

# AN INTRODUCTION TO ZECHARIAH

## Introduction

Zechariah is one of the twelve minor prophets included in the Nevi'im of the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament. Zechariah means 'remembered by God.' He was probably descended from priests. He wrote to God's people from the former kingdom of Judah who were returning as exiles.

## 1. Timeline

In the Book of Zechariah, we are given specific dates in which the word of the LORD came to him. The first time, 'in the eighth month of the second year of Darius' king of Persia (1:1), equates to the Biblical month of Chesvan in 3240 in the Hebrew calendar, around October–November in 520BC in the Gregorian calendar. The two other references are 'in the fourth day of the eleventh month the month of Shebat, of the second year of Darius' (1:7), and 'in the fourth year of Darius' (7:1). Zechariah wrote Chapters 1–8 for around two years from about 520BC. He then wrote Chapters 9–14 when the word of the LORD came again later in life.

## 2. The situation behind the writing of Zechariah

Zechariah was a co-worker with Haggai after the fall of Jerusalem in 587BC (Haggai 1:1). Both prophets wrote to exiles returning to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity under ongoing Persian rule. God's people were greatly diminished from their former days. They sought to rebuild their city and re-establish the temple. God's prophets wanted to encourage and motivate their hope in God's presence, according to His covenant promises, and give hope for final deliverance in the person of Messiah.

## 3. Purpose of the Book

Zechariah wanted God's people to trust God in difficult days even as He worked His purposes out. It would be messy, uncertain, even unlikely at times. God was and is in control. His purposes for His people would be achieved 'not by might, nor by power, but by [His] Spirit' (4:6). In the end, God would be recognised by Israel and the nations as the true King. This would happen through the arrival of God's Messiah in meekness and majesty. Whilst Zechariah's prophecies confirm the initial rejection of God's Messiah, they also confirm His ultimate exaltation, rule, and glory. Zechariah is quoted in the New Testament, especially concerning the incarnation, arrival, betrayal, and return of Jesus as the Messianic King.

## 4. Structure

The Book of Zechariah is in two parts, namely Chapters 1-8 and 9-14. The difference is sufficient for some scholars to claim different authors, but careful analysis of the texts and themes reveals many more similarities.

The first part concerns the rebuilding of the temple. It includes a call to repentance (1:1-6), eight visions confirming God's covenant promises to His people (1:7-6:15), and a specific response (7:4-8:23) to the people of Bethel about ongoing fasting (7:1-3). Different scholars find differing patterns in the first part, but they mostly agree there is chiastic pattern (chiastic comes from the Greek word chi for 'X' so it looks like half an 'X').

Visions 1 and 8 (1:7-17, 6:1-8) contain horses who patrol and report to God on earthly affairs. Visions 2 and 3 (1:18-21, 2:1-13) describe external opposition to the restoration of the city and the temple, whilst Visions 6 and 7 (5:1-4, 5:5-11) describe internal opposition. Visions 4 and 5 (3:1-10, 4:1-14) form the two adjacent, central pillars of the visions describing Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the builder. Out of sequence, the capstone piece is a 'vision' (6:9-15) in which God's rule is delegated.

The second part of Zechariah (9-14) contains two oracles (or spoken explanations) about the relationship between God's people and the nations. Both oracles are judgments, the first through which oppressive Gentile power over God's people is finally overcome (9-11), and the second through which God's people are established as His eternal kingdom through His Messiah, whom we know to be Jesus (12-14).

## 5. Themes

Zechariah is a prophetic book with complex, symbolic visions and oracles which allude to now and not yet, and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. However, there are clear references to judgments on God's people for their sins, judgments on the neighbouring nations for their sins against God's people, and God's rule over all the nations in the end.

## 6. References

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