Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: Resources

# Zechariah 9—14

Whereas Zechariah 1—8 contains references to the circumstances of the period of the restoration of the Judahite community and its temple (see Ezra 1—6), Zechariah 9—14 doesn’t make concrete reference to a context. The new headings at 9:1 and 12:1 suggest that these chapters are separate from what precedes, and they have different emphases from those. No-one knows when they were written, but we can see the sort of situation from the two distinctive features of their prophecies:

1. They look for a future decisive act of God to sort out the people’s destiny—which implies that the author(s) are pessimistic about the present and any immediately or humanly envisageable future.
2. They are disillusioned with the leadership of the community, which they often attack.

So they promise that one day God will sort out this situation and fulfill the destiny of the community and of the world.

The relationship between Zechariah 1—8 and Zechariah 9—14 looks similar to that between First Isaiah and Second Isaiah. In both cases one can see links with various parts of earlier scripture but especially to this one earlier prophet. Here are five themes chapters 9—14 take up from chapters 1—8 (Rex Mason).

1. *Yahweh is committed to Zion*
Yahweh promises to attack Zion’s enemies and defend Zion itself (9:1-10). Zion will become a source of living water (14:8). It will be elevated as a place of worship for all peoples and a place of holiness (14:10-21). Similar promises came in 1:7—2:13, where they were promises relating to the particular situation of the people in the period of the temple restoration; cf. also 8:3-5, 20-23. Similar promises also came in Isaiah 2:2-4; Ezekiel 48:1-12.
2. *Yahweh will cleanse and renew the community*

See 12:10-13:6. For the “spirit of grace” see 4:6 (spirit), 4:7 (grace).

For the stress on cleansing and repentance cf. Ezekiel 36.

1. *Yahweh is concerned to be known by all peoples*

See 9:6-7; 14:16-19 Cf. 8:20-23.

Also Isaiah 19:18-25

1. *The community needs to heed earlier prophecy*

God does not speak through prophets now (10:1-2; 13:2-6).

Cf. the overt stress on earlier prophecy in 1:2-6; 7:7-14.

1. *God will provide the community with its royal and priestly leaders*

See 9:9-10, along with the attacks on false leadership (10:1-3; 11:4-17; 13:7-9).

See the promises in e.g. 3:1-10.

# Responses to Questions

## Haggai

*If God could not be contained in a building, why does he want the exiles to rebuild a Temple?*

\*\*Because their failure to build it didn’t represent theological insight but skewed priorities.

*2:20-23 didn’t happen, did it?*

\*\*No. It looks as if Yahweh changed his mind for some reason. The Israelites held onto the prophecy all the same, perhaps precisely because it had not been fulfilled. In some way, some time, it must be….

## Zechariah

*The temple is very important to Zechariah. Is it still important after Jesus?*

\*\*Acts indicates that it was important to the early Christians, who would still want to make offerings to God (not in connection with gaining forgiveness, as Hebrews says, but as acts of worship and thanksgiving). You might have thought that the idea of a temple would disappear, but in practice Christians have continued to value he idea of there being a place where you could especially meet with God. We call church a sanctuary!

*3: Is the accuser the same as in Job? And what’s the problem he alleges about Joshua?*

\*\*Yes—it’s member of the heavenly court with prosecuting responsibility but who gets too enthusiastic about his job. He is saying that Joshua is defiled—maybe in himself or maybe as one of the people who had been in exile and were therefore marked as people who were under God’s judgment. God does not deny that the accuser is right but declares the intention to reinstate him.

*3:8: Is this the same Branch as in Isaiah? Why was Yahweh interested in Zerubbabel—isn’t he tired of such political leaders?*

\*\*It’s the same branch in the sense that it’s a branch from the felled Davidic tree, but here the branch is identified, because Zerubbabel is the Davidic ruler, even though he is not king. The fact that God had made a commitment to David and his line made it difficult for God not to be interested in Zerubbabel.

*4:14: Who are these?*

Joshua and Zerubbabel, priest and governor—the ruler over the temple and the political ruler.

*6:9-15: Why is Joshua crowned if Zerubbabel is the Davidic ruler?*

\*\*It is odd. Maybe to avoid giving the impression of a political rebellion if they had directly crowned Zerubbabel.

*8:23: Does the OT move towards greater inclusivism?*

\*\*I don’t think so. Genesis is very inclusive.

## Malachi

*Why did God choose Jacob not Esau?*

\*\*Because Jacob was the younger brother. God likes to break human rules.

*Malachi reminds us that not only will Jacob’s descendents continue to be blessed, but Esau’s generations will be cursed (Mal 1:2-5). I wonder about this idea of blessing and cursing of family lines. Does it continue today? Is this just for the descendants who have done nothing wrong other than to be born of Esau’s or Jacob’s bloodline?*

\*\*God doesn’t say cursed actually. God’s point is that in Malachi’s day, Judah doesn’t feel like a people that is loved, because they are having a hard time. (Loving and hating aren’t so much emotions as actions, as when Jesus says you have to hate your parents.) But Judah is God’s chosen people, with a special place in God’s purpose that Edom does not have. As you imply, this is not related to what Judah deserves but to God’s purpose for the world, which is to be fulfilled through Judah. Maybe it’s not related to Edom’s deserve, though elsewhere the OT presupposes that the Edomites were wrongdoers.

*1:11: Where are these sacrifices being offered?*

I take these as incense offerings being made by Jews in places like Egypt, which contrast with the not very worthy offerings in the temple.

*An agent of salvation in Malachi is referred to as Levi in chapter 2, as a messenger in chapter 3, and as Elijah in chapter 4. Are all three referring to the same person?*

\*\*I think chapter 2 is referring to the clan (tribe) of Levi, not to a coming person called Levi. The messenger and Elijah could both be the same person.

*2:10-15: Is this human marriage or the marriage between Yahweh and Israel?*

\*\*I take it to mean human marriages of the kind Ezra and Nehemiah condemn—men are undertaking marriages with people who belong to other ethnic and religious groups. So it’s a bit of both—the human divorce and remarriage is linked to breaking the relationship with Yahweh.

*Does 3:10 validate the prosperity gospel? Does tithing apply today?*

\*\*The prosperity gospel is quite biblical if you take it to mean you will have plenty of food and clothing (cf. Matt 6:33; 2 Cor 9:6-11). It doesn’t mean Cadillacs or private planes! Jesus assumes tithing applies, but there’s no basis for saying that you have to give all your tithe to your local church—you might also give it elsewhere, especially to causes from which you don’t benefit (much of your giving to church benefits you!).

*More than 400 years passed between the OT and the NT. What happened to all the prophets? Did none exist anymore? Why the long hiatus between Malachi and Matthew? Was God silent after Malachi?*

\*\*I don’t think that the absence of named prophets after Malachi proves God was silent—after all, God was not silent before Hosea. God has other ways of speaking as well as prophets. The book of Daniel came into being in about 164; I think it was the last book to come into being. Quite likely many other OT books came into being after Malachi’s day (e.g., Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Chronicles).