

# Visions of Hope (Zechariah)



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Zechariah 1, Zechariah 2, Rom. 15:9–18, Eph. 3:1–8, Zechariah 3, Zechariah 4, Exod. 25:31–40, Zechariah 7.*

**Memory Text:** “ “In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,” declares the LORD Almighty ” (*Zechariah 3:10, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Though Israel had been punished for its sins, it was time for its people to live again in relationship with God according to His promises.

**O**n the wall of an old castle in Europe a short Latin inscription reads: “*Dum spiro, spero!*” It means, “While I breathe, I hope!” This saying can summarize the message of Zechariah to God’s people. Nearly twenty years after their return from the Babylonian captivity, some began to wonder if God was still present among His people. They started to feel discouragement replace their earlier enthusiasm.

Zechariah, whose name means “the Lord remembers,” began his prophetic ministry a few months after Haggai began his ministry (*Hag. 1:1, Zech. 1:1*). Through a series of prophetic visions, Zechariah learned God’s plans for the present and the future. God’s eternal kingdom was coming soon, but the prophet called those who lived in his time to serve the Lord now. A good portion of the book is centered on how they were to do just that. This week, and the next, we will look at what the Lord has revealed to us through Zechariah.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 15.*

## Comforting Words of Life

**Read** Zechariah 1. What is the essential message here? Focus especially on Zechariah 1:3. What is the Lord saying to the people?

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The return from the exile in Babylon sparked joy in the hearts of the remnant people. But the return also caused anxiety. Would they be safe and secure in their land, or would enemies come again to harass them? Had God forgiven their past unfaithfulness, or would He continue their punishment? What did the future hold for God's chosen people and for the nations?

In his vision, Zechariah saw the angel of the Lord move to intercede for Judah. He began with the question, "How long?" In the Bible, this question often is used as an expression of people's distress and appeal to the Lord for help (*Ps. 74:10, Isa. 6:11, Dan. 8:13*). The answer to the question came directly through the interpreting angel, who then passed it on to the prophet. It contained words that promised God's kindness and comfort.

Zechariah was told to proclaim that their Lord was very jealous for Jerusalem (*Zech. 1:14*). Jealousy can have negative connotations, but in the Bible it also can be an expression of God's love. God loved His people and expected them to be faithful. In contrast to His love toward Jerusalem, the angel said that the Lord was angry with the nations that had treated His people so harshly. The full charge against the nations was that they had added to the calamity of the divine discipline by going too far in their harsh treatment of captives.

Zechariah 1:15–17 acknowledges God as having been angry, but shows also that He promised to repay the people with comfort. His purpose, which the prophet was commissioned to proclaim, was to return to Jerusalem with compassion. The Lord would comfort Zion (*see Isa. 40:1*) while His anger would be directed to His enemies. Jerusalem was going to be restored, and it would again be the dwelling place of the Lord.

**Look again at Zechariah 1:3. How does one "return" (NIV) unto the Lord? In what ways is this a call for a restored personal relationship between God and His people? How do we (or do we?) "return" unto the Lord every day?**

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## The Lord Is Coming

Read Zechariah 2. It records a vision in which the prophet is shown a renewed Jerusalem, so full of people that it overspreads its walls. It will attract countless Gentiles as well, which must have sounded very strange to the people. Verse 10 begins with a call to joy, followed by the reason for such jubilation: the personal coming of the Lord to live among His people.

The Lord's dramatic return to dwell in His rebuilt house is cause for praise for those who have returned from exile. Zion, the dwelling place of the great King, is called "Daughter of Zion," a prophetic term of endearment. In view of its glorious prospect, Zion is invited to rejoice because the Lord Himself will take care of its people. Anyone who touches God's people touches the pupil of His own eye (*vs. 8*).

The prophet said that in the day of the Lord, many non-Hebrew nations will come and join themselves to the Lord's covenant. God's original plan was that the people of the surrounding nations would see how Israel's service to the true God results in blessings and prosperity; thus, they would be led to join themselves to the Lord. In this way the remnant of Israel and the believing Gentiles would together become one people, in whose midst the Lord Himself would dwell. This event would fulfill God's promise to Abram and Sarai that through their posterity, all the nations of the world would be blessed (*Gen. 12:1-3*).

**How** was this prophecy to be fulfilled? (*Rom. 15:9-18, Eph. 3:1-8*).

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Through Zechariah's prophecy, God promises not the destruction of the nations but their inclusion among God's covenant people. The promised future is the result of God's own initiative and was the longing of many biblical prophets. Jesus Christ commissioned His church to preach the good news to the whole world of the salvation that is to be found for everyone in Jesus, if they accept it for themselves. The apostle Paul called this plan of the Lord "the mystery hidden for long ages past" (*Rom. 16:25, NIV*).

**How should our understanding of the universality of the gospel message, and the idea that it is for all humanity, impact how we live; that is, how much of our lives, our time, and our thoughts should be focused on reaching the world with the wonderful truths that we have been given?**

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## God's Readiness to Forgive

**Read** Zechariah 3. How is the gospel portrayed here?

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With perhaps the exception of Isaiah 53, no portion of the Old Testament better reveals the wonderful truth of salvation by faith alone than does Zechariah 3. In this vision, the high priest Joshua is being tried on accusations brought forth by the official accuser, Satan. The accusations against the high priest also apply to the nation that he represented. The name *Joshua* (also spelled as *Jeshua*) means “the Lord saves” (see *Matt. 1:21*) and can also be spelled *Jesus*.

In the Bible, the position of standing on the right side is one of defense and protection. The psalmist says, “I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken” (*Ps. 16:8, NIV; see also Ps. 44:3*). In this case, the accuser is doing just the opposite (*Ps. 109:6*). While Joshua is interceding before God for the people, Satan is bringing accusations against them based on their sinfulness.

The Lord rejects the accusations, reminding the accuser that in His mercy He already has chosen Joshua. Moreover, His people already have suffered the full measure of divine punishment. Joshua and the remnant people have been snatched as a burning stick from the destructive fire (*Amos 4:11*) of long captivity in Babylon.

At the command of the angel of the Lord, Joshua's clothes, which represent people's sins, are removed. He is cleansed and then given the new festive garments of salvation and righteousness.

Finally, Joshua is commissioned to do God's will and to walk in His ways, an attitude that will result in God's manifold blessings.

“The high priest cannot defend himself or his people from Satan's accusations. He does not claim that Israel is free from fault. In filthy garments, symbolizing the sins of the people, which he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt, yet pointing to their repentance and humiliation, and relying upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer. In faith he claims the promises of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 583, 584. Those promises, of course, include the covering of Christ's righteousness.

**Imagine having to stand before God in your own “filthy garments.” What great hope is presented here, and how can you not only claim that hope for yourself but reveal the reality of that hope through a holy and sanctified life?**

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## Not by Human Power

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

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In this vision, Zechariah sees a lampstand fed by two olive trees, which refers back to the candlestick located in the Holy Place of the wilderness tabernacle (*Exod. 25:31–40*). The seven lamps are arranged around a large bowl that serves as a reservoir of oil.

The bowl, with its bountiful supply of oil, symbolizes the fullness of God's power through His Spirit. The seven lamps shine with abundant light, a symbol of God's abiding presence, which dispels all darkness. Just as the olive oil is conducted directly from the trees to the bowl of oil at the top of the lampstand without any human agency, so the power that comes from God is constant and sufficient and also needs no human agency.

The message of the vision given to the prophet is that the temple in Jerusalem will soon be rebuilt. God's Spirit, not just human efforts, guarantees the completion of the work. This bold message is given in spite of the fact that the obstacles faced by the builders appear to be the size of a great "mountain" (*vs. 7*).

The prophet is not told who is represented by the lampstand, 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 match the royal power and might of his ancestors David and Solomon. From a human point of view, all efforts and resources available to the builders were inadequate. Yet, God's Word promises that a king is not saved by the size of his army, nor a warrior by his great strength (*Ps. 33:16*). In this way the leaders are told that it is only when the Spirit leads that every detail of service can glorify God.

In this prophetic passage, Christians are given an important principle to remember: God may call us to difficult tasks, but through the work of His Spirit, He can accomplish His purpose (*see Phil. 2:13, 4:13*). By the Spirit, God provides the power for us to do His work now as He did then. Therefore, the work is accomplished not by human might or force but by the Lord working through those who are open to be used by Him.

**Read carefully Zechariah 4:6. Why is it so important always to keep in mind our utter 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?**

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## Beyond Fasting

During Zechariah's third year of ministry, a delegation from Bethel came to Jerusalem to ask the priests and the prophets a question (*see Zech. 7:1–3*). When they were in exile in Babylon, the people fasted during the fifth month to mourn the destruction of the temple (*2 Kings 25:8, 9*). This was in addition to the fasts held in the fourth, seventh, and the tenth months (*Zech. 8:19*). In the fourth month, the breaching of the wall of Jerusalem was remembered (*Jer. 39:2*). The fast in the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, was the only fasting day commanded by God through Moses (*see Leviticus 16*). Finally, in the tenth month, the people mourned the siege against Jerusalem (*Jer. 39:1*). Because the exile was now over and the temple reconstruction almost was complete, the people wondered if it still was necessary to fast in the fifth month.

**Read** the Lord's answer to them (*Zech. 7:8–14*). In what ways can the words here be applied to ourselves?

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God's answer through Zechariah is twofold: first, it is necessary that God's people remember the past so that they do not repeat it. The Lord had warned the ancestors that He expected them to live in trust and obedience. The exile was punishment for their persistent rebellion. So, the people are summoned to learn from their past mistakes. Second, the Lord does not take delight in people's hunger. When they fast and humble themselves before God, their repentance and humility need to be reflected in what they do. To fast in order to feel sorry for oneself is a waste of time and effort. Fasting, among other things, should represent the kind of death to self needed in order to be able to put self aside and reach out and minister to the needs of others. "The spirit of true fasting and prayer is the spirit which yields mind, heart, and will to God."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 189.

**What are ways in which we can make valid religious practices, such as fasting and even prayer, become substitutes for what true Christian faith should be about? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

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**Further Study:** “Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation.

“In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God’s law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning.’ And to those who rely on Him in faith, He gives the assurance, ‘Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.’ Zechariah 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 586, 587.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Read the Ellen G. White statements above. How does this help us to understand the great truth, which is salvation by grace alone? In moments of great personal discouragement about our own faults and shortcomings, how can we draw comfort and hope from these words? How can we learn to make this wonderful truth a source of strength that helps us not to turn away from the Lord in utter despair over our own sense of unworthiness? Instead, how can we make this wonderful truth the source of our determination to continue to love God and to keep all of His commandments?
- ② As a class, go over the final question in Thursday’s study. Why is that such an easy trap to fall into? At the same time, what potential dangers are there when we make our religion into nothing but a kind of social service? How do we strike the right balance?
- ③ However difficult some parts of the book of Zechariah may be (and some parts are difficult), what practical lessons about Christian living can you take from it?

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Zechariah 3:10*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Be assured that if He can control nations, God can control his or her life even more so. He or she will never forget that He knows the future.

**Feel:** Trust that God forgives and restores him or her to a new life. He focuses His special attention on spiritual leaders to prepare them for their ministry.

**Do:** Accept that humans cannot accomplish things by power and might. The Lord's Spirit changes and accomplishes things that no one else can perform.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Visionary Power**

**A** How can God's insights regarding the future help you to orient yourself in time and in your personal life?

**B** Why are God's past actions relevant to you today?

**C** What is your understanding of the power that comes with having the right vision in life?

**II. Feel: God's Cleansing Power**

**A** Why do even church leaders need to be cleansed?

**B** Why can only God take away our sins?

**C** How can you be sure that God forgives you? How and when can you have assurance of forgiveness?

**III. Do: Living With Spiritual Power**

**A** Why do you so often feel weak?

**B** What difference does God's Spirit make in your life, your church, and your community?

**C** How can you give yourself to the Spirit's disposition so that He can use you to accomplish His purposes?

► **Summary:** God's Word, His forgiveness, and the presence of the Spirit of God are crucial elements in our lives. This combination brings real life. God wants to help His people in their life struggles and give them victory over temptation and sin.



## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Zechariah 4:6*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God is the One who is in control of history and individual lives. He justifies, sanctifies, and leads individuals into an obedient, joyful, ethical life. He encourages us to seek Him in order to have the power to do His will.

**Opening Discussion:** A prophet is a spokesperson for God with great authority. But on what fact is the prophet’s authority built? Why is it important to take the prophet’s message seriously?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ In spite of all of God’s promises of His help and guidance, why do we still feel impotent spiritually, so often falling prey to our own weaknesses? What is the way to change that?
- ❷ God says that His work cannot be accomplished “ ‘by might nor by power, but’ ’ ” that it is accomplished “ ‘by My Spirit’ ’ ” (*Zech. 4:6, NKJV*). What does this testify about the nature of the Spirit of the Lord?

### ► **STEP 2**—Explore

#### Bible Commentary

The name *Zechariah* means “the Lord remembers.” God remembers His promises, and He will fulfill them. He remembers His people and their sufferings but also knows their sins, and He wants to deliver them from the power of evil. He remembers His assurance to send the Promised Seed, who will defeat Satan (*Gen. 3:15*). He remembers His promise to establish His eternal kingdom based on love, justice, truth, and freedom.

#### I. Eight Night Visions (*Review Zechariah 3:1–10 with your class.*)

The message of Zechariah’s first six chapters is quite simple: it is time to rebuild the temple. This appeal was the main communication behind a series of eight short visions that God gave to Zechariah in order to help him to

understand from a broader perspective the contemporary situation of God's people. Each vision engaged the prophet in reasoning that deepened his understanding of the message. They were written in a chiasmic order (in a mirror structure), which means that the first vision corresponds with the last one, the eighth; the second with the seventh; the third with the sixth; and, finally, at the climax is the fourth, accompanied by the fifth. These pairs also deal with related subjects, which are chronologically arranged in a reverse order. To summarize the message of each vision, one can say the following:

1. The first vision (*Zech. 1:7–11*), about the man among the myrtle trees and four horses with their riders, conveys the idea that these horses went through the whole earth, and their riders declared that the earth was at peace (*vs. 11*). So, it was now a ripe time to work on God's project; namely, to build His house, because no one had the power to stop it. God had established peace.
2. The second vision (*Zech. 1:18–21*), about the "four horns" (*NKJV*), describes how the craftsmen broke them. God revealed the end of political cause for the exile. These powers were torn down because they were hindrances to the building of the temple.
3. The third vision (*Zech. 2:1–5*), about the "man with a measuring line" (*NKJV*), points to God's abundant blessing: " 'I myself will be a wall of fire around it [Jerusalem]' . . . 'and I will be its glory within' " (*vs. 5, NIV*).
4. The fourth vision (*Zech. 3:1–10*), about God's forgiveness for Joshua, lies at the heart of these eight visions. Satan accused Joshua, the high priest, of sin. Joshua's priestly robe was dirty, thus representing the filthiness of sin. But the "Angel of the LORD," who is without doubt the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, ordered Joshua's filthy clothes to be removed and assured Joshua: " 'I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you' " (*Zech. 3:4, NIV*). The Lord then recommissions Joshua to minister in the temple and announces a magnificent prophecy about the Messiah. Joshua is freely forgiven and proclaimed just, because God declares it so. On this basis he experiences the assurance of forgiveness and the joy of salvation.
5. The fifth vision (*Zech. 4:1–14*), about God's empowering Zerubbabel, lies at the core of Zechariah's message, together with the fourth vision. God gives His Spirit to Zerubbabel to build the temple; thus, He strengthens him to accomplish His will. This vision about the gold lampstand and oil puts the emphasis on the work of the Spirit of the Lord who sanctifies. Only the Holy Spirit can change and stir up the work for God in an efficient way.
6. The sixth vision (*Zech. 5:1–4*), about the "flying scroll" (*vs. 1, NKJV*), shows that the curse was measured and God Himself punishes iniquity.
7. The seventh vision (*Zech. 5:5–11*), about the " 'woman sitting inside the basket' " (*vs. 7, NKJV*), explains the spiritual reason for the exile. God revealed the people's wickedness that had led them into the Babylonian captivity.

8. The eighth vision (*Zech. 6:1–8*), about the “four chariots” (*vs. 1, NKJV*), proclaims the opposite of the first vision. The last message was about war and turmoil in the world; but God would intervene, and His Spirit would bring peace.

To fully understand the message of these visions, one needs to realize that the first four visions show the effects and that the last four visions describe the conditions that led to those results. Thus, these visions should be studied in reversed sequence. One should begin with the last vision and go to the first (from war to peace), continue with the seventh one and then examine the second one (from the religious cause for the exile to the political reason), then investigate the sixth vision and follow with the third one (moving from curses and punishment to God’s immense blessing). At the heart of these visions are visions four and five. God first enables Zerubbabel to build the temple and then cleanses the high priest Joshua to serve in this sanctuary. From the first to the last and from the last to the first, God is in action. His love, grace, and justice are revealed and vindicated.

Apart from learning from this historical situation, we need to first experience God’s love in our hearts. Then we must experience His forgiveness and cleansing, and, finally, His empowering through the Holy Spirit. Then we can be sanctified and gradually be transformed into His image, enabled to obey Him and follow His law, witness for Him, and consequently serve others unselfishly.

**Consider This:** Why does God communicate His message to prophets through visions and dreams and not by direct speech? Discuss whether or not you think it a higher and more preferable level of communication, and why.

**Discussion Question:** God identifies with His people so closely that He declares: “Whoever touches you touches the apple of [my] eye” (*Zech. 2:8, NIV*). What other examples in Scripture can you find of this intimate unity between God/Christ and His followers? Consider, for example, the following texts: Matthew 25:40, 45; Acts 9:4, 5.

## II. God Encourages Right Doing (*Review Zechariah 7:9, 10 with your class.*)

In view of God’s help and intervention in favor of His people, the believers are rightly motivated and empowered to do right.

According to chapters 7 and 8, God calls His people to lead moral lives: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other” ’ ” (*Zech. 7:9, 10, NIV*). In chapter 8, Zechariah accentuated God’s discourse: “ ‘Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,’ declares the LORD” (*Zech. 8:16, 17, NIV*).

The principle of the Christian life is always the same. Once we are saved, we want to obey God and live in harmony with His law. God's imperatives become an integral part of the redeemed.

**Discussion Question:** Many people and powerful nations will seek the Lord Almighty, according to Zechariah 8:20–22. In this passage there is a striking statement given in the context of making a decision to go to Jerusalem to seek the Lord: “ ‘I myself am going’ ” (*Zech. 8:21, NIV*). How does personal example influence others to follow God?

### ► **STEP 3**—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** **The Holy Spirit is the ultimate Author of the biblical books (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). How can we be in tune with Him in order to correctly understand the Word of God?**

**Life Application:** Diligently study and discover the similarities and differences between justification by God's grace through faith and sanctification by God's grace through faith. Why do we need both: the white robe of Christ's righteousness and the oil of the Holy Spirit?

### ► **STEP 4**—Create

**Just for Teachers:** **Ask your class members personal questions to find out the ways in which they study the Holy Scriptures in order to hear the voice of God for themselves. Provide for them a set of simple interpretative principles regarding how to read the Bible and discover its meaning.**

**Activity:** The book of Zechariah has brought comfort, encouragement, and peace to many students of the Bible. Which passages of this important biblical book speak most powerfully to you? What personal solutions has the Bible given you for the problems in your life? Share your experiences with others.