

Visions of Hope (Zechariah)



SABBATH—JUNE 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Zechariah 1, 2; Romans 15:9–18; Ephesians 3:1–8; Zechariah 3; Zechariah 4; Exodus 25:31–40; Zechariah 7.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘ “At that time each of you will invite your neighbors to visit you. They will sit under your vines and fig trees,” announces the LORD’ ” (Zechariah 3:10, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Israel had been punished for its sins. But it was time for its people to live again in relationship with God according to His promises.

THERE IS A SHORT LATIN SAYING ON THE WALL OF AN OLD CASTLE IN CENTRAL EUROPE. IT READS: “DUM SPIRO SPERO.” It means, “As long as I breathe, I have hope!” This saying can summarize the message of Zechariah to God’s people. Nearly twenty years after the Jewish people’s return from slavery in Babylon, they became very discouraged. They began to wonder if God was still with His people.

Zechariah’s name means “the Lord remembers.” He began his ministry (work done for God) as a prophet (special messenger) a few months after Haggai began his ministry (Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1). Through several visions, Zechariah learned God’s plans for the present and the future. God’s eternal kingdom was coming soon. But the prophet called upon those who lived in his time to serve the Lord immediately. A good part of the book is about how the people were to serve Him. This week, and the next, we will study what the Lord has shown us through Zechariah.

SUNDAY—JUNE 9**COMFORTING WORDS OF LIFE
(Zechariah 1:3)**

Read Zechariah 1. What is the important message here? Focus especially on (pay attention to) Zechariah 1:3. What is the Lord saying to the people?

The return to Israel from slavery in Babylon causes joy in the hearts of the Jewish people. But the return also causes some worry for them. Will they be safe in their land? Or will enemies come again to bother them? Has God forgiven their past unfaithfulness? Or will He continue to punish them? What does the future hold for God's chosen people and for the nations?

In his vision, Zechariah sees the angel of the Lord move to act for Judah. He begins with the question, "How long?" (Zechariah 1:12, NIV). In the Bible, this question often is used by the people when they ask the Lord for help (Psalm 74:10; Isaiah 6:11; Daniel 8:13). For Zechariah, the answer to the question comes directly through the angel. The angel then passes the answer on to the prophet. It is an answer that promises God's kindness and comfort.

God tells Zechariah to preach that He is very "jealous" for Jerusalem (Zechariah 1:14). Jealousy can be negative. But in the Bible it also can express (show) God's love. God loves His people and expects them to be faithful. God shows His love for Jerusalem by being angry with the

nations that have treated His people so unfairly. The full charge against the nations is that they have made God angry by going too far in their cruel treatment of His people.

Zechariah 1:15–17 shows that God has been angry with His people. But He promises to repay them with comfort. Zechariah is supposed to preach that God's purpose is to return to Jerusalem with mercy. The Lord will comfort Zion (read Isaiah 40:1) while His anger will be directed to His enemies. Jerusalem will be restored (made new). And it will be the home of the Lord again.

Look at Zechariah 1:3 again. How does someone "return" (NIV) to the Lord? In what ways is God asking for a restored personal relationship with His people? How do we "return" to the Lord every day?

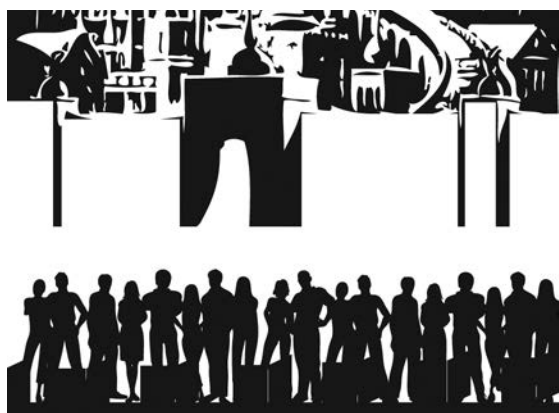


The angel carried words of God's comfort to His people.

MONDAY—JUNE 10**THE LORD IS COMING
(Zechariah 2)**

Read Zechariah 2. It describes Zechariah's vision of a renewed Jerusalem. The city is so full of people that they overspread (spread over) the city's walls. And the New Jerusalem will attract countless Gentiles (non-Jews). But this must have sounded very strange to the Jewish people. Verse 10 begins with a call to joy. Then it is followed by the reason for being joyful: the personal coming of the Lord to live among His people.

The Lord's dramatic return to live in His rebuilt house is reason for praise from the people who have returned from Babylon. Zion, the home of the great King, is called "Daughter of Zion." This name is the prophet's way of describing God's love for His people. Zion is invited to be joyful because the Lord Himself will take care of His people. Anyone who touches God's people touches the people He holds most dear (verse 8).



The New Jerusalem will overflow with people from all the earth.

The prophet said that on the day of the Lord, many non-Hebrew nations would accept the Lord's covenant (promise). God's first plan was that the people of the surrounding nations would see how Israel served the true God. And that they would see that Israel was blessed in life with success and comfort because of this service. In this way, they would be led to join themselves to the Lord. Then the faithful Jews and the believing Gentiles would together become one people. And the Lord would be among them. This event would fulfill (complete) God's promise to Abram and Sarai. The promise is that all the nations of the world will be blessed (Genesis 12:1–3) because of the faithfulness of their future children.

According to Romans 15:9–18 and Ephesians 3:1–8, how was this prophecy (special message) to be fulfilled?

Through Zechariah's prophecy, God promises not to destroy the nations. He promises to include them among God's people. The promised future is the result of God's own plan. And it was the long-time wish of many Bible prophets. Jesus Christ commanded His church to preach to the whole world the good news of salvation for everyone in Jesus. But only if they accept it for themselves. The apostle (teacher) Paul called this plan of the Lord "the mystery hidden for long ages past" (Romans 16:25, NIV).

How should our understanding

that the gospel is open to all people influence us in how we live? In other words, how much of our lives, our time, and our thoughts are focused on (put toward) telling the world about the wonderful truths that we have been given?



Whoever touches God's people touches the pupil of His own eye.

TUESDAY—JUNE 11

**GOD IS READY TO FORGIVE
(Zechariah 3)**

Read Zechariah 3. How is the gospel shown here?

Except for Isaiah 53, no part of the Old Testament better shows the wonderful truth of salvation by faith alone than Zechariah 3 does. In this vision, the high priest Joshua is being tried on charges by Satan. These charges against the high priest are also against the nation that Joshua represents. The name Joshua (also spelled as Jeshua) means “the Lord saves” (read Matthew 1:21). And it can also be spelled Jesus.

In the Bible, you stand on the right side of someone if you want to defend

and protect him or her when he or she is facing charges. The writer of Psalms says, “I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken” (Psalm 16:8, NIV; read also Psalm 44:3). In this case, Satan is doing just the opposite (Psalm 109:6). Joshua is standing before God for the people. But Satan is bringing charges against the people for their sinfulness.

The Lord refuses to accept the charges. He reminds Satan that in His mercy He already has chosen Joshua. And His people already have suffered the full effect of His punishment. Joshua and the small group of Jewish people were rescued from long slavery in Babylon as a burning stick is rescued from a burning fire (Amos 4:11).

Joshua's clothes represent his people's sins. His clothes are taken off of him at the command of the angel of the Lord. And he is cleansed and then given the new clothes of salvation and righteousness (holiness).

Finally, Joshua is commanded to do God's will and to walk in His ways. If he is faithful, this will lead to God's many blessings.

“The high priest cannot defend himself or his people from Satan's charges. He does not claim that Israel is free from fault. Joshua's dirty clothes symbolize [stand for] the sins of the people. So as their representative, Joshua stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt. But he also points to their repentance [sorrow] for their sins. He also depends upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Savior. In

faith, Joshua claims the promises of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 583, 584. Those promises, of course, include the covering of Christ’s righteousness (holiness).

Imagine having to stand before God in your own “dirty clothes.” What great hope does Zechariah 3 give? And how can you claim that hope for yourself and show that the hope is real through living a holy life?



Satan accuses Joshua, but the Angel of the Lord defends him.

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 12

NOT BY HUMAN POWER (Zechariah 4)

Read Zechariah 4. What hope is being given to the people?

Here Zechariah sees a lampstand fed by two olive trees. This reminds us of the candlestick located in the Holy Place of the wilderness sanctuary (house of God) (Exodus 25:31–40).

The seven lamps are placed around a large bowl, which is where the oil is stored.

The bowl is filled with plenty of oil. It symbolizes (stands for) the fullness of God’s power through His Spirit. The seven lamps shine with plenty of light. They are a symbol (word-picture) of God’s presence, which removes all darkness. The olive oil is channeled (directed) from the trees to the bowl of oil at the top of the lampstand without any human help. In the same way, God’s power never stops and also needs no human help to do its work.

The message of the vision given to Zechariah is that the temple in Jerusalem will soon be rebuilt. God’s Spirit, not just human effort, makes the completion of the work sure. This bold message is given even though the builders have problems that seem to be as big as a “mountain” (verse 7).

Zechariah is not told what the lampstand means. But we can be sure that the two olive trees represent the two leaders of Judah, Joshua and Zerubbabel. In worldly terms, Zerubbabel’s position never could be equal to the royal power of his forefathers, David and Solomon. To humans the builders did not do as good a job as the builders of Solomon’s temple had done. But God’s Word promises that a king is not saved by the size of his army. And a soldier is not saved by his great strength (Psalm 33:16). This tells the leaders that only when the Spirit leads can every part of the work glorify (honor) God.

In Zechariah’s message, Christians are given an important principle

(important rule) to remember: God may call us to do difficult work. But through the work of His Spirit, He can fulfill (complete) His purpose (read Philippians 2:13; Philippians 4:13). By the Spirit, God gives the power to do His work now as He did then. This is not done by humans. It is by the Lord working through those who are open to be used by Him.

Read carefully Zechariah 4:6. Why is it so important that we always keep in mind our full dependence upon God? What can happen when we forget that all that we have, or can do, comes only from the Lord and His power working in us?

THURSDAY—JUNE 13

BEYOND FASTING¹ (Zechariah 7:8–14)

During Zechariah's third year of work as a prophet, a group from Bethel came to Jerusalem to ask the priests and the prophets a question (read Zechariah 7:1–3). When they were slaves in Babylon, the people fasted during the fifth month to mourn the fact that Solomon's temple had been destroyed (2 Kings 25:8, 9). This was in addition to the fasts held in the fourth, seventh, and the tenth months (Zechariah 8:19). In the fourth month, the breakdown of the wall of Jerusalem was remembered (Jeremiah 39:2). The fast in the seventh month was on the day called

the Day of Atonement.² It was the only fasting day commanded by God through Moses (read Leviticus 16). Finally, in the tenth month, the people mourned the siege (Babylonian invasion) against Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39:1). Because the slavery was now over and the temple rebuilding program was almost complete, the people wondered if it still was necessary to fast in the fifth month.

Read the Lord's answer to them (Zechariah 7:8–14). How can we use these words ourselves?

God's answer through Zechariah has two parts. First, it is necessary that God's people remember the past so that they do not make the same mistakes again. The Lord warned the people in the past that He expected them to live in trust and obedience. The slavery in Babylon was punishment for their stubborn rebellion (turning against God). So, God calls the people to learn from their past mistakes. Second, the people's hunger does not give God joy. When they fast and humble themselves before God, they need to remember not to take pride in their actions. To fast in order to feel sorry for oneself is a waste of time. Fasting should represent death to self. It should help the believer put self aside, reach out, and minister to (take care of) the needs of others. "The spirit of true fasting and prayer is the spirit which yields [gives up] mind, heart, and

1. fasting—choosing not to eat at all for religious reasons.

2. Day of Atonement—a special annual sanctuary service in which the Jews celebrated forgiveness and cleansing.

will to God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Counsels [Advice] on Diet and Foods*, page 189.

How can we make fasting, prayer, and other good religious practices take the place of true Christian faith? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

FRIDAY—JUNE 14

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace³ will obtain it. So, he shows them their sins to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is always looking for things to blame them for. Satan tries to make even their best and most acceptable service look sinful. Satan uses many ‘hidden’ and cruel tricks. He tries to get them to do things that will cause God to judge them harshly.

“In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. He stands before God in his sin-stained clothes. But Jesus, our Lawyer, defends all who promise to dedicate their souls to Him. He fights for them. By His sacrifice on the cross, Jesus defeats Satan. Jesus’ perfect obedience to God’s law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth. And He claims from His Father mercy and forgiveness for guilty man. To Satan, Jesus says: ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the pur-

chase of My blood, sinners taken from the burning.’ And to those who depend on Him in faith, Jesus gives the promise, ‘I have taken your sin away. I will put fine clothes on you.’ Zechariah 3:4.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 586, 587.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read the Ellen G. White statement above. How does this help us to understand the great truth about salvation by grace? When we become very discouraged, how can these words give us comfort and hope? How can we learn to let this wonderful truth give us the strength that helps us not to turn away from the Lord when we feel discouraged or unworthy? Instead, how can this wonderful truth help us to be more determined to continue loving God and to keep all of His commandments?
- ② As a class, go over the final question in Thursday’s study. Why is it so easy to fall into that trap? At the same time, what dangers are there when we make our religion into nothing but a kind of social service? How do we keep things in the right balance?
- ③ Some parts of the book of Zechariah may be difficult to understand. But what useful lessons about Christian living can you learn from it?

3. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.