

“The function of a particular text should inform interpreters, so much so that they begin to use the lens the text itself provides. If the Bible is approached as a political tract, a textbook of knowledge, a dictionary of ethics, a secret code or a cipher for understanding UFOs, then surely its meaning will be distorted. Interpreters are using inappropriate tools... Or, to shift the metaphor once again, a lens appropriate for seeing the text must be used. How is such a lens acquired? One of the ways is through constant exposure to the text: reading and rereading... It is by ‘steeping ourselves in its tone or temper’ that readers learn ‘its overall message.’” (Stephen Dempster)

1. Again, the Old Testament tells the story of Israel, but specifically in terms of its reason for being – that is, its role in God’s accomplishment of His purpose for His creation.
 - a. The Old Testament isn’t concerned to trace the history of one people among many, but to follow the birth and life of a *chosen* people – a people chosen by God to be His instrument in His purpose to restore and perfect His creation.
 - b. Israel was the Abrahamic seed, and God chose Abraham and his seed to mediate His blessing – that is, the knowledge of God in true communion – to all the earth.
 - c. Thus one must begin at the beginning in order to understand “Israel” and its relationship with God, the world and the Messiah. And one must understand Israel in order to understand Israel’s sacred writings (the Old Testament).
2. The history of Israel as traced out in the Scriptures is the marrow of the salvation history, and one scholar illustrates the relationship between the diverse Old Testament writings, Israel’s history and the salvation history in terms of a *house* and a *journey*.
 - a. A house contains many rooms with different functions and focuses (illustrative of the diverse Old Testament texts). And yet, because the house is inhabited by one family, the various rooms have many features and qualities in common. A home embodies and reflects a kind of stable unity, but unity that is dynamic because the one family is diverse and marked by both generational and situational progress.

The general solidarity of a family unit imparts a unity to the character and personality of their home. At the same time, families aren’t static, and family dynamics introduce diversity and change into their home. This “dynamic unity” is true in a given generation, but all the more so in the passing of generations: A home reflects the individuals and generations that presently inhabit it, but while continuing to reflect the lives, personalities and contributions of its previous residents (whether by personal property, pictures, furnishings, workmanship, etc.).
 - b. Similarly, a journey highlights movement, but movement that is orderly and purposeful – movement from a starting point along a set trajectory toward a pre-determined goal or outcome. Each step or stage of the journey thus presupposes and builds on the preceding ones and leads into the subsequent ones. So it was with Israel’s history as the history of salvation culminating with the Christ event.

3. Drawing upon the above illustrations, Zechariah was a member of the Israelite family which inhabited the multi-roomed “house” that is the Old Testament scriptures. Like a person who lives in the family home – but many generations removed from those family members who first inhabited it, Zechariah took up residence in the Israelite “home” relatively late in the “family story.” He entered a home whose order, personality and furnishings were the cumulative product of centuries of inhabitants, each individual and each generation having made its own contribution. So the story of Israel represents a journey that began in Eden and, under the Lord’s guiding providence, advanced purposefully and methodically toward the destiny for which Israel was created: *to bring forth the child pledged to Eve*. And by doing so, Israel would see the promise to Abraham fulfilled and therefore see its own identity and calling realized. In the Seed of Eve and Abraham, Israel would become Israel indeed (cf. Isaiah 49:1-13 with Galatians 3).
- a. Zechariah entered this story at a critically important time in Israel’s history. The kingdom promised to Abraham and realized in David (cf. Genesis 15:1-20 and 22:15-18 with 1 Kings 4:20-21) had been overthrown and decimated because of Israel’s unfaithfulness. At every step, Israel had failed to be *Israel*: It had failed to fulfill its identity and calling as Yahweh’s son, servant, disciple and witness.

In a certain sense, Israel’s unfaithfulness reached its pinnacle in David. For, as Yahweh’s chosen son-king, David epitomized Israel, which itself was the Lord’s elect royal son (cf. Exodus 4:22-23, 19:1-6 with Genesis 17:1-6, 15-16). If Israel was obligated to fulfill the Abrahamic mission of mediating the knowledge of God to all the earth’s families, so much more was David who represented Israel to the surrounding nations. But far from leading the nations to know and praise the God of Israel, David gave them cause to blaspheme Him because of how he, Yahweh’s king, acted toward Bathsheba and Uriah and so reflected back on his Lord who was Israel’s true King (ref. 2 Samuel 11:1-12:14; cf. Psalm 51:1-4).

God responded by introducing a sword into David’s house: Initially this “sword” slashed into pieces David’s familial household, but eventually it came against his dynastic “house” and his kingdom was cut into two pieces. David didn’t live to see this happen, but Israel’s bifurcation was nonetheless the enduring legacy of the man through whom Yahweh had unified the twelve tribes and brought the Israelite kingdom to its apex. Now, only two generations later, the glory and might of David’s kingdom had been reduced to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin (cf. 2 Samuel 5:1-10 and 12:1-10 with 1 Kings 11:1-40).

The southern kingdom of Judah was the remnant of David’s kingdom and saw some godly and faithful kings during its history. In contrast, Israel in the north departed from Yahweh from the very outset. But in the end, both Judah and Israel proved disobedient and adulterous in their relationship with God (Ezekiel 16, 23) and eventually He sent both into exile and captivity – first Israel and then Judah about 145 years later. Just as the Lord had warned from the days of Moses and then through the mouths of His prophets, David’s kingdom was thrown down and his dynastic house cut off and condemned (Jeremiah 22:24-30).

Even if every other component and aspect of David's kingdom could someday be recovered, Yahweh had vowed that never again would a son from David's royal line sit upon the throne of Israel. And without a Davidic king, there could be no Davidic throne and kingdom; to all appearances, it seemed that Yahweh had abandoned His covenant oath to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

- b. But desolation, exile and captivity weren't to be the last word. Yahweh would indeed keep His promise to David to establish his house, throne and kingdom forever. David's "tent" was now in ruins, but the Lord was going to raise it up again, and this meant liberating and restoring to Himself the sons of the kingdom.
- c. Yahweh promised liberation and recovery for His people and the restoration of David's kingdom, *but in a way that is often misunderstood or even missed altogether*. A careful reading of the prophets shows that they spoke of these things in two distinct ways.
 - First, they promised the liberation of the Judean exiles and their return to Canaan. This was to happen after the land had enjoyed the 70 years of sabbaths it was owed (2 Chronicles 36:11-21; cf. Jeremiah 25:1-12, 29:1-10; Daniel 9:1-19), and the result would be the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem (cf. again Isaiah 44:24-28 with Nehemiah).
 - This release, recovery and rebuilding occurred just as the Lord said, *but it did not fully realize His promise respecting Israel's future*. The earlier prophets had declared that these events would occur and the post-exile prophets treated them as proof of Yahweh's faithfulness. But they, in agreement with their predecessors, indicated that these occurrences didn't fulfill Yahweh's pledge concerning Israel's liberation and recovery from exile and the restoration of David's kingdom. This fulfillment awaited a future time when He would truly end His people's exile and regather them to Himself by returning to them in the person of His Servant-Messiah (cf. Isaiah 7-12, 40-61; Jeremiah 23, 31-33; Ezekiel 34, 37; Hosea 1-3; Amos 9:11-15; etc. with Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23; Zechariah 6-14; Malachi 3:1-5).
- d. The themes of exile, restoration, rebuilding and kingdom were central to the post-exilic prophetic message and Zechariah's prophecy was no exception. His visions and burdens focused on these themes, but with the consciousness that they (and other related themes) have their primary nexus in the *Davidic Covenant*.

God made His covenant with David after he assumed the throne of Israel, unified the twelve tribes and brought relative peace to his kingdom. Most important to the background for the covenant, David had conquered the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem – something Israel had not been able to accomplish to that point (cf. 2 Samuel 5:6-9; 1 Chronicles 11:1-5). David made Jerusalem the seat of his throne, but also came to believe that it should be the site of the central sanctuary Moses had spoken of centuries earlier (cf. Deuteronomy 12:10-14 with 2 Samuel 7:1-2).

With that conviction, David moved Yahweh's ark from Baalah in Judah to Jerusalem (now hailed as the "city of David") and placed it in a tent he'd pitched for it (2 Samuel 6). But if Jerusalem was indeed to be Yahweh's dwelling place, it seemed wrong that His ark should remain in a tent; it ought to be housed in a permanent sanctuary. Thus David determined to build a house for Israel's God and it was in this context that Yahweh made His covenant with David.

The Davidic Covenant is recorded in 2 Samuel 7 (cf. 1 Chronicles 17) and it contained the following particulars:

- Whereas David desired to build Yahweh a house, He insisted that He was going to build a house for David. The meaning of this play on words became clear as the storyline continued to play out: David meant to build a *physical* sanctuary, but Yahweh was promising him that He was going to build him a *dynastic* "house" centered in one particular descendent.
 - God was going to build David an everlasting house in connection with this promised seed, but He had also determined that this descendent would be the one to build a permanent sanctuary for Him (ref. 2 Samuel 7:12-16). Solomon was the immediate referent of that promise (1 Chronicles 28:1-8), but David also understood that its ultimate fulfillment lay in the distant future (2 Samuel 7:18-19; cf. also Acts 2:29-31).
 - And having promised David an enduring dynastic house, God also pledged that this royal dynasty would have an everlasting dominion: He was going to establish David's throne and kingdom forever. Most importantly, this throne and kingdom – as the dynasty presiding over it – were to be bound up in the singular seed pledged in the covenant. *It was by "establishing the throne of his kingdom forever" that Yahweh would establish forever David's throne and kingdom* (cf. 2 Samuel 7:13, 16).
- e. The Davidic Covenant promised the unending perpetuity of David's house, throne and kingdom, and yet now, at the time of Zechariah's prophecy, *all three lay in ruins*. David's throne was cast down and Gentiles ruled his desolated kingdom. But most significant was the fact that David's dynasty had been severed during the reign of Jehoiachin. Yahweh vowed the perpetuity of David's royal house, but then, four hundred years later, He cut off that house and swore that no son of David in the regal line would ever again sit on Israel's throne (ref. again Jeremiah 22:24-30). Exiles were returning to Judah and the temple was being rebuilt, but no royal son of David was on the throne; indeed, the Lord's curse meant that no such son *could* be. The Abrahamic people would continue in exile until David's kingdom was restored, but how could this happen when David's royal line was cut off? And if David's kingdom could not be restored, Israel had no hope for its exile to end. And yet the prophets insisted that Yahweh had not forsaken His oath to David; his house, throne and kingdom would yet be restored and, in that day, the exile of Abraham's household would finally and forever come to an end.

D. Structure

All of the prophets (as all of the Old Testament scriptures) have a christocentric orientation, but the christocentricity of Zechariah's prophecy is especially pronounced because it is expressed in the book's structure and not merely its content. And this structure isn't christocentric in merely a general way, but it actually highlights and correlates key aspects of the Old Testament's revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Not surprisingly, different scholars have arranged Zechariah's prophecy differently, but the structural scheme presented here is that proposed by Meredith Kline. What distinguishes his scheme is its sensitivity to salvation-historical as well as textual and exegetical considerations and concerns.

1. The book forms a kind of literary diptych comprised of two main sections or panels. The first section consists primarily of a set of *night visions* (1:7-6:8) and the second a set of *burdens* (9:1-14:21). These two sections correspond in various ways, including the fact that each is introduced by prophetic *oracles* (1:1-6 and 7:1-8:23).
2. Conjoining these main sections is a central "hinge" prophecy (6:9-15). It is a *physical* prophecy (that is, prophetic disclosure expressed by physical action) and, as such, it has both *narrative* (event and action) and *commentary* (interpretation) components.
3. Following this overall pattern, each of the two main sections is itself partitioned into two panels conjoined by their own physical hinge prophecy (3:1-10, 11:1-17).
4. These three hinge passages each bind together the two panels that make up their respective sections (in the case of the central hinge, its two panels comprise the whole book), but they do more than provide a transitional link between two adjoining contexts.
 - a. First of all, each hinge passage is itself the focal point of its respective section. But each of these hinges also highlights a particular theme (or set of themes) embedded in the section of which it's part. The implication, then, is that these hinge contexts – and the theme(s) they emphasize – provide critical interpretive data to the reader. They help to form, as it were, the lens through which each section ought to be read and interpreted.
 - b. But the three hinge passages are also intimately related to one another. (That relationship, in turn, indicates the way the three sections are related). Specifically, the central hinge highlights the priestly and regal strands of messianic revelation, how those strands coalesce in *Branch* (the Son of David) and the purpose this coalescence serves in God's design. The priestly and regal strands come together in the central hinge passage, but these two strands are highlighted separately in the two secondary hinges – the priestly strand in chapter 3 and the regal one in chapter 11. Moreover, this contextual emphasis takes the same form in all three hinge passages, namely through an act of *investiture* related to priestly and kingly office (cf. 3:3-5, 6:9-11, 11:4-7, 9-10). Thus the two secondary (outer) hinge passages point inward toward and find their convergence in the central hinge and its unification of the priestly and royal messianic themes.