

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Message:

The future redemption and restoration of God's people through the Messiah should motivate His people to serve Him in the present and trust Him for the future. That is, the completion of God's eschatological purpose for Israel is a strong motivation for the Israelites to serve Him by completing the temple.

Author:

According to the superscription (1:1), the author of the book is Zechariah. His name means "Yahweh remembers" (זְכַרְיָה). As might be expected, this name was fairly common with around thirty different people in the Old Testament bearing that designation. Both 1:1 and 1:7 further identifies the prophet as the "son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo." But this designation is ambiguous and there is some question regarding whether Zechariah's father was Berechiah or Iddo. Most likely, Berechiah was the father and Iddo was the grandfather, although in other passages Zechariah is called merely "the son of Iddo" (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh 12:16). Iddo was a Jewish exile who had returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Neh 12:4) in 536 B.C. But these "Iddo" passages might be explained by either the greater prominence of Iddo or an indication that Berechiah had already died.¹ In any case, Nehemiah 12:4, 10, 16, suggests that Zechariah was a priest and his apparent familiarity with priestly things would seem to confirm this (cf. 3:1–10; 6:9–15; 9:8, 15; 14:16, 20, 21).² According to Zechariah 2:4 (Heb. 2:8), the prophet began to prophesy when he was a "young man" (נָעַר, *na'ar*, cf. Jer 1:6–7). "According to some ancient versions Zechariah was a poet as well as a prophet. His name is in the titles of Pss 137, 145–50 in the LXX; in the titles of Pss 111, 145 in the Vulgate; and in the titles to Pss 125, 145–48 in the Syriac."³

Recipients:

The original recipients of Zechariah's messages were clearly the remnant who had returned from Babylon and now constitute post-exilic Israel. More specifically, Zechariah preached his messages to the residents of Jerusalem for at least the first part of the book. Like the recipients of Haggai the original audience of Zechariah appears to be distracted spiritually and discouraged emotionally.

¹ Admittedly, both of these explanations are highly speculative.

² Not everyone is convinced that the Zechariah in Nehemiah 12 is the same as the prophet in the Book of Zechariah. But there appears to be little reason not to associate the two.

³ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah - Malachi*, ed. John D. W. Watts, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1984), 168.

Dating:

The first eight chapters of Zechariah contain straightforward chronological references. The superscription in 1:1 dates the first prophecy to “the eighth month of the second year of Darius,” or calculated to October/November, 520 B.C. The other dated messages are 1:7 “the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius” or Feb 15, 519 B.C., and 7:1 “the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev” or Dec 7, 518 B.C. Chapter 9–14 are undated but appear to have been written after the building of the temple in 515 B.C. The dating of these chapters are related to the issue of the unity of the book (see the discussion below). Since we will hold to the books unity, the dating of Zechariah would possibly fall between 520 to perhaps around 480 B.C.

Historical Setting:

The issue of the historical setting related in part to whether one sees the book as a unity or a combination of two or more different prophets (see the discussion on unity below). However, since we understand the book to be a unity the historical setting relates to a period covering the sixth and fifth centuries. In general this period was characterized by a mixture of hope and discouragement. Hope sprang from the fact that Persian policy enabled the Jewish exiles to return to Israel. However, the fact that Israel was still a vassal state of the Persian Empire, that only a fraction of the Jewish exiles had elected to return, the general destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, hostility from foreign neighbors, and a general lack of covenant renewal was discouraging. The Jewish exiles had been back in the land for about 18 years before Zechariah’s first message in 520 B.C. Efforts to rebuild the temple had begun sixteen years earlier, but opposition to the effort resulted in a stoppage in the work and the people became involved solely in rebuilding their own lives. In August 29, 520 B.C. the prophet Haggai exhorts the people to take up the rebuilding of the temple again. Haggai’s message was soon followed by Zechariah’s ministry. The people respond to the messages of these prophets and the temple was rebuilt in 516/515 B.C.

Purpose:

The purposes of Zechariah appear to be at least threefold. First, the messages of Zechariah were given to encourage the returned exiles to complete the temple rebuilding work. Second, the encouragement to rebuild the temple was part of a larger desire to see spiritual and covenantal renewal. The messages of Zechariah were pointed to that end. Third, Zechariah’s messages were to remind the people of God’s sovereignty in the past and God’s blessings for the future. This future hope is centered on a coming Messiah and His Kingdom.

Contribution:

The Book of Zechariah, one of the longest of the Minor Prophets, provides the most extensive apocalyptic vision in the Minor Prophets. It has been called the Old Testament book of

Revelation.⁴ Similarly, Zechariah also provides the fullest Messianic portrait in the Minor Prophets.

Zechariah and the Other Prophets:

Zechariah's ministry shared some of the same concerns as that of Haggai and their respective ministries overlapped somewhat chronologically as can be seen in the table below.

A COMPARISON OF HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH'S MINISTRIES		
Dates (B.C.)	Haggai	Zechariah
August 29, 520	Haggai's first sermon (Hag 1:1–11; Ezra 5:1)	
September 21, 520	Temple building resumed (Hag 1:12–15; Ezra 5:2)	
October 17, 520	Haggai's second sermon (Hag 2:1–9)	Zechariah begins his ministry (Zech 1:1–6)
October–November 520		
December 18, 520	Haggai's third and fourth sermons (Hag. 2:10–23)	
February 15, 519		Zechariah's eight visions (Zech 1:7–6:8)
December 7, 518		Zechariah's message on fasting (Zech 7:1–13)
March 12, 515	Temple dedicated (Ezra 6:15–18)	

But while the ministries of Zechariah and Haggai do overlap in subject and chronology, there are some differences in the emphases of each prophet. This can be seen in the following table.⁵

Haggai	Zechariah
–focuses on the outward task of rebuilding the temple	–focuses on inward task of rebuilding the remnant spiritually
–centers primarily around the immediate, local situation	–universal in scope –eschatological in and apocalyptic in outlook

Zechariah in the New Testament:

Zechariah's influence on the New Testament has long been acknowledged. There are around seventy quotes or allusions to Zechariah in the New Testament. The bulk of these occur

⁴ Stanley A. Ellisen, *Knowing God's Word: Interpretive Charts and Outlines* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 267.

⁵ Stephen J. Bramer, "Zechariah" (unpublished class notes in BE104 Old Testament Prophets, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 2005), 3.

either in the Gospels or in Revelation. The latter is not surprising given the apocalyptic content of Zechariah. The former is also not surprising since we have noted earlier that Zechariah provides the fullest Messianic portrait in the Minor Prophets. As Dillard and Longman note,

Christian readers of this prophet cannot but notice the coming age of full redemption is inaugurated by a messianic king who makes a humble appearance, bringing righteousness and salvation to Jerusalem while riding on a donkey (9:9; Matt. 21:5). He is the shepherd king, but a smitten shepherd (13:7; Matt. 26:31), pierced and betrayed (11:12–13; 12:10; Matt 26:15; 27:9–10; John 19:34, 37). But it is the King who will subdue the nations (12:8–9) and establish his kingdom among men (14:3–9).⁶

The Unity of the Book of Zechariah:

The general consensus of critical scholarship holds that the Book of Zechariah is not one book but two. The contention is that chapters 9–14 were not authored by Zechariah, but a work appended to Zechariah by a later redactor. The justification for this bifurcation is generally argued along several lines. Zechariah's name is mentioned three times in chapters 1–8 (1:1; 1:7; 7:1) but not at all in chapters 9–14. Similarly, the material in chapters 1–8 is dated and contains specific historical material (e.g., the completion of the temple) but the material in chapters 9–14 is undated and contains no explicit historical references. Other arguments include differences in style, and vocabulary and Matthew's attribution of what appears to be Zechariah 11:12–13 to the prophet Jeremiah (Matt 27:9–10).⁷

The argument above is substantial, but we maintain that it is better to understand Zechariah as a unity. If one views the book as a collection of the prophet's messages, then one would expect to see at least some seams in the book and differences related to content. Furthermore, differences in content, literary style, and vocabulary might be due to the prophet's age,⁸ growth,⁹ and changing circumstances. It is also possible that too much has been made of the differences and that not enough has been made of the similarities. Several scholars have noted fairly extensive similarities between what some have suggested are disparate sections.¹⁰ The idea

⁶ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 436.

⁷ Some commentators have suggested that Jeremiah was the author of chapters 9–14. However, this would seem unlikely. It is hard to fathom why a scribe/editor would want to append material that they knew belonged to Jeremiah to a lesser known prophet. If the editor and scribe did not know that the material was Jeremiah's then how would a first century tax collector discover this fact after chapters 9–14 had been combined with 1–8?

⁸ Those who hold to Zechariah's unity frequently suggest that chapters 9–14 were written later in the prophet's ministry.

⁹ The idea that a prophet could grow and develop in his understanding and ministry is rarely acknowledged in critical study. But it stands to reason that a prophet, like everyone else, should be allowed to develop over time.

¹⁰ See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 482-83, R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), 954, Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 280-81.

of dividing the book also goes against the manuscript evidence. As Kaiser notes, to date there is “no Hebrew manuscript showing such a break between chapters 8 and 9.”¹¹ Kaiser also notes that “In fact, the Greek manuscript found in the Dead Sea Scrolls containing the end of Zechariah 9 shows no gap or space between the chapters.”¹²

Literary Issues:

Many have noted the literary diversity of the Book of Zechariah. Some have attributed this diversity to the idea that Zechariah is actually two separate works (see previous section). Nonetheless, the book contains both prose and poetry. The bulk of the book consists of visions which predominate in 1:7–6:8 and oracles which predominate in 7:1–14:21. Throughout the book many commentators have noted the presence of apocalyptic material. The problem is that a consensus on the definition and characteristics of apocalyptic literature is lacking.¹³ Nonetheless, many feel that the presence of visions, interpreting angels, reinterpretation of earlier prophecies, and eschatological judgment and salvation in Zechariah point towards this genre.

Zechariah is also a book rich in literary features. Literary devices in the book include chiasms,¹⁴ paronomasia (9:3, 5), epimone (1:3–6), metonymy (3:1; 4:10), synecdoche (5:3), polyptoton (1:2, 14, 15; 8:21), anabasis (8:12), tapeinosis (8:17), anthropopatheia (1:14, 15), pleonasm (2:5, 10, 11), idioms (4:13).

Structure:

Most discussions of the structure of Zechariah begin with a discussion of the unity of the book as it relates to chapters 1–8 and 9–14. While we have already stated our preference for the unity of the book, we would also suggest that the Book of Zechariah may be naturally divided into these two major sections (i.e. chapters 1–8 and 9–14). The first major section can then be divided into four subsections (1:1). The second major subsection can be divided into two oracles (9–11 and 12–14). Although we have chosen not to follow it here, scholars such as Lemarche¹⁵ and Baldwin¹⁶ have made a significant case for a complex chiasmic structure.

¹¹ Walter Kaiser, *Mastering the Old Testament: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, The Communicator's Commentary Series Old Testament, vol. 21 (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 287.

¹² *Ibid.*, 287-88.

¹³ Probably the most oft quoted definition comes from John J. Collins who states: “Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (John J. Collins, “Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9

¹⁴ Indeed Baldwin, following Lemarche, sees the entire book as a complex chiasm. See Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. D. J. Wiseman, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), 74-81. For some micro-chiasmic structures see David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 318-20.

¹⁵ P. Lemarche, *Zecharie 9-14, Structure Littéraire et Messianisme* (Paris: Gabalda, 1961).

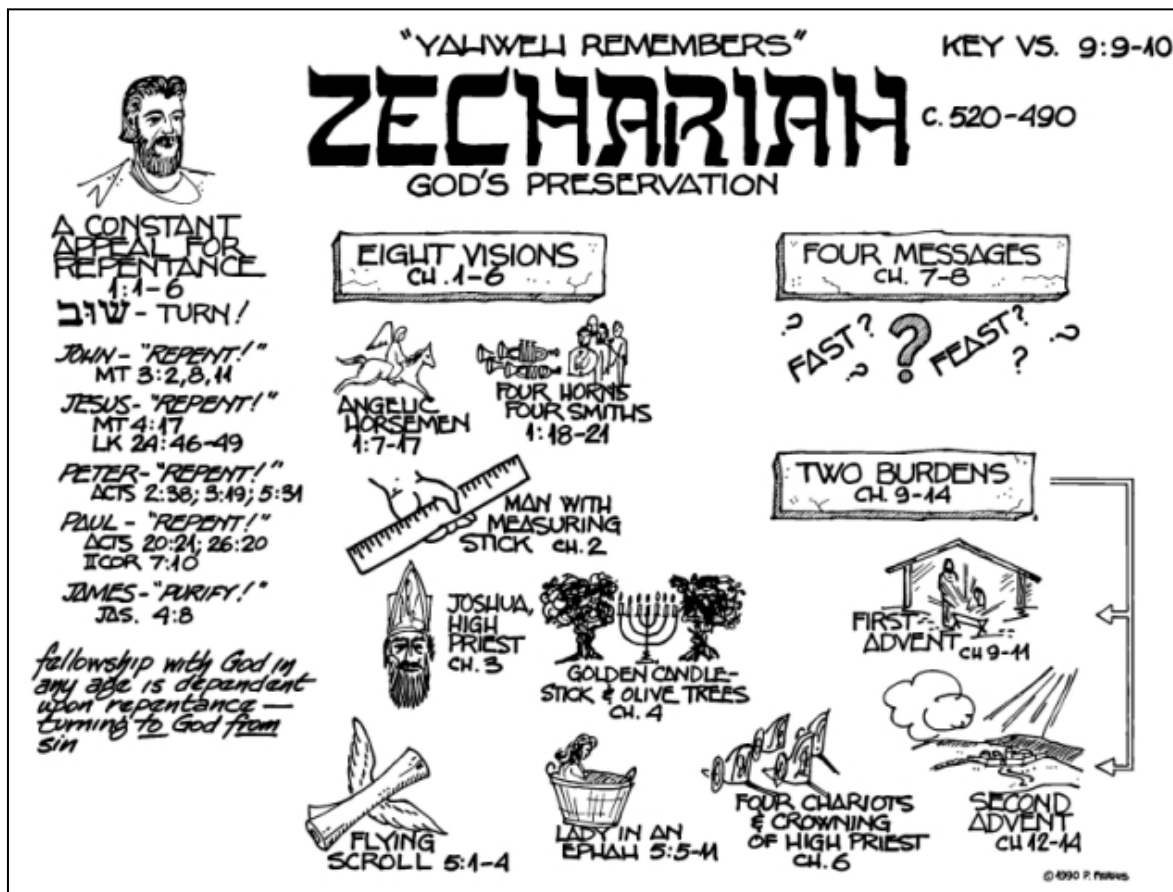
¹⁶ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 74–81.

Outline

- I. PROLOGUE AND APPEAL (1:1-6)
 - A. A Call to Repentance (1:1-3)
 - B. A Call to Remembrance (1:4-6)

- II. PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF MESSIAH (1:7-8:23)
 - A. Eight Night Visions (1:7-6:8)
 - B. Oracle of the Crowning of Joshua (6:9-15)
 - C. Oracles Concerning Hypocritical Fasting (7:1-8:23)¹⁷

- III. PROCLAMATION OF THE COMING OF MESSIAH (9:1-14:21)
 - A. First Oracle: The Messiah's First Coming and Rejection by Israel (9:1-11:17)
 - B. Second Oracle: The Messiah's Final Coming and Reception by Israel (12:1-14:21)

Visual Representation¹⁸

¹⁷ The following chiastic structure is from Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 255.

¹⁸ http://www.bethel.edu/~pferris/ot103/Zechariah/zechariah_640.jpg

Expositional Outline of Zechariah:

I. PROLOGUE AND APPEAL (1:1–6)

- A. A Call to Repentance (1:1–3)
- B. A Call to Remembrance (1:4–6)

II. PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF MESSIAH (1:7–8:23)

- A. Eight Night Visions (1:7–6:8)

Zechariah's Eight Night Visions ¹⁹		
Vision	Reference	Meaning
The Red-horse Rider among the Myrtles	1:7-17	God's anger against the nations and blessing on restored Israel
The Four Horns and the Four Craftsmen	1:18-21	God's judgment on the nations that afflict Israel
The Surveyor with a Measuring Line	Chapter 2	God's future blessing on restored Israel
The Cleansing and Crowning of Joshua the High Priest	Chapter 3	Israel's future cleansing from sin and reinstatement as a priestly nation
The Golden Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees	Chapter 4	Israel as the light to the nations under Messiah, the King-Priest
The Flying Scroll	5:1-4	The severity and totality of divine judgment on individual Israelites
The Woman in the Ephah	5:5-11	The removal of national Israel's sin of Rebellion against God
The Four Chariots	6:1-8	Divine judgment on Gentile nations

- 1. Vision One: The Four Horsemen (1:7–17)
 - a. The introduction to the visions (1:7)

¹⁹ F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1985), 1549.

- b. The imagery of the vision (1:8)
 - c. The interpretation of the vision (1:9–15)
 - d. The implication of the vision (1:16–17)
2. Vision Two: The Four Horns (1:18–21 [2:1–4])
 - a. The imagery of the vision (1:18 [2:1])
 - b. The interpretation of the vision (1:19–21 [2:2–3])
3. Vision Three: The Surveyor (2:1–13 [2:5–17])
 - a. The imagery of the vision (2:1–2 [2:5–6])
 - b. The interpretation of the vision (2:3–5 [2:7–9])
 - c. The implication of the vision (2:6–13 [2:10–17])
4. Vision Four: The Priest (3:1–10)
 - a. The imagery of the vision (3:1–5)
 - b. The interpretation of the vision (3:6–7)
 - c. The implication of the vision (3:8–10)
5. Vision Five: The Menorah (4:1–14)
 - a. The imagery of the vision (4:1–3)
 - b. The interpretation of the vision (4:4–6)
 - c. The implication of the vision (4:7–10)
 - d. The interpretation of the vision again (4:11–14)
6. Vision Six: The Flying Scroll (5:1–4)
 - a. The imagery of the vision (5:1–2)
 - b. The interpretation of the vision (5:3–4)
7. Vision Seven: The Ephah (5:5–11)

- a. The imagery of the vision (5:5–7)
- b. The interpretation of the vision (5:8–11)
- 8. Vision Eight: The Chariots (6:1–8)
 - a. The imagery of the vision (6:1–4)
 - b. The interpretation of the vision (6:5–8)
- B. Oracle of the Crowning of Joshua (6:9–15)
 - 1. The selection of Joshua (6:9–12a)
 - 2. The significance of Joshua (6:12b–15)
- C. Oracles Concerning Hypocritical Fasting (7:1–8:23)²⁰

- A) Messengers from Bethel entreat (*leḥallôṯ*) the Lord (7:1–3)
- B) The Lord denounces ineffective fasts (7:4–7)
- C) An earlier generation rejected the Lord’s demand for social justice (7:8–12)
- D) 1. The Lord sent his people into exile (7:13–14)
- 2. The Lord promises to dwell again in Jerusalem and bless the remnant of his people (8:1–6)
- D) 1. The Lord will deliver his people from exile (8:7–8)
- 2. The Lord exhorts the remnant of His people to rebuild His Dwelling place, for He will again bless them (8:9–15)
- C) The Lord exhorts the postexilic community to promote social justice (8:16–17)
- B) Meaningful fasts will be restored (8:18–19)
- A) All peoples will come to Jerusalem to entreat (*leḥallôṯ*) the Lord (8:20–23)

III. PROCLAMATION OF THE COMING OF MESSIAH (9:1–14:21)

- A. First Oracle: The Messiah’s First Coming and Rejection by Israel (9:1–11:17)

²⁰ The following chiasmic structure is from Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 255.

1. The judgment of the nations prior to Messiah's Coming (9:1–8)
2. The coming and blessings of Messiah's coming (9:9–17)
 - a. The coming of the Messiah (9:9–10)
 - b. The conquest through the Messiah (9:11–17)
3. The restoration of the Messiah's people (10:1–12)
 - a. Rejection of Israel's wicked leadership (10:1–3a)
 - b. Restoration of Israel through righteous Leadership (10:3b–7)
 - c. Redemption of Israel in a "Second Exodus" (10:8–12)
4. The rejection of the Messiah/Shepherd (11:1–17)
 - a. The rejection of the True Shepherd (11:1–14)
 - b. The replacement with a False Shepherd (11:15–17)
- B. Second Oracle: The Messiah's Final Coming and Reception by Israel (12:1–14:21)
 1. The repentance of Judah (12:1–14)
 - a. The security of God's People (12:1–9)
 - b. The sadness of God's People (12:10–14)
 2. The refinement of Judah (13:1–9)
 - a. The process (13:1–6)
 - b. The purpose (13:7–9)
 3. The restoration of Judah (14:1–21)
 - a. Restoration through the return of Messiah (14:1–8)
 - 1). The suffering (14:1–2)
 - 2). The salvation (14:3–8)
 - b. Restoration through the rule of Messiah (14:9–21)

- 1). The protection of the Ruler (14:9–11)
- 2). The plague of the Ruler (14:12–15)
- 3). The place of the Ruler (14:16–21)

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