

Broader Timing

In Jer. 25:11–12, the seventy years is the length of time that the people of the land will serve the king of Babylon (see Jer. 29:10). This could be understood as an approximate seventy-year period from the rise of Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC until 539 BC, when the Persian king Cyrus came to power and decreed that the exiles could return home. Winkle (1987: 299) argues for an exact seventy years from Nabopolassar's overthrow of Assyria in 609 BC to Cyrus in 539 BC. Curtis (2006: 131) argues that for Zechariah, the seventy years are not years of exile, but years of temple desolation. This must be the case since almost two decades have passed since the first exiles returned and they still anticipate the end of the seventy years. Interestingly, the temple was destroyed in 586 BC, and Ezra 6:15 claims the temple was completed in 515 BC, which is very close to seventy years.¹

Timing within the span of Zechariah's Prophetic Ministry

Less than a month later (on the twenty-first day of the seventh month—Haggai 2:1) the people viewed their handiwork and saw that it was miserable in comparison with the glories of Solomon's temple. As a result of their disappointment, Haggai had preached to them and had encouraged them to press on with the work.

During the following month Zechariah declared his first message from the Lord—the call to repentance (Zechariah 1:1–6). As we have seen, this message was given to encourage the people to return to the Lord and to give greater diligence to the task of building God's house for God's glory. Only clean hands and a pure

¹ Anthony R. Petterson, [*Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*](#), ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 25, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 117.

heart can achieve anything of lasting value for the Lord (Psalm 24:4). We have every reason to believe that Zechariah did not just issue this call to repentance once. Because of the people's attitude he must have kept on ramming the same message home over and over again.

Then notice that it was again on the twenty-fourth day, (this time of the ninth month—exactly two months before Zechariah received his visions) that Haggai delivered both of his final messages (Haggai 2:10, 20). That was the turning-point for the Jews in their work of building for God's glory. God said to them, 'From this day on I will bless you' (Haggai 2:19).²

More Data on the Angel of the LORD

In this first vision we encounter **the angel of the Lord** (vv. 11–12). Throughout the Old Testament He appears, speaking and acting everywhere as Jehovah himself. In Exod. 3:2, for example, we read that “the angel of the Lord appeared” to Moses. With reference to the same person the account says a few sentences later, “When the Lord saw” (Exod. 3:4). Whether the Angel of the Lord has a distinct existence or is a mode of the Lord's self-manifestation is difficult to determine. He appears to be the Word of God personified. Acting as God's mouthpiece, He is so merged with Jehovah that He speaks of himself by the divine I. Robertson Smith declares “that he represents God to man so directly and fully that when he speaks or acts God Himself is felt to speak or act.”³ On the other hand, in the above passage (v. 12) He represents man to God. Here He is the Interceding Angel, presenting the cause of men to the Father. “What we see in these theophanies,” G. A. F. Knight writes, “is a groping effort to describe in pictorial terms an

2 Michael Bentley, [*Building for God's Glory: Haggai and Zechariah Simply Explained*](#), Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1989), 104–105.

3 Quoted by Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

experience of God who could not be fully known till He revealed Himself in Christ. But when He did do so, the NT revelation was found to be astonishingly akin to that dimly discovered in and through the OT.” The reality that is being expressed in this passage, Knight continues, “is that God is indeed a communion with Himself, an organism, the Trinity.”^{4 5}

Time for Reflection

If the correct translation of v. 16 is, ‘I have turned towards Jerusalem with mercy’ (as I have argued above), this has an important theological implication. It makes the mercy of God prior to the call to obedience (cf. Exod. 20:2, which precedes the Decalogue). While building the temple is dependent on the people’s obedience (e.g. 6:15; cf. 4:9), in the first instance God has initiated the restored relationship by his mercy. Religion says ‘do’ in order to earn God’s favour. In contrast, Zechariah emphasizes God’s mercy from which obedience is to flow.⁶

What are your conclusions in light of this?

4 ¹⁴ “A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Occasional Paper No. 1, gen. eds. T. F. Torrance and J. K. S. Reid (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, Ltd., 1953), pp. 27–28.

5 William M. Greathouse, “[The Book of Zechariah](#),” in *Hosea through Malachi*, Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill Press, 1966), Zec 1:17.

6 Anthony R. Petterson, [Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi](#), ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, vol. 25, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 120.