

Notes on Zechariah

2009 Edition

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Introduction

TITLE AND WRITER

The title of this book comes from its traditional writer, as is true of all the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The name "Zechariah" (lit. Yahweh remembers) was a common one among the Israelites identifying at least 27 different individuals in the Old Testament, perhaps 30.¹ It was an appropriate name for the writer of this book because it explains that Yahweh remembers His chosen people and His promises and will be faithful to them. This Zechariah was the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo (1:1, 7; cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh. 12:4, 16).

Zechariah, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was both a prophet and a priest. He was obviously familiar with priestly things (cf. ch. 3; 6:9-15; 9:8, 15; 14:16, 20, 21). Since he was a young man (Heb. *na'ar*) when he began prophesying (2:4), he was probably born in Babylonian captivity and returned to Palestine in 536 B.C. with Zerubbabel and Joshua. He became a leading priest in the restoration community succeeding his grandfather (or ancestor), Iddo, who also returned from captivity in 536 B.C., as the leader of his priestly family (Neh. 12:4, 16). His father, Berechiah (1:1, 7), evidently never became prominent.

The Lord Jesus referred to a Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom the Jews murdered between the temple and the altar (Matt. 23:35). This appears to be how the prophet's life ended.² This would make the prophet one of the last righteous people the Jews slew in Old Testament history.³

"According to some ancient versions Zechariah was a poet as well as a prophet. His name is in the titles of Pss 137, 145—50 in the LXX; in the

¹Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, p. 1087. Cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, p. 167.

²Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 425.

³Some students of Scripture (e.g., Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 95) believe that the Zechariah to whom Jesus referred was the son of Jehoiada whom the Jews stoned in the temple courtyard (2 Chron. 24:20-22). However, that man died hundreds of years earlier, before 800 B.C., and Jesus seems to have been summarizing all the righteous people the Jews had slain throughout Old Testament history chronologically. Zechariah ben Jehoiada was the last martyr in the last book of the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles, so Jesus may have been speaking canonically, the equivalent of "all the martyrs from Genesis to Revelation." Nevertheless that Zechariah was the son of Jehoiada, not Berechiah, and Jesus mentioned Berechiah as the father of the Zechariah He meant. "Son" sometimes means "ancestor," but there is no known Berechiah in the family line of the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles.

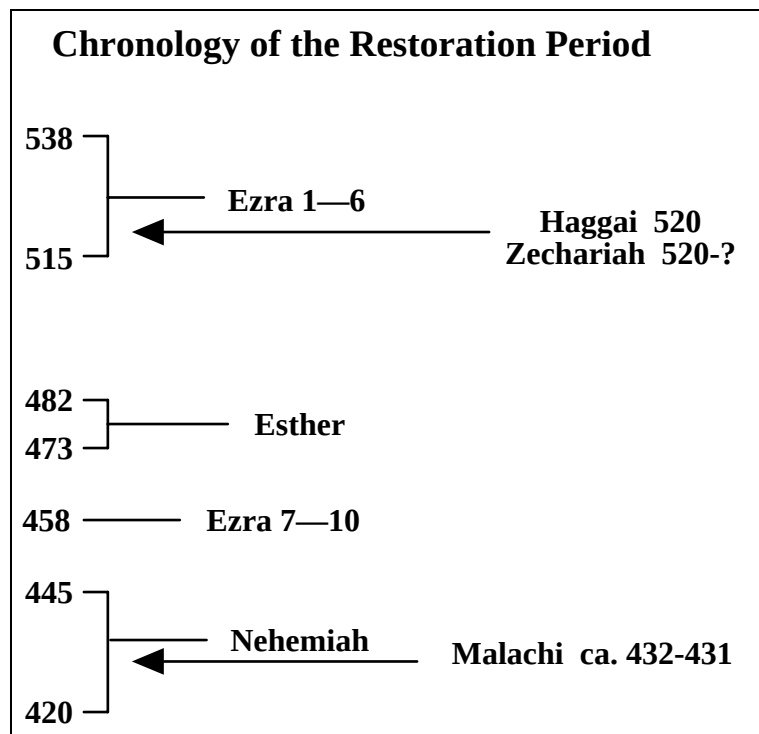
titles of Ps 111, 145 in the Vulgate; and in the titles of Pss 125, 145—48 in the Syriac."⁴

DATE

Zechariah's inspired preaching began in the eighth month of 520 B.C. (1:1). His eight night visions followed three months later in 520 B.C. (1:7), when he was a young man (2:4). He delivered the messages in chapters 7—8 in 518 B.C. (7:1). Nehemiah mentioned Zechariah as the head of a priestly family when Joiakim, who succeeded Joshua, was high priest (Neh. 12:12, 16). This may have been as late as during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.).⁵ Some scholars believe he wrote chapters 9—14 during this later period of his life.⁶ The exact length of his life and ministry is guesswork, however.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Zechariah began ministering among the Jews who had returned from captivity in Babylon (i.e., the restoration community) two months after Haggai began preaching (1:1; 7:1; cf. Neh. 12:10-16; Hag. 1:1). In a sense, Zechariah's message supplements that of Haggai.⁷



⁴Smith, p. 168.

⁵See Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 60.

⁶E.g., Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah," in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 597; Merrill, p. 63; Archer, p. 437.

⁷H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Zechariah*, p. 3.

"Both prophets . . . contrast the past with the present and future, with Haggai stressing the rebuilt Temple as a sign and source of God's blessing and Zechariah emphasizing the role of repentance and renewal in achieving that end. The two prophets worked hand in glove, complementing each other's message."⁸

"There is a marked contrast between Haggai and his contemporary Zechariah. If Haggai was the builder, responsible for the solid structure of the new Temple, Zechariah was more like the artist, adding colourful windows with their symbolism, gaiety and light. To make sure that their symbolism is rightly understood an interpreting angel acts as guide, adding in some cases a message that goes far beyond what could be deduced from the visions."⁹

Haggai and Zechariah's ministries followed those of Ezekiel and Daniel, who ministered during the Captivity in Babylon.

TABLE OF SOME POST-EXILIC EVENTS		
Cyrus issued his edict allowing the Jews to return home.	538 B.C.	Ezra 1
About 50,000 Jews returned under Zerubbabel and Joshua's leadership.	536 B.C.	Ezra 2; Neh. 7
The altar was rebuilt and sacrifices resumed.	536 B.C.	
Work on the temple began but then halted.	536 B.C.	Ezra 3:1-4
The Jews became occupied with rebuilding their own homes.	536-522 B.C.	Hag. 1—2
Cyrus died, and his son, Cambyses II, succeeded him and ruled Persia.	530 B.C.; 530-522 B.C.	
Smerdis ruled Persia.	522-521 B.C.	
Darius I, the Great (Hystaspes), rescued Persia from civil war and ruled Persia.	521-486 B.C.	
Darius confirmed Cyrus' decree and encouraged the Jews to continue rebuilding the temple.	520 B.C.	Ezra 6:1-14
Haggai preached his first three sermons.	520 B.C., 6th and 7th months	Hag. 1:1, 15; 2:1
Zechariah preached his first sermon.	520 B.C., 8th month	Zech. 1:1
Haggai preached his fourth and fifth sermons.	520 B.C., 9th month	Hag. 2:10, 20

⁸Merrill, p. 62.

⁹Baldwin, p. 59.

TABLE OF SOME POST-EXILIC EVENTS (CONT'D)		
Zechariah received his eight night visions.	520 B.C., 11th month	Zech. 1:7
Joshua, the high priest, was crowned.	520 B.C., 11th month	Zech. 6:9-15
The delegation from Bethel arrived, and Zechariah preached again.	518 B.C., 9th month	Zech. 7:1
The Jews completed the temple and dedicated it.	515 B.C., 12th month	Ezra 6:15
Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) reigned over Persia.	486-464 B.C.	Esth. 2:16
Artaxerxes I reigned over Persia.	464-424 B.C.	
About 5,000 Jews returned to Palestine under Ezra's leadership.	458 B.C.	Ezra 7:7
Artaxerxes I authorized Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.	445 B.C.	Neh. 2:1
Nehemiah led the third return to Palestine.	444 B.C.	Neh. 2:9
Malachi ministered.	ca. 432-431 B.C.	

PURPOSE AND THEMES

Zechariah ministered to the restoration community to motivate those Jews to finish rebuilding the temple and to rededicate themselves to Yahweh with the prospect of His blessing. The central theme of the book is encouragement and hope.¹⁰ The key to this hope is the coming of Messiah and his overthrow of ungodly forces and establishment of His kingdom on earth.

"The prophet is concerned to comfort his discouraged and pessimistic compatriots, who are in the process of rebuilding their Temple and restructuring their community but who view their efforts as making little difference in the present and offering no hope for the future."¹¹

This prophet dealt with the future of Israel, and particularly its distant, eschatological future, to an extent that surpassed the other Old Testament prophets (cf. 12:1-3, 9; 14:1-5, 16-21). His revelations concerning the day of the Lord are numerous.

"What former prophets revealed at length, Zechariah epitomizes for us in terse sentences or even clauses."¹²

¹⁰See Archer, pp. 423-24; Robert D. Bell, "The Theology of Zechariah," *Biblical Viewpoint* 24:2 (November 1990):55-61; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of the Minor Prophets," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 423-28.

¹¹Merrill, p. 87.

¹²Charles L. Feinberg, *God Remembers: A Study of the Book of Zechariah*, p. 3.