

# Zechariah 1:1

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*The prophet Zechariah receives the word of the LORD in the eighth month of the second year of King Darius of Persia.*

The book of Zechariah begins with a title verse providing information concerning the date, authorship, and source of the revelation. It states that the prophecy occurred *in the eighth month of the second year of Darius* (vs 1). The biblical material likely dates the prophetic message according to the regnal year of the Persian king because there was no king in Judah during that time. Judah had been conquered by Babylon, which in turn had been taken over by Persia (Daniel 5:30-31).

The man *Darius* was the fourth king who ruled Persia, the nation that defeated Babylonia in 539 BC. The first Persian king was Cyrus II, who ruled Persia from 559 BC to 530 BC. He was the agent the LORD used to restore the nation of Judah from the Babylonian exile (2 Chronicles 36:22–23). The next Persian king was Cambyses II. He took the throne in 530 BC when his father, Cyrus II, died. He remained there until he allegedly committed suicide in 522 BC. The successor of Cambyses was Gautama. Shortly after Gautama took the throne, Darius Hystapes led a coup and assassinated him. King *Darius* secured the throne in 522 BC and remained there until 486 BC.

According to Zechariah, this prophecy transpired *in the eighth month of the second year of Darius*. This date falls between late October and late November of 520 BC, roughly two months after Haggai delivered his four messages to the returned exilic remnant of Judah (Haggai 1:1). Thus, Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai.

The narrator tells us that *in the eighth month in the second year of the reign of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the prophet* (vs 1). The *word of the LORD* refers to Yahweh's revelation (1 Kings 6:11; 16:1). In biblical times, God often disclosed His will to some individuals and commissioned them to relay the divine message to others. For instance, God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh to speak to the Ninevites about their wickedness (Jonah 1:1–2; 3:1–2).

He also appointed as prophets Hosea, the son of Beerī (Hosea 1:1), and Joel, the son of Pethuel (Joel 1:1). He spoke to Micah of Moresheth (Micah 1:1), Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1:1), etc. These individuals were God's messengers, so the Bible rightly calls them "prophets."

The term *prophet* ["nābī" in Hebrew] means "proclaimer" or "forth-teller." It describes someone who received a call from God to be God's spokesman. A *prophet* was God's emissary. He had a particular calling to see or hear what God was saying, live it out in his life, and proclaim it to the people roundabout. That means the prophet could not speak from his authority and was not free to say what he pleased. Rather, he was to discern what God thought about a given situation, what

His attitude was toward the people's behavior in the past, what He required of them in the present, and how He would act in their favor in the future.

The prophetic word came from the LORD, the true and living God who is all-powerful. The frequent formula "Thus says the LORD" (e.g. Jeremiah 11:3; Jeremiah 33:2; Isaiah 48:17) confirms this truth. It makes clear that the *prophet* spoke what he received from the LORD. Although the Hebrew term "nābî" can apply to true and false prophets alike (Jeremiah 6:13; 26:7–8; 27:9; 28:1; Zechariah 13:2), *Zechariah* was a true *prophet* because *the word of the LORD came to him*.

The name *Zechariah* means "Yahweh has remembered." The meaning of the author's name suggests that *Zechariah's* parents were believers who placed their trust in God, and remembered them with a son. The prophet's name also matched his message because God used him to tell the returned remnant of Judah that He had remembered His covenant with them, to restore them after being exiled (Deuteronomy 30:3).

According to the title verse, the father of *Zechariah* was *Berechiah*, a name that means "Yahweh blesses." His grandfather's name was *Iddo*, meaning "his time." The book of *Nehemiah* lists *Iddo* among the priests who returned to Jerusalem with *Zerubbabel* in the first wave in 538 BC (*Nehemiah* 12:4). Assuming they are the same person, that means that *Zechariah* was of a prominent family with a priestly heritage.

The fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian army in 586 BC was devastating for the people of God. Many Judeans faced deportation, spending about 70 years away from their home in captivity in Babylonia. But when King *Cyrus* of Persia began to rule, "the LORD stirred up" his spirit so that "he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom" (*Ezra* 1:1). In doing so, he allowed all captive peoples to return to their homeland.

The people of Judah were beneficiaries of King *Cyrus's* edict. They returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC, albeit not without difficulty. Under the governance of *Zerubbabel* and with the permission of the Persian King, the Judeans began reconstructing the temple in 536 BC (*Ezra* 3:8–13). They planned to complete the project but stopped working on it for about sixteen years because of the hostile intrigues of their adversaries.

In the second year of King *Darius* of Persia (520 BC), God used a man named *Haggai* to urge the people to prioritize rebuilding the temple as a symbol of the immediate presence of the LORD among them. The people obeyed the prophetic message and resumed work on the building project. Two months after *Haggai's* first sermon, God raised *Zechariah* as His messenger to call the people to a spiritual awakening. The prophet told the people that the LORD remembered them and would honor His covenant agreement with them.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>1</sup>In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo.**