

ZECHARIAH

Personal Background

The name *Zechariah* (Hebrew: *Zekar-yah*) means "Yahweh has remembered." This was a very common Hebrew name. There are almost 30 different men with this name mentioned in the Bible, "presumably because the Lord had remembered the prayers of the parents for a baby boy." (Gleason L. Archer, Jr.)

Zech. 1:1 indicates he was the son of *Berechiah* and the grandson of *Iddo*. Iddo was one of the priests who returned to Jerusalem in the group led by Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:4, 16; Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Zechariah was also one of the ones who returned under Zerubbabel, and he was already a priest at the time of the return (Neh. 12:16). It is also very likely he was just a *young man* (Hebrew: *na'ar*) at this time (Zech. 2:4). He was likely born in Babylon, and perhaps had just become a priest at the time the exiles returned to Jerusalem.

Jewish tradition states that Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were the founders of the *Great Synagogue*. The Greek Old Testament (The Septuagint) also credits Zechariah and Haggai as being the co-authors of several of the Psalms (see the study in this series on *Haggai*).

In Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:51 Jesus speaks of "Zechariah, the son of Berechiah" who was "murdered between the temple and the altar." (*NOTE* --- Another priest by the name of Zechariah ... the son of Jehoiada ... was also killed in the court of the temple (II Chron. 24:20-22). Some contend Jesus, or some scribe making a copy of the biblical text, confused these two men. Others maintain they were two separate men who happened to suffer similar fates.)

"A tomb is shown to this day at the foot of the Mount of Olives, which, it is pretended, belongs to the prophet Zechariah. Others maintain that he is buried in a place called Bethariah, 150 furlongs from Jerusalem" (Adam Clarke). Zechariah "has been called the prophet with 'the soul of an artist and the eye of a seer.'" (H.I. Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*)

Date

According to Zech. 1:1 this prophet began to prophesy two months after his contemporary Haggai began his work (see Haggai 1:1). This would place the beginning of Zechariah's work as a prophet around the month of November, 520 BC. From Zech 7:1 we know that Zechariah prophesied for at least two more years. Chapters 9-14 are not dated, however, and due to various stylistic differences, and due to internal evidence, "it is likely that this message was given after the dedication of the Temple. Presumably this represents Zechariah's message during a later period in his prophetic career." (Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks*)

Note--- There are those who do not believe Zechariah authored chapters 9-14. The two major theories about this are:

The Pre-Exilic Theory --- contends this section was written prior to the exile, perhaps by Jeremiah.

The Post-Alexandrian Theory --- which contends it was written after the time of Alexander the Great (356 - 323 BC) by an unknown author. This is viewed as necessary by some because of the reference to Greece in Zech. 9:13. *Keil*, however, states that such conclusions against the "unity of authorship of the entire book are founded upon false interpretations and misunderstandings!"

Historical Background

For a discussion of the historical background see the study in this series on Haggai. Haggai "furnished the initial impetus for laying the foundation of the second Temple, whereas Zechariah helped materially toward the completion of the project by giving a larger spiritual dimension to the restored theocracy through his prophetic oracles. With his contemporary Haggai, he was called to give that kind of spiritual leadership which would regenerate the theocracy, recall it to its true vocation, and guide it toward its destiny as the living witness of God in the world." (*Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*)

Zechariah "began to prophecy at the time when zeal for the ideals of the theocracy had reached a very low ebb." "As was the case with Haggai, the primary concern of Zechariah was the establishing of spiritual priorities in the life of the returned community." Zechariah saw the "dangers involved in cultic formalism;" he realized that "submission, penitence, and cleansing from sin must precede the outpouring of Divine blessing;" and that "the prosperity of the theocracy depended upon a proper relationship between the covenant people and their God." (*Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*)

Characterization of the Book

"Zechariah is the longest and most obscure of all the twelve minor prophets" (Adam Clarke). "It is the most difficult of any of the OT books to interpret" (Homer Hailey). Zechariah "is the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological, of all the writings of the OT" (Robinson). "Zechariah predicted more about the Messiah than any other prophet except Isaiah" (*Ryrie Study Bible*). "No prophet of the entire OT is more concerned with the Messianic hope or gives more specific predictions about the coming of the Messiah." (*The Open Bible*)

"Zechariah has exercised a greater influence upon the Messianic picture of the NT than any other minor prophet" (Jack P. Lewis). There are prophecies concerning *His first coming* --- 3:8; 9:9, 16; 11:11-13; 12:10; 13:1, 6-7, and there are prophecies concerning *His second coming* --- chapter 14. "Christ is portrayed in His two advents as both Servant and King, Man and God." (*The Expanded Open Bible*) The following are a few of Zechariah's explicit anticipations of Christ:

The Angel of the Lord --- 3:1

The stone with seven eyes --- 3:9

The Righteous Branch --- 3:8; 6:12-13

The King/Priest --- 6:13

The humble King --- 9:9-10

The cornerstone, tent peg, & bow of battle --- 10:4

The Good Shepherd who is rejected & sold for 30 shekels of silver, the price of a slave --- 11:4-13
The pierced one --- 12:10

The cleansing fountain --- 13:1

The smitten Shepherd who is abandoned --- 13:7 The coming Judge & righteous King --- chapter 14

Jack Lewis points out that "Zechariah exercised other influences on the NT. His demand that everyone speak truth to his neighbor is echoed by Paul (Zech. 8:16; Eph. 4:25). The reader of the book of Revelation may also find here the antecedent of certain pictures employed by that writer." For example:

The four horsemen --- Zech. 6:1-8;

Rev. 6:1-8 The two olive trees ---

Zech. 4:3f; Rev. 11:4

The lampstand & seven eyes --- Zech. 4:2-10; Rev. 1:12f

In Zechariah, *Satan* appears as the accuser to bring men's failings to the attention of God --- Zech. 3:1f; cf. I Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6f; 2:1f.

Homer Hailey notes "Zechariah differs in three points from the prophets who preceded him:

1. He gives *emphasis to visions* as a means of divine communication. It is true that visions appear in the Book of Amos, but not in proportion to those in Zechariah.
2. *Angelic mediation* occupies an important place in his message. Angels are especially conspicuous in the first six chapters of the book.
3. *Apocalyptic symbolism* entering into the visions is another outstanding characteristic of this prophet's writings."

"The prophet sees and emphasizes the truth that ultimate triumph is dependent on Divine cooperation and on the submission of the people to God's Divine Will" (Homer Hailey). "It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of such passages from this Minor Prophet in the preaching and the faith of early Christians!" (*The Open Bible*)