite, already exiled, assume their new identity of “oppressed” and seek to be freed from the foreign domination in a second Exodus (Zech 9:4; 10:11; 11:1-3):<sup>4</sup>

9:8     Then I [Yahweh] will encamp at my house as a guard  
         so that no one will march to and fro;  
         no oppressor will again overrun them,  
         for now I have seen with my own eyes.

See “march” (*br*) twice in 9:8; cf. the riches of Tyre, 9:3-4. Cf. 10:4 donde *noges es un gobernante sin matices negativos*.<sup>5</sup>

- 9:9 The king in solidarity with the poor and oppressed (*'ani*, poor, oppressed).
- 9:11 “I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit” (meaning, the Exile).
- 10:2 “Therefore the people wander like sheep; they suffer for lack of a shepherd.
- 11:6-7, 11 “For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord. I will cause them, every one, to fall each into the hand of a neighbor, and each into the hand of the king; and they shall devastate the earth, and I will deliver no one from their hand. 7 So, on behalf of the sheep merchants, I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter”...11 So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep merchants, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord”.

The Masoretic Hebrew text (TM) twice refers to the poor/oppresed (11:7; 11) utilizing the same word (*'ani*) that describes the king on a donkey in 9:9 (above), and the RV95 still follows the TM, as also the NIV. A Hebrew manuscript from Qumran also supports the TM. However, on this point all the commentators and the great majority of the modern translations (BJ, DHH – even the NVI, which attempts to follow the NIV) prefer the text from the LXX (Septuagint, Greek) which brings together two Hebrew words that refer to the “Canaanites”, a common euphemism in the Bible for “merchants” (NVI; cf 14:4) or “sheep traders” (BJ, see note; DHHBE, see note). At any rate, 11:6 explicitly refers to the violence that Judah suffered and 11:7 and 11 describe a situation of oppression and violence – all under Yahweh’s sovereignty.

- 11:14-17 A worthless shepherd “who devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs (see Micah 3:1-2).
- 13:7 “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate”, say the Lord of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones”. Cf. the bloody judgment against the useless shepherd (11:17); the wounded false prophet (13:6); and the mourning “*el/mi que traspasaron (dqr)*” (12:10).
- 14:2 “The city [Jerusalem] shall be taken [by the gentiles], the houses looted and the women raped (*shaqal*). Half the city shall go into exile...”. See the verb *shaqal* in Isa 13:16; Jer 3:2; Deut 28:30.<sup>6</sup>

See also 10:4 “commander/leader” (*nagas*), in this verse a positive meaning; and 10:11 “distress” (*šara* I). Probably a textual error for “Egypt” (DHHBE, note). In 10:11 the nation’s liberation from the Exile is compared to the original exodus from Egypt (the paradigm of the Exodus). There are references to the wealth of the oppressors in 9:3-4 (Tyre); 11:5 (the merchants); 11:16 (the worthless shepherd who takes advantage of the weak and exploits the people); 14:1 (“the plunder of Jerusalem) looted by invaders); and 14:14 (“the wealth of the nations”); 14:21 (the land free of traders/merchants who exploit).

**2 Women.** The Second Zechariah lacks the almost excessive concern for women – and the temptation they represent – that we see in → the First Zechariah (5:5-11). The anonymous oracles in Zechariah 9-14 (some of which could have come from prophetesses) does not specifically name any woman and refers only to men, above all shepherds/leaders. Of course marriage is the norm in a patriarchal society (12:12-14), but it mentions the rape (*shaqal*) of the women of Jerusalem in war (14:2), and the physical beauty of the young men and maidens in the coming epoch of freedom:

“Grain shall make the young men flourish  
and new wine the young women” (9:17).

The commentators are not in agreement about 13:2-6, if the text only refers to the elimination of false prophets<sup>7</sup> or the termination of the entire prophetic ministry in Israel.<sup>8</sup> Given that women couldn't be priests, terminating the entire prophetic ministry would imply the elimination of women from the spiritual leadership. In the New Testament, see 1 Thes 5:19-21; 1Cor 11:2-16. If the Second Zechariah is trying to terminate the entire prophetic ministry, its project for the future would represent the counterpart in the vision of Joel, who wanted to see the gift of prophecy universalized (Joel 2:28-32; cf. Mal 4:5-6; 2 Cr 20:14-19; 29:30).

**3 Sexual Minorities.** Zechariah 9:1-9 appears to allude to the conquest of the “gay” emperor Alexander the Great, one of the great military leaders of history. Many suggest a date a little before or immediately after Alexander's triumphal march from Syria and Phoenicia in the north (9:1-4) to Palestine and the four Philistine cities named in 9:5-7 (BJ 1092 y note 9:1<sup>a</sup>; DHHBE 1201 and note b9:1-8). After his victory over the Persians in Issus (333 B.C.), Alexander marched on the route of the cities here named and in the same order (see the reference to the sons of the Greeks in 9:13).<sup>9</sup>

Zechariah 9:1-9 interprets Alexander's conquests as triumphs of Yahweh who encamps in his House and guards against the oppressor (cf. Cyrus of Persia as Yahweh's anointed/messiah” in → the Second Isaiah 45:1-8). It was Alexander the Great who transmitted Greek culture throughout his great empire, with his famous admiration for homoerotic love. Notably, the Second Zechariah interprets these military triumphs of the gay emperor as Yahweh's actions in history and as immediate antecedents of the peaceful arrival of the liberating King to Jerusalem (9:10-11; Matthew and John interpreted the text as a prophecy of the peaceful triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem; see above → Titus). For being so peaceful, the King, riding a donkey, promised by the Second Zechariah, resulted in being a figure that broke the rigid traditional schemes of gender created by the patriarchal cultures (male militants vs. peaceful women).

The Second Zechariah also (or the school of prophet it represents) never claiming to have a wife or family, speaks very little about women and speaks of none by name (cf. the sixth vision in the First Zechariah, 5:1-11), and would have the bachelor's life-style of the shamans (→ Joel). The oracles express the suffering and anger of the marginalized and oppressed groups. Zechariah 13:6 would even reflect the habitual sado-masochistic practices between the prophets and the shamans:

And if anyone asks them, “What are these wounds on your chest?” the answer will be “The wounds I received in the house of my friends (*me’ahabay*)”.

In this text the Hebrew (*me’ahabay*) clearly means “lovers”, but – with obvious timidity and ideological prejudices – they preferred to translate it in this context as “friends” (DHH, BJ, RV95, BL and NVI). However, the commentaries recognize the error and supply the data to be corrected. The Hebrew word (*me’ahabay*) in a **participio plural piel**, which in other contexts refers to adulterous lovers (Hos 2:7,9,12,14,15, Lam 1:19; relations with prostitutes (Ezek 23:5,9,22) or lovers (Jer 22:20,22; 30:14; Ezek 16:33, 36, 37).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, David Petersen (1995:107, 127-128) translates it **“un hombre me sedujo desde mi juventud...me golpearon en la casa de amor (ilícito)”**. The Meyers point out that “friends” in Hebrew **no sería un participio de la raíz piel (intensivo), sino qal (simple)** and recognize that the text refers to the flagellation and the wounds of a professional prophet (see the priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18:28; cf. Lev 19:28; Deut 14:1; Jer 16:6; 41:5; 47:5; Hos 7:14).<sup>11</sup>

In 13:2-6 the false prophet, like the authentic, has a shamanic life-style, mainly unmarried – here still living in a house and under the authority of the parents, who execute the death penalty, killing their own son) cf. Deut 13:6-10; 18:20; 21:18-21 which commands “stone” the false prophet or the rebellious child). Although the patriarchal marriage continues as the common practice in the post-exile society of Jerusalem’s elite, to whom the Second Zechariah directed his apocalyptic oracles, the oracles do not name any definite marriages (see the wives in mourning, 12:12-14, cited under women, above; also 9:17 and 4:2; and the children in 10:7 and 9).

Zechariah 9:6 refers to another type of “sexual minority”:

“A mongrel people [bastard] (Hebrew: *mamzer*) shall settle in Ashdod,  
and I will make an end to the people of Philistia”.

The note in the BJ reflects the common interpretation: “the mixed population resulting from colonization”; see Deut 23:2; NVI, “Bastards”; “a foreigner” RV95; DHHBE, “a mixed race”, note “expression of disdain toward a cross-bred population”; “a cross-bred population”, BL; NRSV “mongrel people”. However, David Petersen translates “an incestuous population”<sup>12</sup> and Carol and Eric Myers, “a villain”.<sup>13</sup> Whichever the preferred translation – the result of a disapproved sexual union, be it incestuous or adultery with pagans – the text describes the fruit of such a union with strong disapproval, and accordingly, the character of the offspring is determined by the sin of the parents. Such judgment seems highly unjust to many modern readers → Hebrews 12:8, “illegitimate children” and the birth of Jesus → Luke 1-2; Matthew 1-2.

### **Alexander III (The Great) of Macedonia, (356-323 B.C.) and the Bible**

Alexander, son of Philip II of Macedonia and Olympias, at six years of age had as a tutor Aristotle (342-340 B.C.), who encouraged him in his love of classic Greek culture and

literature. At 14 years, he commanded the left wing of the Macedonian Army and through the death of his father in 336 ascended to the throne at 20 years old. After the conquest of the Persian Empire (333 B.C.), within ten years he succeeded in creating the largest empire in history. In the process Alexander revolutionized the art of war; for example, he left the injured behind to marry with the inhabitants of each area and thus established Greek colonies which made Greek the first universal language in history. After the conquest of Egypt (332), he founded Alexandria, the principal intellectual center of the ancient world. There they translated the Hebrew Bible into **common** [koiné] Greek (the Septuagint version, LXX), that would be the Bible of the primitive Christian churches (see the New Testament, also in Greek). After extending his empire as far as India's frontier (the Indus River), his soldiers refused to continue. He returned to Babylon in 323 B.C. where he died on 13 June at 32 years old, of exhaustion, wounds and fever. Hellenism, the cultural synthesis of the east and west continues as a fundamental influence in Western History, and with the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is expressed in the syncretism of the Roman Catholic Church (including the many popular expressions; see the Neo-Platonist theology of Saint Augustine and the Aristotelian theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas).

Although Alexander married Roxana, his marriage was more a political gesture than an expression of love. His strong passion for beautiful young men was legendary. In 324, when his best friend since childhood, Hephaestion, died, Alexander went into an extravagant mourning. Later, he enjoyed a relationship with the handsome eunuch Bagoas, who was previously the young favorite of King Darius of Persia, and he took many eunuchs as sexual companions (Is 39:7; Joel 3:4; see → Nehemiah and → Qohelet). Despite his "gay" life, the Koran recognizes him as a prophet: "Alexander of the two horns" (*Ishkander du al-qarnain*).

**Alexander the Great in the Bible.** See Collins (1993) and Goldengay (1998) → Zechariah 9-14.):

→ Zech 9:1-8 debatable, positive (330 B.C.)

Daniel 2:33 legs of iron (statue), = the fourth kingdom, 40; metaphoric, implicit, neutral

7:7, 19 the fourth beast = the fourth kingdom, 7:23 ("different", three times)

8:5-8, 21-22 the male goat with a horn;

11:3-4 a warrior king (without descendents; see BJ notes concerning the texts in Dan)

1 Maccabees (130-100 B.C.) 1;1-9; 6:2 explicit, negative (arrogant)

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### End Notes

1. Ralph Smith 1984:175-180
2. David Pleins 2001:403
3. David Pleins 2001:403
4. David Pleins 2001:404
5. Petersen 1995:52
6. Meyers 1993:414
7. Carol and Eric Myers 1993:399-404
8. David Petersen 1995:124.128; Pablo Andiñach 1999:1087
9. Pablo Andiñach 1999:1085; H. C. Leupold 1956:165; cf. Carol and Eric Myers 1993:99, 102-103; David Petersen 1995:53
10. see Carol and Eric Meyers 1993:383; Luis Alonso Schökel 1994:35
11. David Petersen 1993:384
12. David Petersen 1995:39-40
13. Carol and Eric Myers 1993:110