



Zechariah

Like the book of Haggai, Zechariah is set around 520-516 bc, and concerned with the urgent need to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem after the exile. Zechariah contains a collection of both verbal messages and of visions which act to encourage the leaders of the people to carry on rebuilding the temple. Zechariah is often seen to have two halves: the first half of the book (chapters 1–6) contains a mixture of visions and prophecies; the second half of the book (chapters 9–14) contains two long prophecies.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 40 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-6; 6.9-15; 7.1-14



Genre

Prophecy



Anything tricky?

The book doesn't really hang together so it can be hard to keep up with what is being talked about at any one moment.



Inspiring quotes

He said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts." (*Zechariah 4.6*)

⁴ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. ⁵ And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. (*Zechariah 8.4-5*)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (*Zechariah 9.9*)

And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. (*Zechariah 12.10*)



About the Author

The prophecies are ascribed to Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo (1.1).

The second half of the book (chapters 9–14) feels very different from the first half so some suggest it was written by a different but unknown author.

What do we know about him?

Iddo was the head of one of the priestly families who returned to Jerusalem after the exile and Zechariah was his grandson. Some suggest that Zechariah was a young boy when he returned with his family.



How is it structured?

- 1.1-6 Opening message on the importance of repentance
- 1.7-17 First vision – a man on a red horse among myrtle trees
- 1.18-21 Second vision – a vision of four horns
- 2.1-5 Third vision – a man with a measuring line
- 2.6-13 A prophecy about the coming destruction of those who have harmed Judah
- 3.1-10 Fourth vision – a vision of Joshua, the angel of the Lord and Satan
- 4.1-14 Fifth vision – a golden lampstand
- 5.1-4 Sixth vision – a flying scroll
- 5.5-11 Seventh vision – a basket of sin
- 6.1-8 Eighth vision – four chariots
- 6.9-15 The coronation and commissioning of the King and a priest
- 7.1–8.23 Prophecy about how to worship
- 9.1–11.17 Prophecy of judgement on Judah's enemies and of the restoration of Judah
- 12.1–14.21 Prophecy of victory for Jerusalem



About the times

The exiles were allowed to return from Babylon by King Cyrus in 538 bc. The first exiles began to return shortly after this. Zechariah (and its companion book Haggai) come from this period and reflect a little of what it was like in that time.

This marks the start of the second temple period which stretches from the time of Haggai and Zechariah until its destruction in ad 70 by the Romans.

What were people feeling?

Reading between the lines of Haggai and Zechariah, the people were feeling an odd mix of hopeful (due to the exile ending) and misery (since their return was not as comfortable and prosperous as they had hoped).

Other books set around this time

The very end of 2 Chronicles and Haggai



What kind of Book is it?

Prophecy. Zechariah is an unusual prophetic book in that it contains more visions than any other prophetic book in the Bible (more even than Ezekiel and Jeremiah). The visions in the first half of the book are quite like the apocalyptic visions that can be found in, for example, Daniel and Revelation.

The book also changes tone halfway through so that the second half of the book has a very different feel from the first half.



Look out for...

Angels appear throughout this book (21 times in all), look out for them as you read.

Many people think the tone and style of the book changes at chapter 9. See what you think when you get to it.

The early visions (chapters 1–8) contain elements like men riding horses and horns which are familiar from both Daniel and Revelation. Look out for motifs you recognize from other books in what you read here.



What could this mean for me?

One of the big themes of Zechariah is forgiveness. Reflect on what Zechariah thinks forgiveness is and what we might learn from that for ourselves.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- How did you get on with the visions in Zechariah? Did they make sense or leave you confused? Which was your favourite of the visions?
- Zechariah contains two key prophecies that are often applied to Jesus (9.9 and 12.10). Look at them in context. What do you think they meant to Zechariah's first audience? And what do they mean when you apply them to Jesus?
- Zechariah is written at a time when people felt quite disappointed. They had pinned all their hopes on a glorious return from exile but when it came it didn't live up to their expectations: the temple was in ruins; they had no strong leader and many of them were poor. In the middle of this Zechariah offered them hope – did you notice anything in the book that might inspire us in similar situations today?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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