

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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This resource has been adapted into multiple languages, including English, Tok Pisin, Arabic (عربي), French (Français), Hindi (हिन्दी), Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), Portuguese (Português), Russian (Русский), Spanish (Español), Swahili (Kiswahili), and Simplified Chinese (简体中文).

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Zechariah

The people of God who had returned to Judea from exile were being oppressed by neighboring nations. As a result, they were discouraged, and they let their Temple lie in ruins. Zechariah encouraged them with a vision of things to come. God continued to love Jerusalem and the land of Judah, and his unwavering plan was to live there again with his people and establish his rule over all the earth. Zechariah warned Israel not to repeat the sins that had led to exile, and he called those who wavered between God's truth and human wisdom to return to God, obey the commands of God's covenant, and practice justice in the land.

Setting

Cyrus, king of Persia, issued a decree in 538 BC permitting conquered peoples who had been deported by the Babylonians to return to their homelands (see [Ezra 1:1-11](#)). The first Jewish emigrants to return to Jerusalem were led by Sheshbazzar, the first governor of the restored community ([Ezra 1:5-11](#)). During his administration, the returning Jews laid the foundation for a new Temple (538–536 BC; see [Ezra 5:16](#)), but soon abandoned the project. The construction site lay neglected for nearly two decades as the people experienced economic hardship, political oppression and harassment, and spiritual barrenness (see [Hag 1-2](#)).

In response to their distress, God raised up two prophets to initiate the physical rebuilding and spiritual renewal of Jerusalem. The prophet Haggai, who preached for only four months in late 520 BC, challenged the Hebrew community to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple. The people responded favorably to Haggai's message and began to reconstruct the Lord's Temple that year ([Hag 1:12-15](#)). The prophet Zechariah complemented Haggai's message by calling for the spiritual renewal of God's people ([1:3-6; 7:8-14](#)). Zechariah's ministry in Jerusalem lasted for at least two years. The rebuilding of the Temple was completed in March 515 BC during the reign of Persian king Darius I ([Ezra 5:2; 6:13-18](#)).

Summary

Zechariah's task was to prepare the people for proper worship in the Temple once the building project was completed. He did so by rebuking, exhorting, and encouraging them.

The people of Judah were committing blatant social and moral sins; they were passively rebellious and spiritually apathetic. Zechariah called the people to return to God through genuine repentance ([Zech 1:3-5](#)). Only spiritual renewal could foster true worship and meaningful service in the Temple, which was under construction. Only obedience to the Lord would usher in the long-awaited blessing, prosperity, and righteousness of the messianic age ([6:9-15](#); [8:13](#)).

God's plan to do good to Jerusalem was contingent upon the community's adherence to God's laws, especially those governing their treatment of one another ([7:8-12](#); [8:14-17](#)). Before the other nations would seek the Lord in Jerusalem, Israel had to seek God's favor, act justly, and show kindness and mercy to widows, orphans, and foreigners ([7:9-10](#); [14:16-21](#)).

Authorship

The book of Zechariah is silent about its authorship, but Zechariah probably wrote down his own sermons. The superscription ([1:1](#)) identifies Zechariah as the son of Berekiah and the grandson of Iddo, as Ezra confirms ([Ezra 5:1; 6:14](#)). Nehemiah informs us that Iddo returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon with Zerubbabel and Jeshua ([Neh 12:4](#)). Nehemiah also lists Zechariah as the head of the family of priests descended from Iddo ([Neh 12:1, 16](#)). This suggests that Zechariah was both a priest and prophet in Jerusalem.

Date

Zechariah's ministry began just two months after Haggai's, in 520 BC. Zechariah's last dated message was delivered in 518 BC. The first portion of the book ([chs 1–8](#)) was probably written down between 520 and 515 BC, since Zechariah makes no reference to the completion and dedication of the Jerusalem Temple in 515 BC (see [Ezra 6:13–22](#)). Zechariah's undated messages ([chs 9–14](#)) might indicate that his ministry continued well beyond the completion of the Temple and that he composed these chapters later in his life, perhaps as late as 500–470 BC.

Some biblical scholars assign [chapters 9–11](#) to a "Second Zechariah" and [chapters 12–14](#) to a "Third Zechariah." However, the vocabulary and grammar show remarkable literary continuity throughout the entire book, and archaeological discoveries and socio-political considerations support a unified composition.

Recipients

Zechariah's messages were intended for the people living in and around Jerusalem after their return from exile ([1:3](#)). Within Zechariah's sermons and visions are words specifically addressed to the governor Zerubbabel, the high priest Jeshua, and the rest of the priests (see [3:8–9](#); [4:6–7](#); [7:4–7](#)).

Literary Genre

Zechariah is prophetic literature containing messages that call God's people to repentance, to renewed corporate worship, and to the practice of social justice.

In addition, Zechariah contains elements of apocalyptic literature. This genre of writing interprets current events and predicts future events by means of symbolic language, ciphers, and codes. Such writing is often cast in the form of visions that are explained by an angelic mediator (see [1:9](#)). The settings, characters, and events of apocalyptic literature tend to go beyond ordinary reality. Apocalyptic literature announces an end to the status quo and opens up alternative possibilities as a result of God's impending intervention in human affairs.

Later Jewish apocalyptic literature placed heavy emphasis on the future restoration of Israel in the day of the Lord. Zechariah's prophecy was more concerned with social justice in the present. Three types of messages are usually associated with apocalyptic literature in the Bible: (1) encouragement for the oppressed, (2) warnings to the oppressor, and (3) calls to faith for those wavering between God's truth and human wisdom.

Meaning and Message

The book of Zechariah calls for repentance, spiritual renewal, and a return to right relationship with God ([1:1–6](#)). Zechariah's duty was to comfort and strengthen a small, discouraged remnant of God's people ([1:13](#); [8:6–15](#)). Zechariah also reinforced Haggai's summons to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple ([8:9, 13](#)).

Zechariah's messages came to him as visions of the future that promised peace to Israel, judgment of the nations, restoration of Jerusalem, responsible government by God's appointed leadership, and righteousness among God's people ([1:7–6:15](#)). Zechariah emphasized that social justice was Israel's right response to God ([7:8–12](#); [8:14–17](#)).

Zechariah's last two messages instill hope in God by focusing on the future restoration of Israel ([chs 9–14](#)). The prophet forecasts the Lord's return to his Temple ([9:8–10](#)), Israel's rescue from her enemies ([12:1–14](#)), and the establishment of God's Kingdom in Jerusalem ([14:9–11](#)). Zechariah also points to the Messiah, who would be a suffering shepherd ([13:7](#)) and a righteous king ([9:9](#)), bringing salvation to Israel and peace to the nations ([9:10, 16](#)).