

Introduction to Zechariah

Where is it in the Bible?

Zechariah is the thirty-eighth book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Haggai and Malachi. It is the eleventh book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section and are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles.

Who wrote it?

The first verse identifies the prophet as “Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo”. Iddo is mentioned in Nehemiah 12 as the head of one of the priestly families that returned from Babylon. Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai and is mentioned with him in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14.

When was it written?

Like the book of Isaiah, the book of Zechariah divides into sections which scholars believe were written at different times by different authors. The first section consists of chapters 1-8 and is attributed to the prophet Zechariah. He began prophesying in 520 B.C., shortly after Haggai, and continued until 518 B.C. It is not clear exactly when the oracles were written down. Chapters 7 and 8, as well as the first six verses of chapter 1, may have been added by a later editor.

The last six chapters of the book are sometimes called “Deutero-Zechariah” or “Second Zechariah” and “are among the most obscure and difficult passages in the Hebrew Bible. Although they have been classified as part of the book of Zechariah since the Middle Ages, the attribution is coincidental.”¹ They seem to come from a later period, although suggested dates range from pre-exilic times to the Roman period.

What is it about?

Like Haggai, the prophet Zechariah was concerned with encouraging the reconstruction of the temple because of its importance for identity, community, and proper worship. The visions in the first eight chapters of the book assure the people and their leaders that the task will be completed.

Second Zechariah (chapters 9-14) is an apocalyptic text that speaks of the destruction of nations, the restoration of Israel, and the coming of a messianic king. It shares many of the themes found in other prophetic books.

How is it structured?

- I. Introduction (1:1-6)
- II. Eight Visions (1:7-6:8)
 - a. First Vision: The Man on the Red Horse (1:7-17)
 - b. Second Vision: Four Horns and Four Smiths (1:18-21)
 - c. Third Vision: The Man with the Measuring Line (2:1-5)

¹ John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 411.

- d. Oracle against Plundering Nations (2:6-13)
 - e. Fourth Vision: Joshua and Satan (3:1-10)
 - f. Fifth Vision: The Lampstand and the Olive Trees (4:1-14)
 - g. Sixth Vision: The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)
 - h. Seventh Vision: The Woman in a Basket (5:5-11)
 - i. Eighth Vision: Four Chariots (6:1-8)
- III. Crowning of the Leader (6:9-15)
 - IV. Religious Practices (7:1-8:23)
 - V. Two Prophetic Oracles (9:1-14:21)
 - a. The Coming Ruler and Restoration (9:1-11:17)
 - b. Victory for Jerusalem (12:1-14:21)

What are some things to look for?

- **Angels:** “Angels are mentioned twenty-one times in Zechariah, exceeded in the Bible only by Judges (22), Luke (23), and Revelation (79).”² The Hebrew word used here simply means “messenger”, but when it is used in a context which indicates that the message comes from God, it is translated “angel”. “Because angels always speak God's message, Zechariah uses variations of the phrases "Thus says the LORD of hosts" (1:3, 13, 16; 2:6, 9; 7:4; 8:2; etc.) or "the angel who talked with me" (1:9, 12, 13, 19; 2:3; 3:6; 4:1, 5; 5:5; 6:5; etc.) interchangeably.”³
- **Zechariah in the New Testament:** The book of Zechariah is alluded to or quoted over seventy times in the New Testament. Many passages have been applied to Jesus, although the term “messiah” is not used in Zechariah.
 - The vision of “my servant the Branch” in 3:8 and 6:11-15 brings to mind prophecies from Isaiah 11:1 and Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15 which Christians connect with Jesus as the Messiah.
 - Both Matthew and John quote Zechariah 9:9 in the description of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:5; John 12:15).
 - Jesus uses Zechariah 13:7 when he talks about the disciples deserting him after the Last Supper (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27).
 - The thirty pieces of silver that Judas throws into the temple in Matthew 27:3-5 are an allusion to Zechariah 11:12-13.
 - John 19:37 says that Zechariah 12:10 was fulfilled when the Roman soldiers pierced Jesus' side following his death.

2 Michael Rogness at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=56>

3 *Ibid.*