

## Book of Zechariah

**Title:** The universal tradition of both Jews and Christians endorses the prophet Zechariah as author. His name, common to more than 29 Old Testament men, means “The Lord remembers”. This book is second only to Isaiah in the breadth of the prophet’s writings about Messiah.

**Author – Date:** The prophet identifies himself as “Zechariah (“Yahweh Remembers”), the son of Berechiah (“Yahweh Blesses”), the son of Iddo (“The Appointed Time”). He is not to be confused with the Zechariah mentioned (in Matthew 23:35), “Zechariah son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.” That Zechariah lived much earlier (825 B.C.), and his death is recorded (in 2 Chron. 24:20-22). Nor should Zechariah the prophet be confused with any of the 28 other men in the Old Testament who bore this name.

Zechariah the prophet was probably born in Babylon during the 70-year Babylonian captivity. His coming to Jerusalem is recorded (in Nehemiah 11:4; 12:16), and his ministry is mentioned (in Ezra 5:1; 6:14). These historical citations confirm that Zechariah was a priest as well as a prophet. The Talmud indicates that he was a member of the Great Synagogue, a council of 120 originated by Nehemiah and presided over by Ezra. This council later developed into the ruling elders of the nation, called the Sanhedrin.

Zechariah was a younger contemporary of Haggai and continued the ministry that Haggai began. Both Zechariah and Haggai ministered to the same people, but from different perspectives. Haggai reproved the people for their failure to rebuild the temple, while Zechariah encouraged the people by presenting to them the coming glory of the Lord.

Because of the abrupt change in style (in chapters 9 to 14 from chapters 1 to 8), some have proposed a “second Zechariah” theory. Such an extreme view is not necessary because the difference in subject matter is ample reason to account for the difference in style. In addition, the prophet may have recorded that part of his prophecy (chapters 9 to 14), at a much later time in his life. Moreover, all parts of Zechariah are quoted in the New Testament without any indication of a diversity of authorship. There is no manuscript evidence to support any division of the book.

Zechariah’s opening words are dated from 520 B.C., the second year of Darius I (1:1). The Persian emperor Cyrus had died and was succeeded by Cambyses (ca. 530-521 B.C.) who conquered Egypt. He had no son, he killed himself, and Darius rose to the throne by quelling a revolution. He was a contemporary of Haggai, and began his prophesying 2 months after him (compare Haggai Introduction). He is called a young man (in 2:4), suggesting that Zechariah was younger than Haggai;. The length of his ministry is uncertain; the last dated prophecy (7:1), came approximately two years after the first, making them identical in time making them identical in time with Haggai’s prophecy (520 – 518 B.C.).

Chapters 9 to 14 are generally thought to come from a later period of his ministry. Differences in style and references to Greece indicate a date of (ca. 480 – 470 B.C.), after Darius I (ca. 521 – 486 B.C.), and during Xerxes’ reign (ca. 486 – 464 B.C.), the king who made Esther queen of

Persia. According (to Matt. 23:35), he was murdered between the temple and the altar, a fate similar to an earlier Zechariah (compare 2 Chron. 24:20-21), who had been stoned to death.

**Historical Setting:** Various scholars have estimated that Zechariah began his ministry sometime between 520 and 508 B.C. Comparing (Zechariah 1:1; with Haggai 2:1, 10), reveals that Zechariah's first message was delivered between Haggai's second and third messages and came two months after Haggai began his ministry (Hag. 1:1). The message of Zechariah (7:1 – 14:21), came between two and three years later. Chapters 9 to 14 are undated but include material indicating that Zechariah's prophetic activity may well have extended into the mid-fifth century B.C.

The tone of the prophecy is one of encouragement. It was given to a people who were discouraged, and it cures that discouragement by focusing their attention on the glory of God. Zechariah had primary and secondary purposes in delivering his prophecy. The primary purpose was to encourage the people to continue to rebuild the temple and to see that task through to its completion. His secondary purposes, which serve as motivators behind the primary purpose, are to announce God's prophetic program as it concerned the Gentiles. To predict the blessings of the millennial age for Israel, and to outline the events leading up to it.

**Background – Setting:** The historical background and setting of Zechariah are the same as that of his contemporary, Haggai. (In 538 B.C.), Cyrus the Persian freed the captives from Israel to resettle their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4), and about 45,000 to 50,000 returned from Babylon. They immediately began to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:1-4:5), but opposition from neighbors, followed by indifference from within, caused the work to be abandoned (Ezra 4:24). Sixteen years later (Ezra 5:1-2), Zechariah and Haggai were commissioned by the Lord to stir up the people to rebuild the temple. As a result, the temple was completed 4 years later (in 516 B.C.; Ezra 6:15).

Zechariah has more messianic prophecies than any other "minor" prophet and makes frequent mention of both the first and second advents of Messiah. The Angel of the Lord is more prominent in Zechariah than in any other of the prophetic writings. Zechariah is also one of the most devotional of the prophetic books, dwelling more completely on the person and work of Christ than any other of the prophetic writings. Except for the apocalyptic sections (the eight night visions), its basic language and style are simple and direct.

**Historical – Theological Themes:** The theme of Zechariah is the glory of the Lord (Yahweh). The theme is set forth as being the motivation for completing the task of rebuilding the temple, and for showing that the people of the prophet's day are an important part of God's ultimate program of displaying His glory through the nation in the future.

Zechariah joined Haggai in rousing the people from their indifference, challenging them to resume the building of the temple. Haggai's primary purpose was to rebuild the temple. His preaching has a tone of rebuke for the people's indifference, sin, and lack of trust in God. He was used to start the revival, while Zechariah was used to keep it going strong with a more positive emphasis, calling the people to repentance and reassuring them regarding future blessings. Zechariah sought to encourage the people to build the temple in view of the promise that someday Messiah would come to inhabit it. The people were not just building for the present, but

with the future hope of Messiah in mind. He encouraged the people, still downtrodden by the Gentile powers (1:8-12), with the reality that the Lord remembers His covenant promises to them and that He would restore and bless them. Thus, the name of the book (which means “The Lord remembers”), contains in seed form the theme of the prophecy.

This “apocalypse of the Old Testament” as it is often called, relates both to Zechariah’s immediate audience as well as to the future. This is borne out in the structure of the prophecy itself, since in each of the 3 major sections (chapters 1 to 6, 7, 8, 9 to 14), the prophet begins historically and then moves forward to the time of the Second Advent, when Messiah returns to His temple to set up His earthly kingdom. The prophet reminded the people that Messiah had both an immediate and long-term commitment to His people. Thus the prophet’s words were “gracious words, comforting words” (1:13), both to the exiles of Zechariah’s day as well as to the remnant of God’s chosen people in that future day.