

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Z

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**Zechariah, Book of:** What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Zechariah?

**Approximate date:** 520-400s B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate, some Left); 400s-100s B.C.E. (some Left)

**Author(s):** Zechariah (Right, some conservative-moderate); Zechariah and/or anonymous other(s) (some conservative moderate); "Proto-Zechariah" and "Deutero-Zechariah" (Left)

**Location of prophet/author(s):** somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

**Target audience and their location:** Southern Kingdom Israelites and Jerusalemites

Zechariah, just like Haggai, was a post-exilic prophet and one of his contemporaries (Ezra 5:1; 6:14), and it should not be surprising that there are parallels between the two books that bear their names. Zechariah returned to the Land of Israel with the exiles from Babylon, and succeeded Iddo, his grandfather, as head of a priestly family (1:1, 7; cf. Nehemiah 12:10-16). Zechariah's name (Heb. *Zekaryah*, זְכַרְיָה) means "the LORD remembers," and many extrapolate this as relating to God's covenant faithfulness demonstrated in the text that bears his name. The Book of Zechariah, though, unlike Haggai, forms a much broader period of time. Zechariah is the longest of the Minor Prophets.

Conservatives generally hold to some kind of unity for the Book of Zechariah, following Jewish tradition which has historically held to a unified composition. Zechariah first prophesied shortly after Haggai (1:1-6), which was followed by several prophetic visions (1:7-6:15). It is significant that two dates are given in the text of Zechariah: the second year of Darius Hystaspis (1:1, 7), and the fourth year of his reign (7:1). This places at least part of the Book of Zechariah in 520-518 B.C.E. (Dillard and Longman, 429), even though it is most likely that Zechariah's prophetic ministry continued. It is notable that there are a few conservatives who, while not necessarily being against the unity of Zechariah, would make note of the differences between the "first section" (chs. 1-8) and the "second section" (chs. 9-14) of the text (Harrison, 954-956). They would still argue that it is most important that interpreters look at the final form of the text to draw conclusions.

Liberals make a stark divide in the Book of Zechariah, breaking the text between chs. 1-8 and chs. 9-14, classifying them as "Proto-Zechariah" and "Deutero-Zechariah." It is argued that chs. 1-8 depict the immediate future of the Jewish community, and chs. 9-14 depicts the future, indicating that these are from two different prophets (*IDB*, 4:944-947; Harrison, 951-954; *ABD*, 6:1061-1064). It is proposed that chs. 1-8 and chs. 9-14 are of different literary genres, employing different imagery, thus requiring different authors; some early propositions attributed chs. 9-14 to Jeremiah (*EXP*, 7:596). Liberals are not agreed among themselves whether chs. 9-14 actually make up a unity, or could be divided further (Harrison, 950). Liberals are forced to conclude that "Deutero-Zechariah" was anonymous (*EDB*, 1413).

One of the main propositions for chs. 9-14 coming from a different prophet or source is often argued on the basis that "Javan" or Greece (9:13) is presented as a power in the Ancient Near East, not Persia, thus "necessitating" chs. 9-14 as being composed sometime in the 100s B.C.E. Concurrent with this is the idea that chs. 9-14 explains the rise of Alexander of the Great and the military actions of the Maccabees. This late dating of chs. 9-14 assumes that Greece was not any kind of power or unknown by the 500s, which cannot be sustained in comparison with other Tanach passages (Isaiah 66:19; Ezekiel 27:13, 19; cf. Harrison, 952-953; *EXP*, 7:597).

There is no evidence in tradition that chs. 9-14 were ever considered separate from the text of chs. 1-8 (*NBCR*, 787). Conservatives do recognize the difference in style between chs. 1-8 and chs. 9-14, but do not believe that this requires two different "Zechariahs" (*NIDB*, 1083-1084). There are even those who believe in the division of Proto- and Deutero-Zechariah who must say, "It has to be admitted that none of [our] reasons offers conclusive proof that Zechariah should be

divided into...sections" (*ECB*, 721). Many conservatives believe that the differences in the Book of Zechariah proposed by liberals are artificial (Dillard and Longman, 430-431).

No major difficulties exist with the Hebrew text of Zechariah (*ISBE*, 4:1185), even though the Greek LXX may offer a better reading in some places (Harrison, 956-957).

The events of Zechariah are set in the early years of Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.), also covered in Ezra 5-6. The chief purpose of Zechariah was to rebuke the returned Jews to rebuild the Temple (4:8-10). If the people would return to the Lord, then He would return to them (1:7-6:8). The people of Judah needed to be riveted out of their procrastination, and give themselves wholly to the purpose of rebuilding their community and Temple.

A theme seen throughout Zechariah is that God is true to His covenant promises. Jerusalem is depicted as playing a crucial role in the future of God's Kingdom. Zechariah takes on Messianic significance, depicting a coming One who will defeat the enemies of Israel (9:9-17; 14:1-21). Israel's restoration would include the regathering of His scattered people (10:1-11:3), with God's ultimate victory over those who reject Him (12:1-9) as the world recognizes His universal kingship (2:13; 6:1-8; 14:16-21).

Many of the themes in Zechariah are applied directly to Yeshua the Messiah and His ministry (Mark 14:27 and Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 27:9 and Zechariah 11:12-13; John 19:37 and Zechariah 12:10; John 12:15 and Zechariah 9:9; cf. Dillard and Longman, 436). Some consider Zechariah to be among the most Messianic texts in all of the Tanach (*EXP*, 7:599). Other themes seen in Zechariah are expanded upon in the Book of Revelation (*NBCR*, 788; *ISBE*, 4:1186), and are directly applied to Yeshua as being the One who defeats Israel's enemies and comes to reign over the whole world.

In the Jewish tradition, Zechariah 14:9 is used in the *Aleinu* prayer, Zechariah 14:1-12 is the Haftarah used for the first day of *Sukkot*, and Zechariah 2:14-4:7 is read on the first Sabbath of *Chanukah* and the Haftarah for *B'ha'lotecha* (Numbers 8:1-12:16; cf. *Jewish Study Bible*, 1250).

Zechariah is an encouraging book for the downhearted, who believe that God has left them or that their actions are indifferent. There is some limited Messianic engagement with Zechariah, but most often only with its prophecies pertaining to the Last Days. The overall message of Zechariah of shaking God's people out of their laziness, is not something widely emphasized in today's Messianic community. Zechariah, just like Haggai, could definitely be a text to inspire us to make the progress that God desires us to make.

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**Zephaniah, Book of:** What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Zephaniah?  
**Approximate date:** 640-622 B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate, some Left); 400s-200s B.C.E. (some Left)

**Author(s):** Zephaniah (Right, some conservative-moderate); Zephaniah and/or anonymous other(s) (some conservative moderate, some Left); Zephaniah and anonymous redactors (some Left)

**Location of prophet/author(s):** somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

**Target audience and their location:** Southern Kingdom Israelites and Jerusalemites

The Prophet Zephaniah was likely a person of considerable social status in Judah, as indicated by his ancestry (1:1), which designates him a fourth generation descendant of King Hezekiah (Dillard and Longman, 415). The meaning of Zephaniah's name (Heb. *Tzefanyah*, צְפַנְיָהּ) is disputed, with some favoring “the LORD has hidden,” and others “watchman for the LORD” (*EXP*, 7:537). Zephaniah demonstrates some knowledge of the political climate of the Southern Kingdom, and the prophetic works of Isaiah and Amos. Compared to Micah, whose prophecies focus on the plight of the common people of Judah, Zephaniah focuses his attention in more distinguished circles. Zephaniah could have known about a young Jeremiah.

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.E.), making him contemporary to Jeremiah, Nahum, and possibly Habakkuk, either just before or sometime during the Josianic reforms (Harrison, 940). Some find evidence that the Josianic reforms were already underway (*ISBE*, 4:1189; Dillard and Longman, 416) because of the reference to “the remnant of Baal” (1:4) and various allusions to the Book of Deuteronomy (1:13; cf. Deuteronomy 28:30; 1:17; cf. Deuteronomy 28:29). The Book of Zephaniah is the last pre-exilic text.

Conservatives hold to some kind of unity for the composition of Zephaniah, noting that “all of Zephaniah is intelligible as spoken in Josiah's reign” (*ISBE*, 4:1189). It is possible, though, that some references to “the scattered ones” (2:7, 9; 3:10, 19) are post-exilic redactions, but nothing so as to dismiss a core of the text originating from Zephaniah.

Liberals have largely doubted some kind of unified authorship or composition of Zephaniah, arguing that sections of Zephaniah were written in the post-monarchic period, specifically 3:9-20. There are liberal trends, however, which indicate that some are willing to designate the salvific sections(s) as *not* being later additions (*IDBSup*, 984; *EDB*, 1416), and more liberals are leaning toward a greater part of Zephaniah being authentic to the prophet (*ABD*, 6:1078).

The Hebrew MT of Zephaniah is in good condition, even though consultation of the Greek LXX is helpful with some passages (Harrison, 943; *ABD*, 6:1078).

The Prophet Zephaniah announced God's judgment upon the people of Judah. His words are given against a probable backdrop of the Scythian invasion of Assyria, as Josiah's reforms could be enacted without significant Assyrian reprisal (Harrison, 940) as a declining power (*IDBSup*, 984). A major focus of Zephaniah is the Day of the LORD when God will severely punish both the nations (ch. 2) and Judah (Dillard and Longman, 419). In spite of God's judgment, God is also merciful and will restore His people in the end (ch. 3).

The Josianic reforms were only temporary, as the people of Judah would fall back into their previous sinful patterns. Many of the prominent families of Judah would participate in worship of the Queen of Heaven (2 Kings 23:11; *IDB*, 4:951). Zephaniah indicts the people of Judah for this idolatry (1:1-2:3), and then indicts the nations who influenced Judah (2:4-15). A key thrust of Zephaniah is God's holiness and His grace (*ISBE*, 4:1190).

Allusions to Zephaniah and his message are seen in various places in the Apostolic Scriptures (*ISBE*, 4:1191), certainly affecting some of the eschatological expectations of the Apostles (Dillard and Longman, 420), as particularly seen in Revelation (*EDB*, 1417). More modern engagement with Zephaniah largely takes the text to relate “to contemporary institutions, calling upon the authorities to make sweeping and effective reforms lest the judgment threatened by Zephaniah befall the present government” (*ISBE*, 4:1191).

There has currently been no significant Messianic engagement with the Book of Zephaniah.

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