

Zechariah Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

PREVIOUS

NEXT

Today in the Word

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Zechariah 1:1

The word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah. - Zechariah 1:1

TODAY IN THE WORD - As we begin to study the book of Zechariah, we've moved forward about 100 years in time. Since Zephaniah's day, Judah had been conquered and exiled to Babylon. Later, the Jews had been given permission to return to their homeland; a relatively small group had done so in 538 b.c. under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest.

Zechariah's family had been among those who returned (his grandfather Iddo is listed in Neh. 12:4). The prophet began his ministry in 520 b.c., during the reign of King Darius of Persia, proclaiming the word of the Lord to these repatriated Jews, a community numbering about 50,000 people. It's known that Zechariah was a priest, and tradition says he was also a member of the "Great Synagogue," a ruling council of the day. His name means "the Lord remembers," evoking God's covenant faithfulness (cf. Ps. 86:15).

Zechariah's immediate purpose was to rebuke, encourage, and motivate the people to rebuild the Temple, which had been destroyed during the conquest. His book is highly literary in nature, and conveys a strong Messianic theology. In fact, Zechariah has more to say about the Messiah than any other book except Isaiah, and the New Testament cites or alludes to the book of Zechariah over 40 times. Some of his prophecies have already been fulfilled in or near the first coming of Christ, while others await the end times, which means that the book also has an eschatological or apocalyptic flavor. In addition, we'll find here the same "mountain peak" hermeneutical challenge as we did in Zephaniah--to the prophet, various future events looked close together, while from our perspective in time, some are past and some are future.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - More often than usual, this month we'll be suggesting supplementary Bible passages for your reading or study. We want you to see how the images and themes of Zephaniah and Zechariah connect with images and themes elsewhere in Scripture.

Zechariah 1:2-6

If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me. - Jeremiah 15:19

TODAY IN THE WORD - The Book of Common Prayer begins a time of confession with these words: "Here in the presence of Almighty God, I kneel in silence, and with penitent and obedient heart confess my sins, so that I may obtain forgiveness by your infinite goodness and mercy. Amen."

In a similar spirit, the great hymn "Just As I Am" admits: "Just as I am, without one plea, / But that Thy blood was shed for me / And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee. / O Lamb of God, I come! I come! / Just as I am, and waiting not / To rid my soul of one dark blot. / To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, / O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"

Repentance, as Zechariah also made clear in today's reading, is a matter of life and death (cf. Deut. 30:11-20). These early verses set the tone and summarize the point of what follows: learn from history, repent and do right, and blessing will follow.

What was the history? Disobedience, rebellion, and idolatry, as we've seen already in the message of Zephaniah. God was faithful to send prophets to warn them, but the nation had refused to listen. Their sin had brought on His anger and the punishment of the Exile. "Where is that generation now?" Zechariah asked rhetorically (v. 5). The Hebrew verb overtake is a hunting term--the Word had pursued and caught them (v. 6). Had they really thought they could escape God's decrees?

To the remnant who had returned to Palestine, God now said, "Return to me ... and I will return to you" (v. 3). Is His love then conditional? No, but His blessings are. Conditional upon what? Repentance and obedience (cf. Jer. 18:7-10). To return to the Lord, the people must turn from their evil ways and pursue righteousness. Such repentance also involved acknowledging the justice of God; that is, admitting that He was right to do as He had done to them.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Why not answer today's call to repentance in your own prayer time?

Zechariah 1:7-17

I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. - Zechariah 1:16

TODAY IN THE WORD - After a female emperor penguin lays her egg, she goes to sea to eat and regain her strength. In the meantime, the male cares for the egg, keeping it warm with his feet. In the Antarctic at that time of year, it's completely dark, and temperatures are well below freezing. He can't leave to get food, so he fasts for about two months.

Thousands of these penguins gather together for warmth. A large circle of them rotates slowly so that each bird has an equal turn in the warmer center. And all the while each father carefully protects his egg.

The emperor penguin provides us with an object lesson in the loving care of our Father God, a theme that undergirds today's reading as well.

For the next week or so, we'll be studying eight visions seen by Zechariah, narrated as a single night's experience. These visions are highly pictorial and symbolic, and they often include interpretive clues given to the prophet (and to us) by an angel.

In this first vision, Zechariah saw a man riding a red horse, with other horses following his instructions. The picture seems to be of a military patrol, and indeed the horses bring back a reconnaissance report that the world is at peace. In the person of the patrol's commander, Zechariah most likely saw a vision of the preincarnate Christ (such an appearance is called a "theophany"), while the horses represent angels.

The angels' report made God angry. Why? The nations of the world shouldn't be so smug, because God's people were still oppressed and living under foreign domination. Though Babylon, for example, had been the instrument of God's judgment, such nations had overstepped their bounds and would soon be judged themselves.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Today, set yourself the goal of memorizing verses about Christ's role as our advocate or intercessor.

Zechariah 1:18-21

TODAY IN THE WORD - In *Courage to Stand*, Philip Graham Ryken observed: "Many Christians testify to the grace and goodness of God. Yet how often do they explain how much God hates sin and how severely He intends to deal with it? News of divine judgment has an essential place in evangelism. People have to hear the bad news about sin and death before they can receive the good news about forgiveness and new life in Christ."

Judgment was passed on Israel's enemies in today's reading--the just wrath of God was the focus of Zechariah's second night vision. This follows up on the first vision, in which God assessed the situation and promised judgment.

This vision has two parts. In the first, Zechariah saw four horns. Generally, horns symbolized strength--these horns were probably man-made objects, something like trumpets, and possibly crafted from animal horns. They represent the nations which had conquered Israel and Judah, especially Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia, and Persia. An alternative interpretation suggests that "four" is a symbolic number, signifying completeness, and in this view the horns stand for all the enemies of God's people.

In the second part, the prophet saw four craftsmen, who unmade or destroyed the four horns. They represent nations, namely Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, and Greece, who had overthrown or would overthrow the first set of nations.

In the fate of these nations, we find a dramatic contrast. Whereas they had felt stable and secure in the first vision, now they're terrified and defeated. Whereas they had "lifted up their horns" (that is, made war) against God's people in the past, now their horns will be cast down. How did this drastic change come about? By the Lord's decree, who had justly judged their sin and now sent punishment.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - How are your evangelism skills these days? In your presentations of the gospel, be sure not to skip over or downplay the part about sin and sin's punishment, death.

Zechariah 2:1-13

"Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. - Zechariah 2:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Delicious smells drift from the kitchen window. The kids are out in the backyard playing. Dad is trying to mend the back fence. Mom steps out on the patio and rings a bell hanging there. Immediately, Dad and the kids drop what they're doing and head for the dining room, stopping on the way to wash their hands. Dinner is served!

How did they know? Of course, they knew because that bell was the dinner bell, a signal they'd heard many times before. Its cheerful chimes lifted their spirits and called them to the waiting feast.

In a similar way, today's reading, particularly verse 6, is a trumpet call summoning the exiles home: "Come! Come!" From every direction, God called Israel home.

Zechariah's first night vision spoke of judgment and restoration, and the second focused on the judgment part of that. In this third vision, we learn more specifics about the restoration and blessing of God's people. Some of these specifics apply to the immediate future (already past to us), and some to the end times.

The prophet saw a surveyor holding a measuring line with which he intended to measure Jerusalem. The measuring line suggested building or establishing, and was thus a symbol of restoration. God was promising that the city would be completely rebuilt. After all, Jerusalem was the "apple of His eye," precious in His sight (vv. 8, 12).

Jerusalem would be blessed with three P's: prosperity, protection, and presence. That the city would overflow with people and livestock shows its prosperity. God would protect the people with a "wall of fire," an image reminiscent of the Exodus. Best of all, He Himself would dwell with them and be the city's glory (vv. 5, 10; cf. Rev. 21).

During the millennial kingdom, not only Israel but many nations will be united to God and will be called His people (v. 11). This will be the ultimate fulfillment of His world-embracing covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3; cf. Isa. 2:2-4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Today's reading is one of several in Zechariah that describe a marvelous "homecoming"--Jews coming from throughout the world back to their homeland.

Zechariah 3:1-10

See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you. - Zechariah 3:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

An event that shaped the life of John Wesley was his rescue from a fire when he was only a child. When his face appeared at an upstairs window in the burning house, two brave men ran in to carry him out, the last person to be saved from the fire.

For the rest of his life, Wesley thought of himself as a "brand plucked from the fire" (v. 2, NASB). He even included this verse in an epitaph he composed for himself, recognizing that God had saved him and set him apart for a special work.

In today's reading, the high priest Joshua (also called Jeshua in Ezra and Nehemiah) is the original "burning stick snatched from the fire." In his fourth night vision, Zechariah saw the Jewish remnant's religious leader, a living symbol for the nation. He stood before the "angel of the Lord," a title often indicating the preincarnate Christ (see also 1:12-13).

When God called Joshua or Israel a "burning stick," He meant that the people had been saved from grave danger. The metaphor also showed helplessness, that is, the stick could do nothing for itself. The context is itself a second picture, that of a court of law. The man stood silent before his would-be prosecutor, Satan, but the Lord was his defense attorney and spoke on his behalf (cf. Rev. 12:10).

Next, we see a third picture: filthy clothes. These represent the nation's sinfulness, so when God re clothed Joshua, this signified forgiveness and restoration. Such clothing imagery has deep historical roots--God mercifully provided garments for the fallen Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21)--and is similarly used in the New Testament--for example, new linen is given to the bride of the Lamb (Rev. 19:8; cf. Isa. 61:10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today, imagine one of the vivid pictures from the Scripture reading. Meditate on it and its meaning in the context of Zechariah. Why do you think God chose to communicate truth to us in this way?

Zechariah 4:1-14

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty. - Zechariah 4:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

At a small midwestern Bible college one summer, the president’s cabinet met to pray. Finances were low--so low they couldn’t meet the next payroll. During the meeting, an assistant called the business manager out to look at some mail that had just arrived.

In the mail was a check for a large sum of money, plus several smaller checks. Together they totalled precisely the amount of money to meet the need! The college’s administrators rejoiced, and praised the Lord for His provision. He had known the need already, and had sent the funds in His time. God is always in control--a truth we see clearly in today’s reading as well.

In the fifth night vision, Zechariah saw a gold lampstand and two olive trees. This was a message from God to Zerubbabel, the governor of the returned exiles. He encouraged him to lead the nation to finish rebuilding the Temple, and to trust in Him though the odds seemed overwhelming. By faith, this “mountain” could be leveled (v. 7).

The lampstand symbolized the service and witness of God’s people, and especially how they are to be a light to the nations. Like the church lampstands in Revelation 1, this lampstand showed God’s glory. The bowl of oil represented the Holy Spirit, fueling the light and present in abundant supply. The two olive trees likely stood for Zerubbabel, the political leader, and Joshua, the religious leader. By showing both the royal and priestly lines, this symbolism furthermore implied the Messiah.

As we know from the historical books of the Old Testament, the nation responded to God with obedience and rebuilt the Temple, completing the project by 516 b.c. They listened, trusted, and obeyed!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In today’s reading, God gave Zerubbabel the encouragement that He would be with him as the nation rebuilt the Temple. Figuratively speaking, a problem that seemed like a mountain could be flattened through God’s power (vv. 6–7).

Zechariah 5:1-4

The wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. - Psalm 1:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

When advertisers want you to get a message, what do they do? They might put attention-getting ads on the radio or television. When you’re online, those extra sponsor boxes keep popping up. As you’re driving home from work, a billboard falls right into your line of sight. Relaxing on the beach, you look up and see a banner ad towed by a small plane. On occasion, you might even see an airplane using smoke to write a message in the sky.

When God wanted His people to get the message, He sent His prophet Zechariah a vision of a scroll flying across the sky! Of course, the scroll was God’s Word, and to say that it was “flying” meant that it was unrolled, while also suggesting motion and life. The scroll’s dimensions were huge, and this added to the idea that it was easy to see, obvious, or clear. That is to say, God’s commands were not a hidden mystery, which made the sins of the people that much more flagrant.

Because of their sin, the interpreting angel told Zechariah that the scroll was a “curse,” reminding us of the Law’s blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (see Deut. 27–28). Two specific sins are condemned: stealing (a violation of the eighth commandment) and swearing falsely or perjury (a violation of the third commandment). Since the people were no doubt guilty of more than this, these are probably just a few examples of their sinful behavior.

Sin cannot be tolerated in God’s presence. When He comes to dwell with His people, as He had promised in earlier visions, evil won’t be allowed to remain in the land. Sinners will be banished from His presence--the equivalent of spiritual death. When the scroll entered the sinner’s house to destroy it, this was a picture of the destiny of the wicked (v. 4; cf. Ps. 145:20).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we’ve been considering Zechariah’s eight night visions this week, you may have had the urge to sketch out one of the scenes he saw. Go for it today!

Zechariah 5:5-11

This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land. - Zechariah 5:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

A five-volume history recently published in English about Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp, reveals the horror of what happened there. At least 1.1 million people died in 1940–1945, the vast majority of whom were Jews.

The books include construction plans for gas chambers and crematories, prisoner lists, and rare photographs. There is an almost day-by-day calendar of events, along with notes on how few of the 8,000 guards were ever brought to justice. References are given from war crimes proceedings, records, and memoirs. There are also quotes from first-person narratives--testaments secretly buried around the Auschwitz grounds, written by prisoners.

These records chronicle the evil of Hitler's regime. In a similar way, Zechariah's visions and other Old Testament passages serve as prophetic records of evil. This seventh night vision reinforces the point that "on that day" sin will be judged, though here the focus seems to be national rather than individual.

Zechariah saw a basket, normal except that it was larger than usual. We know this because it held a woman, who symbolized wickedness. Her destination was Babylon, and the picture of her basket on a pedestal or in a house (v. 11) indicated that she would be worshiped there.

Why was Israel's sin personified as a woman? Is the Bible sexist? No, we have the creation account as proof that both men and women are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). A possible reason is simply that the word wickedness (v. 8) is feminine in Hebrew. Or perhaps the reason is that in biblical figurative language, God is male while His people are female--for example, the church is called His bride.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

For today's reading in Zechariah, the Expositor's Bible Commentary gives 2 Corinthians 7:1 as the ideal application: "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."

Zechariah 6:1-8

Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. - Revelation 14:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his commentary on this passage in Zechariah, theologian John Calvin concluded with a prayer asking God for the grace to accept the following truth:

"That all things are governed by thee, and that nothing takes place except through thy will, so that in the greatest confusions we may always clearly see thine hand, and that thy counsel is altogether right, and perfectly and singularly wise and just; and may we ever call upon thee, and flee to this port--that we are tossed here and there, that thou mayest ever sustain us by thine hand, until we shall at length be received into that blessed rest which has been procured for us by the blood of thine only-begotten Son. Amen."

God's sovereignty is indeed a port of rest for every believer. That's the theme of Zechariah's eighth and final night vision. In it, he saw four chariots, pulled by different colored horses, between two bronze mountains. The four chariots are "four spirits of heaven," that is, angels, who will execute God's judgments (v. 5). The mountains may symbolize Christ's strength in judgment, or they might be specific references to Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives.

There's a symmetry here with the first night vision (see January 10). Then the angels were sent out to assess the situation, now they're sent throughout the world on a mission of judgment. It's uncertain if the directions in which they go have specific meanings, except that the north (v. 8) points to Babylon.

The horses' colors may represent specific judgments. Commentators have speculated that red means war, black means famine, white means violence or conquest, and dappled means pestilence or plague (cf. Rev. 6:1–8). The point here, however, is not the exact nature of the judgments, but the sovereign and awesome nature of who "the Lord of the whole world" is and what He will do (v. 5). Judgment will satisfy His justice and give His Spirit rest (v. 8).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A month ago, it's unlikely you would have predicted that you would spend January studying the books of Zephaniah and Zechariah. When Today in the Word arrived in the mail, you may have been quite surprised! Yet God knew, and had sovereignly planned these devotionals just for you.

Zechariah 6:9-15

Here is the man whose name is the Branch... [H]e will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. -

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the legends of King Arthur, retold many times in literature and music, one of the main themes is the establishment of a just and righteous kingdom. Against a society of warring states, King Arthur tried to establish a united England. His knights of the Round Table lived by the code of chivalry that obligated them to defend the weak, to show mercy to their enemies, and to use their strength in the cause of goodness.

Those who are familiar with the legends know that King Arthur ultimately failed in his quest. But the legends also say that one day the King will return!

This vision of a just and righteous kingdom is shared by the biblical prophets. One day, God will send a perfect King whose kingdom will never fail. That's the central theme we find in today's reading. The symbolic action narrated here follows the eight night visions, and probably belongs with them in an outline of Zechariah.

God instructed the prophet to collect gold and silver from three donors (probably lately-returned, prominent exiles who wanted to help rebuild the Temple), have a craftsman named Josiah (or Hen) fashion a crown, and place it on the head of the high priest, Joshua. Afterwards, the crown was to be kept as a memorial of this prophecy.

What did this action illustrate and foretell? It heralded the future Advent of Messiah, the Branch, in whom the offices of king and priest would be united (v. 13; cf. Heb. 7:1–3).

In the words of Haggai, "the desired of all nations will come" (2:7). He will "build the temple of the Lord," that is, establish worship of the one true God throughout the earth (Zech. 6:13). "Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the Lord," promised God, meaning that Gentiles will also be involved in these events (v. 15; cf. Isa. 60:3–10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you wish, sometime in the near future plan a supplementary worship time for your church group or a group of friends. Pick songs that celebrate the Advents of Christ--both of them.

Zechariah 7:1-7

Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me... [E]ven if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. - Isaiah 1:13, 15

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the Gospels, Jesus reserved His strongest condemnations for the religious leaders, especially the Pharisees. They did acts of righteousness just to be admired by others. They tithed their spices but neglected true obedience. They exalted themselves and loved to be shown honor. They were like their forefathers, who persecuted the prophets. They were "blind guides," "full of hypocrisy and wickedness," "snakes," and "whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones" (Matt. 6 and 23, esp. v. 27).

Why was Jesus so hard on them? Since they were leaders, they had led others astray. And in centering their religious life around themselves, they had missed the point of worship. God is the center of true worship!

In today's reading, Zechariah similarly rebuked his fellow Israelites for their self-centered religious practices. About two years after the night visions, the people of Bethel sent a delegation with a question: should they fast and mourn in the fifth month or not? It was during the fifth month that the Temple had been burned; throughout the years of the Exile, the Jews had remembered that disaster by fasting and grieving (2 Kings 25:8-10; Ps. 74). But the Exile was over, they had returned home, and the Temple was being rebuilt, so they were a bit confused about how to behave.

The Lord's reply through Zechariah, which consisted of a series of rhetorical questions, showed that their religious observances generally were self-centered, ritualistic, and insincere. Both their feasting and their fasting were "for yourselves" (vv. 5–6). Furthermore, other prophets, including Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, had already condemned the nation for this same sin, so they should have already known the answer to their question (v. 7; cf. Isa. 58).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Here's a question for personal self-examination today: Why are you doing spiritual practices like prayer, Bible study, worship, and

church service? Is it for show, for your own ego, or to assuage guilt feelings? Or is it a loving, obedient expression of intimacy with your Savior and joy in His presence? You may not always have spiritual “feelings” during these times, but they should always be an extension of your faith in the presence of God, not the approval of yourself or others.

Zechariah 7:8-14

Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. - Zechariah 7:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Jackie Robinson, the player who broke baseball's color barrier, endured a difficult rookie season with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Fans hurled racial slurs and mailed death threats, opposing pitchers threw beanballs, and even some of his own teammates started a petition against him.

One man who stood by him was shortstop Pee Wee Reese. At one game, fans sitting close to the field abused Robinson mercilessly, and it looked as if he might be near the breaking point. At that moment, Reese walked across the field to where Robinson was playing, and put his arm around his teammate's shoulders. The crowd fell silent.

Jackie Robinson and Pee Wee Reese showed the courage to stand for what was right, even when the majority opposed them. Similarly, Zechariah exhorted the Israelites to pursue righteousness, even when many were practicing hypocrisy and self-centeredness.

In today's passage, the prophet moved from yesterday's condemnation of false religion to an exhortation to true religion. The emphasis, as we can also find in other prophets, was on justice, mercy, and compassion (v. 9; cf. Micah 6:8). Specifically, the people should not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, or poor people, nor should they think evil of others (v. 10; cf. James 1:27). These extend the command to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:33).

The failure of the pre-Exilic Israelites to obey God in these areas and others was what had led to the Captivity and Exile (vv. 11–14). Strong phrases are used here--they refused, stubbornly turned their backs, stopped up their ears, and hardened their hearts. Their behavior was willful and intentional, not an accident or the result of ignorance. The metaphor of a whirlwind reflected the scattering of the Jews throughout the world, also called the Diaspora.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In applying today's Bible reading, let's follow up on yesterday's "Today Along the Way." Yesterday, we asked a question for self-examination through the Holy Spirit. Did God speak to you during this time?

Zechariah 8:1-17

Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain. - Zechariah 8:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Geckos have some of the stickiest feet in nature. They can hang their entire body weight off one toe, and climb up nearly any wall, no matter how slick or polished.

Biologists and engineers looking to duplicate the gecko's abilities in synthetic glues have recently uncovered its secret. It uses millions of tiny foot hairs to adhere to surfaces through weak molecular attractive forces. Each foot hair ends in about a thousand even tinier pads at its tip. These pads are arranged in precise geometric sizes and shapes and determine the level of stickiness. The total adhesive power of an average gecko would support 280 pounds!

As sticky as geckos' feet are, God's faithfulness is even "stickier." He never lets us go, and His promises endure forever. That's the lesson we learn in today's passage, in which restoration and blessing were promised to Israel.

In the reading, we see farmland that is abundantly fruitful, and old people and children enjoying life in the midst of safety and plenty (vv. 4–5, 12). This memorable picture of peace and prosperity, which will be realized in full during Christ's coming reign on earth, parallels other, more well-known Bible passages (cf. Isa. 65:17–25; Jer. 31:10–14). God loved Israel and had pledged Himself to her in an everlasting covenant relationship. He will bring His people home, and return to Jerusalem to dwell with them (vv. 3, 7–8).

In the big picture, we see a strong contrast (vv. 10–11, 14–15). As the people looked to the past, they saw judgment; as they looked to the future, they saw blessing. Whereas previous times had been hard, the future held fruitfulness and comfort. In the days of Conquest and Exile, they'd known no security, but in the future, God Himself would save them and use them to bless others--an

irony, since those others had previously cursed them (v. 13).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As you've been studying Zechariah, you may want more in-depth resources to aid your understanding and interpretation. This week, obtain a commentary on Zechariah at your local Christian bookstore or church library.

Zechariah 8:18-23

Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you. - Zechariah 8:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

One Sunday in a rural Scottish village, the offering plate was being passed in church, as usual. But what happened next was certainly not usual.

A small boy put the offering plate on the floor and stepped into it. When asked what he was doing, he replied that he had no money, so he wanted to give himself to God instead. The pastor scolded him for disturbing the service and sent him back to his seat.

But God had a plan for that boy, and took him at his word. His name was Robert Moffat, and he became a pioneering missionary to southern Africa!

What drives present-day evangelism and missions is God's heart for the nations, on display in today's reading. Yesterday we read about the blessings God has planned for Israel, with the eight-times-repeated refrain, "This is what the Lord says." Today, we find two more statements foretelling blessings, both based on the sure foundation of God's promise.

In all Zechariah's prophecies, the key to the blessings described is the presence of God: His resolve to save His people and dwell with them in Person. His presence and the blessings flowing from it are a promise not only for Jerusalem and Israel, but for the whole world--God's vision in this regard is global! The blessings themselves will show His presence, and people of many nations will seek the Lord in Jerusalem (vv. 20–23; cf. Ps. 67).

God's redemptive purposes have always encompassed all humanity, as we see from start to finish in the Bible: from His promise following the Fall to His covenant with Abraham to a plethora of end times prophecies to Paul's calling as an apostle to the Gentiles (Gen. 3:15; 12:3; Micah 4:2–3; Col. 1:27–29).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Zechariah prophesied that God's presence with Israel will be a witness to the nations. In truth, every Christian is a witness, a light who attracts others to Jesus (Matt. 5:14–16).

Zechariah 9:1-8

Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch. - Zechariah 9:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

The city of Tyre was rich and powerful. Living in this important ancient center of commerce and trade, its citizens trusted in their wealth and military strength. The island fortress had walls 150 feet high, and the city also boasted a strong navy.

By the time of today's reading, Tyre had already withstood two long sieges by the superpowers of the day. Assyria had tried to conquer the city for five years, but failed. Then for 13 years, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians had thrown their armies against the city, but Tyre had remained independent and prosperous.

In light of this history, it took tremendous faith and guts for Zechariah to prophesy the doom of Tyre and other enemies of Israel (cf. Ezek. 26:3–14). Chapters 9–11 constitute a single prophetic oracle, one of two that occupy the rest of the book. An oracle may be defined simply as a "pronouncement or revelation from God." One meaning of the Hebrew verb is "to lift up," as in "to lift up one's voice," the calling of a prophet.

From our perspective in time, the judgments in today's reading have mostly already been accomplished. Alexander the Great defeated or destroyed the nations mentioned here, including his conquest of Tyre about 333 b.c. How did he do it when others had failed? He built a breakwater out to the city's island fortress, and triumphed after a mere five-month siege. Amazingly, Alexander and the Greek army bypassed Israel and completely spared Jerusalem and the Temple!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Tyre seems to have been a society quite confident in its physical strength and material goods. Surely we as Americans are tempted by this same attitude!

Zechariah 9:9-13

See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation... He will proclaim peace to the nations. - Zechariah 9:9-10

TODAY IN THE WORD

A little more than 31 years ago, an engineer named Ray Tomlinson typed the first e-mail sent from one computer to another over a network. Now more than half of all Americans use e-mail, with about 90 million people considered to be "active" users. Nearly 10 billion electronic messages are sent worldwide every day!

Said Sonia Arrison, director of the Pacific Research Institute's Center for Technology Studies: "E-mail has affected every aspect of human communication, from dating to conducting business and even to conducting war... It is also a good way to transport the goods and services of the 21st century: ideas." That first e-mail message, according to one news article, "launched a revolution in the history of human communications."

The incarnation of Christ likewise marked a revolution in the history of divine communication with humanity. After many generations of other methods, God's final, perfect revelation would be His only begotten Son. Zechariah foretold Him in today's reading!

In the rapidly-shifting time perspectives of prophecy, we've zoomed ahead from events mostly fulfilled under Alexander the Great to the advents of the Messiah--one of which to us is already past, and one future.

What qualities would characterize the coming King? He would behave righteously and act to save or redeem His people. He would be gentle, but also powerful--powerful enough to bring peace to the whole earth! That He would come riding on a donkey showed humility as well as royalty, since in King David's day the donkey was regarded as a royal mount. This specific prophecy was fulfilled on Palm Sunday, during the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (v. 9; Matt. 21:1-11).

What would the King do? He would fight on behalf of His people, using them as a bow or sword against their enemies (v. 13). He would free the prisoners (cf. Isa. 42:6-7). And He would disarm the nations and end all war--a prophecy to be fulfilled in the Millennium.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we delve more into the messianic prophecies of Zechariah, we'll recommend more parallel readings in "Today Along the Way." Today, you might wish to read John 12:12-19, an account of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, exactly as predicted in our Scripture reading.

Zechariah 9:14-17

The Lord their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. - Zechariah 9:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

This past summer, the nation was riveted by a drama near a small Pennsylvania town. After accidentally drilling into an abandoned shaft, nine coal miners were trapped 240 feet below ground in a nearly flooded tunnel. More than 100 workers drilled day and night in a race to save them. Would they be in time?

After about 80 hours of drilling, pumping air in and water out, and technical problem-solving, the rescuers finally reached the trapped men and pulled them up to safety through a special rescue tube. "I didn't think I was going to see my wife and kids again," said one rescued miner. "It was a miracle. Between God and my wife and the kids, that's the only things that got me through."

Rescue and life are what the Messiah's Advent signify as well. Continuing from verse 13, we again see the Lord marching forth as a Divine Warrior to save His people (cf. Hab. 3:11-15). This metaphor is often accompanied in Scripture by thunderstorm imagery, showing the superior, supernatural, utterly different nature of His battles.

The bowl simile in verse 15 is particularly rich and complex. Since the bowl was full, it suggested the completeness or totality of the Lord's victory. It also implied the joy of victory, since it's linked to an immediately preceding statement about wine. Most importantly, since a sprinkling bowl would have been full of blood from the sacrifices, this figure of speech meant that God's triumph would

inspire worship.

Verse 16 also used figurative language to summarize God's salvation and love for His people. In one picture, they were a flock, implying that He was their Shepherd, a familiar and comforting metaphor of care, guidance, and provision (cf. Ps. 100:3). In a second picture, they were sparkling jewels, that is, God's special treasure, living trophies of His glory (cf. Isa. 62:3).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Our suggested extra reading today is Psalm 18:7–19. As in our main reading, the Lord is pictured as a mighty, supernatural warrior coming in power and glory to save His people. The difference is that in Zechariah, God comes to rescue a nation, while in Psalm 18, He comes to rescue an individual: "He drew me out of deep waters" (v. 16).

Zechariah 10:1-12

From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler. - Zechariah 10:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Anyone who's ever been on a family camping trip knows the importance of a single tent peg. If even one stake or length of rope is out of place or not set securely, the tent will sag lopsidedly, rip, or even collapse.

"Tent peg" is one of the less familiar metaphors for the Messiah mentioned in today's reading, but it's a good one. This chapter continues the themes of the past few days: Messiah's coming, His mission of rescue and restoration, and the blessings resulting from His work.

First, we see images of spring showers, focusing on the fact that it's the Lord who sends rain, not idols (vv. 1–2). God was angry with false prophets and deceiving leaders--the people needed to listen to their true Shepherd, not to be led astray by empty lies.

There are also many pictures of strength and victory here. God planned to make Judah "like a proud horse in battle" (v. 3). The nation will overthrow their enemies (v. 5). When the Lord brings His people home, they will "pass through the sea of trouble," a clear allusion to the Red Sea Crossing and His miraculous rescue of them from bondage in Egypt (vv. 10–11).

This homecoming will bring back Jews to the Promised Land from every corner of the earth (vv. 8–12). When God says He will "signal" for them (v. 8), the Hebrew word literally means "whistle." That is, the Lord is going to whistle for His sheep!

The most powerful images in this chapter refer to the Messiah, Jesus Christ (v. 4). He's the cornerstone, the first and most important brick in God's building (cf. Isa. 28:16; Eph. 2:19–21). As we've mentioned, He's the tent peg. He's also the battle bow, or the Divine Warrior we've already seen fight to save His people. And He's the ruler, or King, whose righteous reign will bring peace to the nations.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Throughout Zechariah, we've encountered vivid figures of speech, including metaphors, symbols, and personifications. For example, in verse 3 of today's reading God promises to make Judah "like a proud horse in battle"--a simile for strength and victory.

Zechariah 11:1-17

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. - Isaiah 53:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

In *Companions for Your Spiritual Journey: Discovering the Disciplines of the Saints*, Mark Harris wrote that our "most profound source of hope" is found in the suffering of Jesus:

"Christians who suffer are able to look into the eyes of the suffering Jesus of the Cross. This Jesus is a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities, a man who knows that we are made of dust, a man tested in all points as we are, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief."

By the Spirit, Zechariah and other prophets foretold the rejection and suffering of the Messiah. This first of two oracles now concludes on a negative note: Messiah would come, but incredibly, He would be despised. Thankfully, we have the benefit of hindsight and the New Testament to help us make sense of why this happened and how this fits into God's plan.

For most of the chapter, Zechariah lived out a two-part object lesson. In the first part (vv. 4–14), he acted as a good shepherd--in fact, as the Good Shepherd, a type of Christ. In the second part (vv. 15–17), he played as a warning the opposite role--a cruel,

selfish shepherd whom we know as Antichrist.

The flock that Zechariah led was “marked for slaughter,” that is, for judgment. Why would Israel be punished so severely? Because the flock detested him--that is, the nation would fail to recognize and accept their rightful Shepherd. Symbolically, the two staves of Favor and Union would be broken--God’s blessing and national unity would cease. The Good Shepherd’s “pay” would be thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave in ancient times and of Judas’ betrayal of Christ (cf. Matt. 26:14–16; 27:3–10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you have time, do some additional Bible study today. Read John 10, the passage about Jesus being the Good Shepherd, and make a list of connections and parallels between this chapter and Zechariah 11. Two main areas that should stand out are the shepherd imagery and the Jewish rejection of their Shepherd.

Zechariah 12:1-14

They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child. - Zechariah 12:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Have you ever had this feeling? You’re driving along the road, thinking of a thousand different things that need to be done, when you happen to glance into your rearview mirror. Back in the distance, you see a red traffic light. Between you and the traffic light is another red light, this one flashing on top of a police car headed your way.

That sinking feeling that you’ve blown it--we’ve all had it at one time or another. Magnify that feeling about a bazillion times, and you’ll know how Israel will feel when they look on the “one they have pierced,” and realize their colossal error in rejecting Him.

In today’s reading, we will study Zechariah’s second oracle, which continues to the end of the book. Through it all, we’ll see one basic scene: Messiah’s Second Advent, when He’ll return to complete His work of redemption and establish His rule on earth. No one can resist His sovereign power (v. 1).

The oracle first shows Messiah’s physical deliverance of Israel. The nation is pictured as the cup of God’s wrath, which will send the nations reeling (v. 2). Just as drunken men are overcome by alcohol, so the wicked will be overcome by divine judgment. Israel will also be an “immovable rock,” strong and secure (vv. 3–5). God’s people will be a fire in dry grass, defeating their enemies as quickly as such a fire spreads (v. 6).

In yesterday’s prophecy, Israel was condemned, but now the nation is redeemed when the Shepherd returns. “On that day” the Lord will save, shield, fight, win, and pour out His Spirit. “On that day,” God plus the weakest person will be a mighty warrior.

By God’s grace, Israel will receive spiritual deliverance as well. They’ll see the Crucified One and grieve. To “look on” Him carries the idea of responding in faith (v. 10). With their eyes opened to the truth, they will repent with sincere and godly sorrow.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Spend some time in prayer today rejoicing in your Savior. Through the lens of Scripture, behold Him, confess to Him, praise Him, and meditate on His greatness and love. He paid the ultimate price for your salvation--He gave His life that you might have eternal life!

Zechariah 13:1-9

A fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. - Zechariah 13:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Atacama Desert, on the Pacific coast of Chile, is considered to be the driest place on earth. Often the area, which includes many mountains, goes without rain for several years, and on average receives only .004 inches of rain per year. Rainstorms that hit the tropical forest on the other side of the Andes generally cannot rise high enough to do the same on the Atacama side. Some sections of this high, cold desert have not experienced rainfall for over 400 years!

The physical dryness of the Atacama Desert reflects the spiritual dryness of Israel in today’s reading. We’re still learning about the Messiah’s dealings with Israel, here for the most part at His Second Coming. After the Spirit has been poured out, and after the nation has recognized its sinful rejection of Christ and repented, then will come God’s forgiveness, pictured here as a cleansing

fountain (v. 1).

The cleansing from sin will involve an end to worship of other gods, and an end to false prophecies (vv. 2–6). People who have done these things will hide and lie, as opposed to the open blasphemy practiced among the original audience of Zechariah's message. Even family members of such sinners will have God as their first and all-consuming priority (cf. Deut. 13:6–9).

Verse 7 returns briefly to Christ's First Coming. Jesus quoted the lines about the Shepherd being struck and the sheep scattered as fulfilled in His arrest (Matt. 26:31). A severe refining process will precede a remnant's return and restoration (vv. 8–9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The long-awaited One has come! The Living Water is available today! Are you excited about this message? Have you shared this good news recently?

Zechariah 14:1-11

The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. - Zechariah 14:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

At the 1999 U.S. Open, Andre Agassi won one of the hardest-fought, come-from-behind victories in recent tennis history.

After winning the first set against Todd Martin, he dropped the next two sets on tiebreakers. He didn't give up though, and fought back tenaciously with tough serves, pinpoint returns, and relentless volleying to counter Martin's 23 aces. After three hours and 23 minutes, he finally won the fifth set 6-2 to clinch his fifth career Grand Slam championship.

While we can't really say that Christ's victory will be "come-from-behind," it certainly appears that way at the beginning of today's reading. During the battle of Armageddon, the nations will fight against Jerusalem, and at first will be winning. But then the Lord will arrive, fight, conquer, and make the city safe forever (vv. 2–5, 10–11). He'll stand on the Mount of Olives, which is one reason why some scholars think Christ will return to this specific place. In the passage, though, the focus is on the fact that He'll powerfully make a way of escape for His people. "On that day," nature itself will obey God's sovereignty, reminiscent of the day the sun stopped in the sky for Joshua (vv. 6–7; Josh. 10:12–14).

When Christ returns to do battle--this is the same battle as pictured in Zechariah 12 (see January 28)--He'll be accompanied by "all the holy ones" (v. 5). These might be angels, but are more likely believers. Before the Tribulation period preceding the Second Coming, believers will have been "raptured" to be with Jesus, and at this point they'll return to fight with and for the Lamb (Rev. 17:14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we see in both the Old and New Testaments, Jesus is coming again! At His Second Advent, He'll judge the nations, establish His kingdom, and dwell with us.

Zechariah 14:12-21

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. - Revelation 11:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

One classic hymn proclaims:

"O worship the King, all glorious above, / And gratefully sing His wonderful love; / Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days, / Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise. / O tell of His might, and sing of His grace, / Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space. / His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form, / And dark is His path on the wings of the storm / All hail to the King! in splendor enthroned; / Glad praises we bring, Thy wonders make known. / Returning victorious, great conqueror of sin, / King Jesus, all glorious, our vict'ry will win."

The book of Zechariah closes on this same note of triumph and glory. The nations who attacked Israel will be struck with a plague, and will give up their wealth. Best of all, the entire world will come to worship the one true God at the Feast of Tabernacles (vv. 16–19).

Why the Feast of Tabernacles? This feast celebrated the harvest, suggesting the completion of God's plan for history and the

gathering of all believers. It also commemorated the journey of the Exodus, reminding us of God's special dealings with Israel. It was the last and greatest festival on the Jewish calendar, a time of joy and thankfulness. In all these ways, the Feast of Tabernacles is a fitting symbol for history's climax.

Why do the book and this second oracle end with pots and pans (vv. 20–21)? The significance is that "on that day" everything will be dedicated to the Lord. In the past, only a gold plate on the high priest's turban had "Holy to the Lord" engraved on it; but now, figuratively, even the horse's bells will have God's name on them, meaning they'll be consecrated or holy. No evil will be allowed in God's house (cf. Rev. 21:27).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

About any subject, but especially in regard to the Messiah and the end times, what new things did you learn this month? What spiritual truth or principle have you come to understand for the first time? What part of God's character do you grasp more clearly than ever before?

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Our Daily Homily

by F B Meyer

Zechariah 1:8

He stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom.

The myrtle in a lowland vale is a beautiful emblem of the people of God. They do not aspire to be forest trees, but are content to fill a little space if He be glorified. As the myrtle seeks its home in shady and moist lands, so the believer needs shadow and moisture. God's ideal for us is a lowly plant, fragrant in scent, and graceful in its appearance.

But, however lowly and humble the myrtle might be, the Angel of Jehovah, who could have been none other but the Lord Jesus Himself, was there. At dead of night the prophet beheld Him sitting on a red horse, and attended by a retinue of horsemen, who had come back to Him after walking to and fro in all the earth. The Lord has his throne in the midst of his people, and his servants post over sea and land to do his bidding on their behalf.

And thus the prophet overheard the colloquy. The Lord's inquiry and the Angel's answer were clearly distinguished. He also heard the appeal made by the Redeemer of Israel to the Eternal, as He pleaded that God would avenge his peoples cause, and was answered with good and comforting words. The Angel Jehovah who pleaded for Israel (Zephaniah 1:12) still pleads for his Church: and is similarly answered.

Yes! we are the objects of divine solicitude. Jesus with his bright angels is on our side. Not more really was He with the disciples of old, who were but as myrtles, than He is with us. He is still displeased with those who invade our lives with their cruelties. He is jealous for his people with a great jealousy. He will yet comfort Zion, and choose Jerusalem. However dark your night, dare to believe that the Lord of the Angels has stooped to your myrtle-tree life to help and bless.

Zechariah 2:5

I will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of her.

Jerusalem was to be rebuilt; but it would soon outgrow the narrow boundaries of the walls which Nehemiah and Ezra had reared with so much care. The multitude of men and cattle would pour over the ramparts as villages spread themselves out over the open country. What then: would there be no wall to arrest the foe and preserve the inhabitants from attack? Yes; there would be one, because the presence of God would be as a wall of fire round about. Nor would this be all, because He would be the glory in the midst (Isaiah 4:5).

How busy some of us are in building walls to our lives—the walls of property; of family alliances; of preparation against all kinds of ill. But the utmost we can do is not enough to defend us against the inevitable perils and dangers of our mortal life. Better far is it to bide within the enfolding, encouraging presence of the Eternal God, which is as a rampart of fire. Can plague or pestilence pass through fire? Travellers light a cordon of fires to surround them with their protection from tigers and wolves; so the soul hides in God. Notice the exquisite similitude—we are safe as "the apple of his eye." What a safe environment is furnished by the brows, lids, lashes, strong frontal bones, and lachrymal water to cleanse each defect. We raise the arm at once to protect the eye. So safe art

thou, O weak believer!

But we need not defence only, but illumination; not the fire around alone, but within; not deliverance, but salvation. Where can this be obtained, save in the indwelling of the Son of God, making our hearts so full of his burning purity that sin might be abashed and no sacrilegious foot intrude?

Zechariah 3:2

A brand plucked out of the fire.

Such is the divine economy, that God makes much of brands, fragments, castaways. What others regard as unworthy of their heed is dear and priceless to the great Lover of souls. The smoking flax, the bruised reed, the woman that was a sinner, the dying thief, the brand plucked from the fire, charred and blackened and almost useless—those whom man rejects as worthless—the base things of the world, and the things that are despised; these are chosen to bring to naught the things that are, so that no flesh should glory in his presence.

Hear the enemy and the Son of Man speaking concerning that smoking brand. The enemy says: It is so worthless and useless, so nearly eaten through with fire, so black and charred—cast it back again into the flame, and take some other. But Jesus says: Because it is so nearly worthless, because no one else would find any use for it, because all others would fling it back to be consumed—there is the more reason why I should take it in hand: nothing less than Divine skill or patience will avail.

And see what He will do for that charred ember. He will take away the filthy garments, clothe with change of raiment, and set the fair miter of priesthood on his head. From the verge of the pit to the proximity of the throne!

“The fair miter” may fairly be taken to represent a fresh enduement of the Holy Spirit for service. We must receive a new anointing ere we can go into the temple of God, to perform the priestly offices of praying for the people, and of coming forth to bless them. Let us break in on the heavenly ceremonial, pleading for one another that none may be missed, but that on each the fresh miter may be bestowed.

Zechariah 4:12

Two golden spouts. (r.v.)

What a sermon there is in a wick! Sit beside it, and ask how it dares hope to be able to supply light for hours and hours to come. “Will you not soon burn to an end, you wick of lamp?” “No; I do not fear it, since the light does not burn me, though it burns on me. I only bear to it the oil which saturates my texture. I am but the ladder up which it climbs. It is not I, but the oil that is in me, that furnishes the light.”

Yes, that is it, and when we anticipate the future, our hearts might well misgive us if we were counting on meeting its demands from our only slender resources. But this is not necessary; we do not give light to the world; we only receive the oil from the Holy Spirit and the spark of his fire; and if we burn steadily through the long, dark hours, it is because we have learned to translate into living beauty those supplies of grace which we receive in fellowship with Jesus.

But how necessary it is that nothing interrupt the flow of oil; that there be no uncleanness permitted to clog and obstruct the narrow bore of the golden spout of faith. Let us daily see to this; let us watch and pray, that there may be no hindrance or impediment; let us draw from our King-Priest more and more of his grace, to enable us to persevere. It cannot be too often repeated, that it is not what we do for Him, but what He does through us, which really blesses men. Be satisfied then to be only a wick, unseen amid the glory of the light that crowns it, and willing to be consumed by the daily removal of the charred fringe. Delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in your mortal flesh.

Zechariah 5:10

Then said I to the Angel that talked with me, Wither do these bear the ephah?

The first vision of this chapter denounces those who had sinned against the first and second tables of the law; the record of their sin would be written in unmistakable syllables, and would consume the houses of evil-doers with dry-rot (Zechariah 5:4). But the second vision is most consolatory. A woman who symbolizes the wickedness of the land is thrust into an immense ephah, and covered with a leaden weight, and then is borne away from the Holy Land by two women in whose wings are strength and speed. Its destination was Babylon; thence had come the principal forms of iniquity, with which the chosen people were cursed, and thither would they return. But what encouragement to every pious Jew to know that the wickedness which had brought God's judgments on the land

was removed beyond recall!

This choice is presented to every one of us:—If we refuse to confess our sin, it eats out our heart and life, as cancer and consumption do the fiber of life. If, on the other hand, we confess, and seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, our iniquity will be purged, and the power of sin broken. With swift and sure salvation will God come to our relief, and the chains that bind shall drop from off us like wreaths of hoarfrost before the sun. What though the tendency and possibility of sin remain yet within us; yet the thrall of wickedness is abolished. However many the dark transgressions of the past, when sought for, they cannot be found; and whatever the temptation without, and the frailty within, we are learning to abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good. So our path mounts up on a stairway of light to the gates of everlasting day. “Awake to righteousness, and sin not.”

Zechariah 6:12

Behold the Man whose name is The Branch.

Three men came from Babylon, where many Jews remained, even after the return under Ezra and Nehemiah; they brought presents to the new-found temple. Their names were Robust; the Goodness of God; God-knows. Of the gold and silver a double crown was made, and placed on Joshua's head: one circle, as emblem of the priest; the other, of the king—the two signifying the final gathering of Israel's outcasts to the Messiah, who would then be recognized as their true King and Priest. In the Jewish commonwealth it was without precedent for the same man to be both king and priest; but as the time drew nearer the advent of the Lord, revelation concerning his marvelous Person grew in clearness, and the majestic combination of glory in his character became apparent. In his Church Christ is Priest and King, after the order of Melchisedec, and between the two offices is no dispute.

As Branch, He is a scion of David's ancient stock; and through his far-reaching boughs the sap of the eternal purpose breaks into flower and fruit. He sprouted out from his place, Bethlehem, as predicted, and as befitted one of David's line.

As Builder, He began to build the Temple of the Lord, laying its foundations in the blood of his cross. He quarries the stones from the hearts of his people, and superintends the plan of the growing structure, as its Architect. Through the ages tier after tier is being added, though the builders pass and He will place the top-stone at his second advent. The Temple grows towards completion. Let us ask whether we have been built into its fabric, or left as those huge boulders at Baalbec, shaped for the Temple but never carried beyond the quarry.

Zechariah 7:5

When ye fasted and mourned ... did ye at all fast unto Me, even to Me?

The men at Bethel asked this question of the priests; it was answered by the prophet. The fast of the fifth month was in memory of the fall of Jerusalem; that of the seventh commemorated the murder of Gedaliah, when the last blow was struck at Jewish independence. The question was: Should the restored Jews continue these fasts now that the events they recalled were forgotten in the abounding joy of the new state? It was a question of rite and ceremony and outward observance; and the prophet answers in effect: “Ye take much trouble and thought about the observance of a man-constituted religious rite; would that you were equally solicitous to practise those virtues, and denounce the vices, which were the theme of so many exhortations and warnings of the older prophets.”

God invariably demands a religion which does not consist in outward rites and ceremonies, but is inward and spiritual; and demands true judgment, the showing of mercy and compassion, the forsaking of oppression and evil imaginings. This is unpalatable enough to the natural man, who pulls away his shoulder.

On the general question, one would advise that there is no need to observe the sad anniversaries of our sins and their accompanying punishment, if once we are assured of God's free forgiveness. When He forgives and restores, the need for dwelling on the bitter past is over; and we should put off our sackcloth and array ourselves with festal garments. This is a most salutary and necessary lesson. Too many of us are always dwelling beside the graves of the dead past. Each month has an anniversary of something we have lost. “Not looking behind” should be the motto of our Christian life.

Zechariah 8:6

Should it also be marvellous in mine eyes, saith the Lord?

Marvelous! Marvelous! Probably there is no adjective more frequently on our lips than this, in these wonderful years when we are reaping the harvest of centuries of patient sowing, and when any morning the newspapers may announce a discovery which will revolutionize our methods of illumination, or locomotion, or military organization.

The other day we were told that the philosopher's stone was found at last; and that silver can be transformed into gold; tomorrow we may rub our eyes at the marvelous news that the North Pole has been reached. Men resemble the little child led into a toy-shop, or listening to a lecture at the Royal Institute, with open-eyed wonder and open-mouthed exclamation.

But none of these things are wonderful to God; they are but the unraveling of his thoughts, the discovery of his secrets! They are only marvelous to us because we are as yet in the baby stage, waking up to know a little of what a wonderful God He is. Like a little child in Wonderland, our God is leading man from room to room, telling him such wonderful stories of his nature and creative work, as make us continually exclaim, How wonderful!

But there are more wonderful things than these—that rebels should be forgiven, prodigals restored, the sons of darkness changed into children of light, Satan driven out before the Stronger than he, the unclean heart made the pure temple of the holy God. Talk they of marvels in the natural world! These pale before the star of Bethlehem, the sunset of Calvary, and the radiance of the Resurrection morning. And we shall see greater things than these, when we follow on to know through unending ages.

Zechariah 9:11

Because of the blood of thy covenant, I have sent forth thy prisoners.

The state of the Jews in Palestine is presented under the figure of prisoners, shut up, as Joseph of old, in disused water-pits, from which the water had been drawn off, leaving a miry swamp behind. Jeremiah sank in one of these, almost to suffocation. But all the while they might reasonably be prisoners of hope, not of despair; of hope, because the seventy years had expired; of hope, because the purpose of their captivity had been achieved; of hope, because God had entered into covenant with their fathers, and had ratified it with blood. And, because of this, they would go forth out of the pit.

These words will probably be read by many other prisoners: prisoners of circumstance; prisoners in the hands of strong oppressors; prisoners in the utmost extremity. They fear every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as though he were ready to destroy. Behold, I bring to such of these as are united with the Son of God, good tidings of great joy! God will ever be mindful of his covenant. You may forget, or be utterly unworthy of his continued favor; you may have involved yourself in difficulties of your own making, the consequences of your own sin; but you must never forget that you are bound to God by the blood of an everlasting covenant. In the depth of your despair you may appropriate the psalmist's words, "Remember the covenant!" And He who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd, will raise you from the dark dungeon, and make you sit with princes. He will certainly chasten, but He will assuredly redeem. Be of good cheer, ye prisoners of hope! According to covenant, God comes down the long corridor to throw open the prison doors.

Zechariah 10:6

They shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the Lord their God.

God distinguishes, in these words, between the civil rulers of the people, called shepherds, and the people, his flock. He was determined to interpose on the behalf of his people, and to redeem them from the troubles in which their rulers had involved them. The distinct mention of Judah and Israel foreshadows a more complete restoration than that which had brought them from Babylon; in which Judah alone, with a few other Israelites from the other tribes, participated. This restoration is yet future; but when it comes, it will be so complete that the long history of the centuries shall be obliterated; and both the house of Judah and the house of Joseph will be as though they had never been cast off.

Hast thou been cast away from the hand of God—not as far as thy salvation is concerned, but for his purposes of service? Be sure to put away your sin. Ask for rain in the time of the latter rain—the gracious rain of the Holy Spirit; put away the false ideals which you have followed, as Israel false gods; then He will bring you again.

Your sins shall be remembered no more—the deep gulf of separation shall be bridged; the years devoured by the locust shall be restored; the dead past shall bury its dead; the river of the water of life will flow again into the channels which it filled once with music, but have so long been dry; and you shall be as though you had never been cast away. If you take the precious from among the vile, you shall not remove. God not only forgives, but obliterates the memory of past failure and sin. He reposes as much confidence in us as though we had never deceived Him; He treats his prodigals as though they had never gone astray.

Zechariah 11:7

I took two staves, the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands.

The prophet exercised his office amongst the poor of the land. They gave heed unto him (Zechariah 11:11), and recognized that he spoke the word of the Lord. It always has been so; and such people make the best flock, for pastoral oversight.

One day, the prophet appeared amongst these humble folk with two staves: Beauty, to represent the possible excellence of the people whom God loved; Bands, to denote the unity by which the entire nation should have been bound in one. These twain he broke to show, first, that God would be compelled to choose another people to set forth his praise; and, secondly, that the unity of Israel would be annulled. When his hearers had received these announcements, wrung from his heart, their sole response was to make a collection amongst them in recognition of his pastoral care; and this amounted only to the price of a good bond-servant (Exodus 21:32). What a miserable return for all the prophet's team and words!

All this was symbolical of our Lord. He longs for the beauty and unity of his Church. But, alas! how bitterly He has been disappointed! How hopelessly He has snapped his staves! How ungraciously his reward has been meted out to Him! (Matthew 26:15). The historical counterpart of this scene was afforded in his closing discourses and final betrayal; and its spiritual counterpart is being enacted day by day. O my soul! hast thou missed the beauty and unity He chose for thee? Hast thou esteemed his service of small account! Art thou like the Pharisees, that use the price of blood for the Potter's Field? (Matthew 27:6-7, 10). Repent thee, lest the Good Shepherd be compelled to adopt severer methods, and pass thee also through the refining fires.

Zechariah 12:10

They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn.

The fulfillment of these words is evidently future. A time is undoubtedly coming when the Jews shall recognize that Jesus is their brother. That scene in Joseph's palace, when he made himself known to his brethren, and they looked on him whom they had cast into the pit and mourned with bitter tears, shall be literally enacted before the eyes of the world. The prophet tells us that this great reconciliation will take place, when their foes will be in the siege against Jerusalem; from which we infer that they will be restored to their own land in unbelief, but will be led to recognize Jehovah-Jesus when He comes to their rescue (Revelation 1:7).

But the interesting point for us to notice is the precise place in which their morning breaks out with its exceeding great and bitter cry. It is after they have been saved (Zechariah 12:7); after they have been engirded with strength; after their foes have been destroyed. Then the sluice-gates of sorrow are opened, and the bitter tears gush forth. They look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn. This is the true place of penitential grief. It was when the woman had been already forgiven that she loved much, and covered the Lord's feet with tears.

Do not chide yourself if your sorrow for sin is meager and belated. This is quite likely to be the case, until you have deeper experience of the love of your dear Lord. But the more you know Him; the more you gaze on the piercings of his heart, the more you will mourn, as one that is in bitterness for the first-born. Pour on me this grace, O Lord, and give me this brokenness of heart! It was the figure of Christ on the cross that broke down Count Zinzendorf's proud heart.

Zechariah 13:7

Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my Fellow.

There is no uncertainty as to the application of these striking words. On the eve of his death our Lord appropriated them to Himself. To his troubled disciples was He not the Shepherd and they the little flock? (Matthew 26:31). How well every word suits his lips!

He was a Shepherd, true, stedfast to his Father's charge. There is a special emphasis in the pronoun my: since the Father had given over to his care a number of souls who were his, but whom He committed to the Son with the charge that He should lose none, but raise all of them up at the last day.

But He was more than Shepherd. He was Jehovah's Fellow. From eternity He had dwelt in the bosom of the Father. He counted not equality with God a prize to be grasped at, as though there were any uncertainty about it. It was his native right. To all the deep secrets and purposes of God He was privy in all the plans of creation, providence, and redemption, He had fellowship. My Shepherd, said the Almighty; and my Fellow. But, O my soul, stand still and wonder; He who was all this became also a man! What an astonishing combination: The man that is "my Fellow!" The mediator between God and man was Himself — man.

But listen to the appeal to the sword of Divine justice. It had slept. Even since the sin of Eden it had remained quiet and unavenging. The pledge of the Son to come in the fullness of time met all its demands. But when He came it awoke. He was made sin for us: He bore the penalty of our transgression: He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and slain. And now, O sword of Divine Justice, thou hast returned into thy sheath, never again to awake.

Zechariah 14:20

In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord.

In the days which the prophet anticipated, the knowledge and love of God would be universally diffused. The method in which he expresses this is as significant as it is beautiful. Horses were forbidden under the Jewish law, because of the temptations they presented to pride and war; but they would become dedicated to God, and their furniture or trappings would be emblazoned with the same sacred words that shone of old from the high priest's golden frontlet. So, the commonest utensils in the Lord's house would become as sacred vessels.

Such a day ought to be our every-day experience. "Holiness to the Lord" should be written on our commonest and most ordinary actions. The holy emotions and intentions that thirst in our bosoms on the Lord's day and in the Lord's house should always characterize us. Whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all for the glory of God.

Many bells ring in our lives hour by hour: for awaking from our sleep, for meals, for work in the school or factory, for our attendance on those who employ us. There is the bell of call for the surgeon, the clergyman, the man of business. Let us look on each summons, from whatever quarter, as being the call of God, as much so as the recurring duties of the priests in the temple of old; and let us regard each opportunity as a sacred bowl, from which we may pour out some holy libation to the glory of God. We can only live like this when we have consecrated ourselves absolutely to God, and regard our entire life as being marked out in all its details as a sacred plan. It is good also carefully to observe our priestly office, and to remember that we are a holy nation as well as a royal priesthood.

ZECHARIAH 14:9 - And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—"The LORD is one," and His name one.

When I was a lad in Sunday School, I was taught that Jesus was a Prophet when he was here on earth and now he is a Priest in heaven, but when he returns he will reign as King on this earth. But that statement is not quite accurate, because Jesus is reigning as King today. He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and Melchizedek was both a king and a priest (Heb. 6:20–7:3). Today, Jesus is seated on the throne in heaven at the Father's right hand (Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3; 8:1), and he is King.

The King created us. When our Lord created Adam and Eve, he created royalty, for our first parents were given dominion over creation (Gen. 1:26, 28; Ps. 8:6–8). The tragedy is that they lost that dominion when they disobeyed the Lord, ate of the tree of life, and were cast out of the garden (Gen. 3). In Romans 5:12–21, Paul explains that the consequences of that sin touched every human ever born into the world. Because of Adam's disobedience, sin is reigning in this world (Rom. 5:21), and because sin is reigning, death is reigning (5:14, 17); for "the wages of sin is death" (6:23). The King's creation has been marred by sin and death.

The King came to us. Because of his love and grace, the Lord devised a plan of salvation that would rescue us from sin and death. The Son of God was born in Bethlehem, sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). He was born "King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:1–2), and during his ministry on earth he exercised the dominion Adam had lost. He commanded the fish (Matt. 17:24–27; Luke 5:1–11; John 21:1–14), the birds (Matt. 26:31–34, 74–75), and the animals (Mark 1:12–13; Luke 19:30). He had dominion! But he was rejected by his own people. Pilate, the Roman governor, asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" and Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:33, 36). In other words, his kingdom is not a political entity but a worshiping and serving community. Jesus will one day reign as "King over all the earth," but today his kingdom is at work wherever his people obey him and pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The crowd shouted to Pilate, "Crucify him!" And the priests said, "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15). Jesus wore a crown of thorns and was crucified for us with a title above his head: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." But in his death and resurrection, Jesus broke the power of sin and death; now grace is reigning, and those who trust Jesus may today "reign in life" (Rom. 5:17, 21). He has made us "kings and priests" (Rev. 1:5–6) and we are seated with him on the throne (Eph. 2:1–7). We may walk in victory and blessings because we "reign in life" through him (Rom. 5:17).

The King is coming again! Jesus promised to return and take those who have trusted him to their home in heaven to reign with him forever (John 14:1–6; Rev. 22:5). There will be a new heaven and a new earth. Meanwhile, our privilege and responsibility is to "worship the King" (Zech. 14:16–17) and serve him faithfully. Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16), King of heaven and King of all the earth.

The Father "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13). We are now in the kingdom! Worship the King! - Warren Wiersbe - [Old Testament Words for Today: 100 Devotional Reflections](#)

Zechariah 1:1-6 1

The First Word Of Salvation

November 30, 1996 — by David C. Egener

Evangelist J. Edwin Orr said that “the first word of the gospel” is repentance. It’s a turning away from sin and toward the Lord. The prophet Zechariah cried out to the people of Israel to repent and return to the Lord: “Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds” (Zech. 1:4).

Salvation begins with repentance. It involves a change of mind about sin, which leads to belief in Jesus Christ and brings us the forgiveness of God. Yet repentance is more than a once-for-all act that initiates salvation. It is an ongoing choice—a change of mind that sees sin as wrong, confesses it, and rejects it.

Martin Luther put it this way in the first of the 95 theses he nailed to the door of the Wittenberg church: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘repent,’ He willed that the entire life of a believer be one of repentance.” It’s an ongoing mindset toward sin.

Here’s the point. The change of mind that is the heart of repentance should become a pattern of thinking—a lifestyle. Even though we are secure in Christ, we must continue to see sin through God’s eyes and acknowledge it as evil. And when we sin, let’s repent, confess our wrongdoing, and receive the forgiveness of God.

I reached for His tender compassion

Because I was sinful and weak,

And oh, the sweet words of forgiveness

I heard Him so willingly speak! —Simon

Repentance means hating sin enough to turn from it.

Zechariah 2:1-5 2

A Wall of Fire

October 8, 2003 — by Albert Lee

The construction of the Great Wall of China began in the third century BC. Often called the “eighth wonder of the world,” it is approximately 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometers) long. The Great Wall was built to protect the people against raids by nomadic peoples and invasions by rival states.

In Zechariah 2, we read about another wall of protection. Zechariah had a vision of a man with a measuring line, who was trying to determine the length and width of Jerusalem (Zech 2:1-2). His intention was apparently to begin rebuilding the fortified walls surrounding the city. The man was told that this would not be necessary, because the number of God’s people would be so great that Jerusalem’s walls would not be able to contain them (v.4). Besides, they would not need walls, for the Lord promised: “I ... will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst” (Zech 2:5).

Physical walls can be scaled or broken through, no matter how high or strong they are. But as God’s children, we have the best wall of protection anyone can have—God’s personal presence. Nothing can pass through to us without first passing through Him and His will. In Him we are safe and secure.

I can trust my loving Savior

When I hear this world’s alarms;

There’s no safer place of refuge

Than within His mighty arms. —Hess

Zechariah 3:1-5 3

Safety is not found in the absence of danger but in the presence of God.

The Devil In Court

February 26, 2012 — by Dennis Fisher
"The Devil and Daniel Webster" is a short story by Stephen Vincent Benet. In it, Jabez Stone, a New England farmer, has such "bad luck" that he sells his soul to the devil to become prosperous. Eventually, the devil comes to collect Jabez's debt. But the eminent lawyer Daniel Webster is called in to defend him. Through a skillful series of arguments, Webster wins the case against the devil, and Jabez is saved from perdition.

Of course, this tale is only fiction. But the Bible records a vision in which Satan accuses a believer before the Divine Judge. Joshua, a high priest, stands before God. As a picture of his personal sin and guilt, the priest is dressed in filthy clothing. Nearby, Satan accuses Joshua. But the Angel of the Lord rebukes him and says to Joshua: "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes" (Zech. 3:4).

Only God can make a sinner acceptable to Him. And the New Testament tells us how: "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Do you feel unworthy to enter the presence of God? Remember, as Christians, our Savior's blood has cleansed us, and Christ Himself represents us.

The power of God can turn a heart

From evil and the power of sin;

The love of God can change a life

And make it new and cleansed within. —Fasick

Justification means our guilt gone, Christ's righteousness given.

Zechariah 4:1-6 4

Go Light Your World

Do you feel as if you're burning out in your service for God? You may want to supply spiritual light to your dark world till the end of your life, but you wonder if you can. You won't burn out if you understand and apply the truth of Zechariah 4:1-6.

The prophet saw two olive trees that supplied oil to a bowl that fed seven lamps on a golden lampstand. As we think about the reality behind this symbolism, we can be encouraged. You and I are not the source of light that enlightens the world. We can only receive the oil of the Holy Spirit that fuels the living flame He produces. If we burn steadily through the long, dark hours, it is because we have learned to yield our lives to the Spirit's unlimited supply of power and strength. This comes only through continual fellowship with Jesus our Savior.

It needs to be said again and again: It's not what we do for the Lord, but what He does through us that enlightens and enriches others. We must be satisfied to be a bright and shining lamp, drawing from the hidden resources of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. Our role is to help others see the glory of His light. And we must remember daily that every demand placed upon us is a demand placed upon Him.— David H. Roper

Help me, dear Lord, to be honest and true

In all that I say and all that I do;

Give me the courage to do what is right,

To bring to the world a glimpse of Your light. —Fasick

Let your light shine—whether you're a candle in a corner or a lighthouse on a hill.

Zechariah 4:1-14

The Power of Small Deeds

July 19, 2001 — by Joanie Yoder

Many great accomplishments for God had small beginnings. When Zerubbabel was called to rebuild God's ruined temple, one of the first things he did, with the help of God's people, was lay a foundation. Then they began building on that foundation, stone upon stone. Many shortsighted citizens balked at those basic efforts and "despised the day of small things" (Zechariah 4:10). But God promised Zerubbabel success, not by mere human might and strength but by His Spirit.

Author Mike Yaconelli illustrated this principle by writing about a teenager who became burdened for homeless people in Philadelphia. He decided to go around his neighborhood and collect blankets, which he gave to people living on the street. The following week he made another collection. Others soon followed his example. As a result of that first small act, there's now an organization that gives blankets to homeless people around the world.

Do you long to have an impact on others' lives but feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the task? Don't despise small beginnings. Like that teenager, start helping people in the name of Christ, one small deed at a time. You'll soon prove that little is much when God is in it.

The work we do in Jesus' name,

When strengthened by His might,

Can start off small but grow in time

And bring the Lord delight. —Sper

The smallest deed is better than the greatest intention.

Zechariah 4:1-7

It's Done By The Spirit

July 11, 2000 — by David C. Egner

A man who worked for a television station accepted an invitation to attend a church's drama about the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the conclusion, a pastor invited attendees to call the church if they wanted to talk about what they had seen and heard. Simon, who was a skeptic, called the next day and made an appointment to meet with a pastor.

Later that same year, after several meetings and much soul-searching and thinking, Simon decided to trust Jesus as his Savior. He grew rapidly as a believer, and he was part of the cast in the next year's drama.

This type of testimony is encouraging because so often it seems that our efforts to shine the light of the gospel into our communities are met with resistance.

In today's Bible reading, former Jewish exiles who were trying to rebuild Jerusalem were facing opposition from their neighbors. God reminded them that success would not come by human might or power, but by God's Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

As part of Christ's church today, we may get discouraged by resistance to the gospel. We too need to remember that God's work is not done by our might or power, but by the Holy Spirit. Our responsibility is to speak out faithfully in His name and leave the results to Him.

Thinking It Over

Do you have friends or neighbors who have been resistant to the gospel? Are you continuing to pray for them? Are you trusting God for the results?

Heart-work is God's work—not ours.

Zechariah 4:6

The builders of the Panama Canal faced enormous obstacles of geography, climate, and disease. Most of the construction was supervised by Colonel George Washington Goethals. He had to endure severe criticism from many back home who predicted that he would never complete the "impossible task." But the great engineer was resolute and pressed steadily forward. In his work without responding to those who opposed him. "Aren't you going to answer your critics?" a subordinate inquired. "In time," Goethals replied. "How?" the man asked. The colonel smiled and said, "With the canal!" And his answer came on August 15, 1914, when the canal opened to traffic for the first time.

If we tried to respond to all who criticize us as we follow the Lord, nothing worthwhile would be accomplished. But if we are confident we are doing God's will, we can close our ears to ridicule and press on with the work. Completing the task is often the best way to silence the critics. —R. W DeHaan

God Judges us by what we do, not by what others say.

Zechariah 4:10**John 6:1-12**

"For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10).

When a young boy offered his bread and two tiny fish to Jesus, the Lord blessed his small lunch and it became a bountiful provision for many hungry people. God does the same when we offer Him our insignificant actions. He takes what little we have and uses it mightily for His glory.

One night in London two Christian men were trying to decide whether to cancel a missionary society meeting because the weather was so bad.

"Is it worthwhile to hold this service?" one man asked.

"Perhaps not," the other answered, "but I don't like to shirk my responsibility. Besides, the meeting has been announced, and someone might come."

So, as thunder rumbled and torrents of rain poured down, they started the service, even though only one person had showed up. A man who was walking past the brightly lighted chapel stepped inside to take refuge from the storm and doubled the size of the audience. As he sat down to dry off, he heard the speaker make a powerful plea for workers among the Indians in North America. After the service, one of the leaders remarked to the other, "Time thrown away tonight." But he was wrong. The passerby had heard God's call and yielded his life to Him. Within a month he had sold his business and was preparing himself to work among the Indians in British Columbia, where he would stay for thirty-five years. The title of a gospel song is true: "Little Is Much When God Is In It." When we link our faith with God's omnipotence, we can expect results. —P.R.V.

Don't despise little things; a lantern can do what the sun never can—shine at night.

Zechariah 4:10**Small Is Beautiful**

January 24, 2009 — by David H. Roper

Just the other day someone said of a friend, "This man is destined for a great ministry," by which he meant he was headed for the big time—a high-profile church with a big budget.

It made me wonder: Why do we think that God's call is necessarily upwardly mobile? Why wouldn't He send His best workers to labor for a lifetime in some small place? Aren't there people in obscure places who need to be evangelized and taught? God is not willing that any perish.

Jesus cared about the individual as well as the masses. He taught large crowds if they appeared, but it never bothered Him that His audience grew smaller every day. Many left Him, John said (John 6:66), a fickle attrition that would have thrown most of us into high panic. Yet Jesus pressed on with those the Father gave Him.

We live in a culture where bigger is better, where size is the measure of success. It takes a strong person to resist that trend, especially if he or she is laboring in a small place.

But size is nothing; substance is everything. Whether you're pastoring a small church or leading a small Bible study or Sunday school class, serve them with all your heart. Pray, love, teach by word and example. Your little place is not a steppingstone to greatness. It is greatness.

The Lord will give you help and strength

For work He bids you do;

To serve Him from a heart of love

Is all He asks of you. —Fasick

Little is much when God is in it.

Zechariah 4:10

Pay Attention to Little Things!

For who hath despised the day of small things? - Zechariah 4:10

That well-known Christian, Horatius Bonar, once aptly re-marked: "It is well to remember that a holy life is made up of a number of small things: little words, not eloquent speeches and sermons; little deeds, not miracles and battles. These, not one great heroic act of mighty martyrdom, make up most Christian lives. So, too, the avoidance of little evils, little sins, little follies, and small indiscretions and indulgences of the flesh, will go far to make up at least the negative side of a holy life."

I have read somewhere that the merchants of Panama, to be secure from fire, build (their houses on wooden piles driven deep into the sand beneath the water of rivers and lakes. Soon, however, a minute species of the madrepore, which are microscopic in size, begin to do their destructive work unseen by human eyes. They bore, saw, and eat away until the strong posts undergirding the homes become completely honeycombed. Then on some windy day when the sea dashes against such dwellings, they crumple and fall because the weakened pilings cannot stand the strain. In a similar fashion sin honeycombs a man's character, and when the testing days come, he may fall before the onslaughts of temptation.

It is important for us to keep in mind that it was the one act of eating of the forbidden fruit which led to the fall of the entire human race. Only one moment of weakness lost Esau his birth-right. One wrong decision landed Lot in Sodom, where he first lost his testimony, then his wife, and finally almost all of his possessions. A kiss, too, is a very small thing, but it betrayed the Son of God into the hands of His enemies. This day pay attention to little things; they often are of tremendous importance!

God often uses foolish things,

The base things and the small,

To bring to naught the mighty ones,

So men can't boast at all.

—Roberta Beck

Zechariah 7 7

The Gift Of Obedience

December 15, 2003 — by Dave Branon

It's that time of year again when people think about God and goodwill more than they do at any other time. It seems that the nearer we get to Christmas, the more we notice that people have a willingness to express an interest in religious things. Both church attendance and church activities increase.

Does this heightened religious activity honor the Lord? We must be careful that what takes place is not what happened to the people of Zechariah's day. Although they engaged in religious activities, they were out to please only themselves. A vital element was missing—obedience to God.

Instead of their conducting empty rituals, God wanted them to show their obedience to Him by: (1) administering true justice, (2) showing mercy and compassion, (3) refusing to oppress widows, orphans, and the poor, and (4) not planning evil against others (Zechariah 7:9-10).

We can best honor God during this special season by evaluating our own devotion to Him in light of these four commands to God's people. Our Lord does not want empty, self-centered religious activities from us. He wants the gift of obedience expressed in acts of kindness and helpfulness for those less fortunate than we are.

Try to bring God's love and kindness

Into someone's life today;

Even just a gift of caring

Can the Savior's love display. —Hess

Kindness is always in season.

Zechariah 7:7

AT this time of year people think more about God and goodwill than at any other time. The nearer we get to Christmas, the more interested people become in religious matters. Church attendance as well as church activities increase.

But does this heightened religious activity honor the Lord? We must be careful that what takes place is not the same as what happened in the day of Zechariah. Although the people engaged in religious activities, they were out to please only themselves. A vital element was missing—obedience to God.

Instead of empty rituals, God wanted their obedience through (1) administering true justice, (2) showing mercy and compassion, (3) refusing to oppress widows, orphans, and the poor, and (4) not planning evil against others.

We can best honor God during this special season by considering the implications of these four tests in our devotion to God. Our Lord does not want empty, self-centered religious activities from us. He wants the gift of obedience expressed in acts of kindness and helpfulness for those less fortunate than we. -DDB

Zechariah 7:9

Luke 10:25-37

"Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother" (Zechariah 7:9).

The Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable set a worthy example. He stopped to help a Jewish man, even though he knew that Jews despised Samaritans and that most of his fellow Samaritans hated Jews. He acted sacrificially—his deed cost him time and money. And he took a risk by stopping on that Jericho road—he too could have been at-tacked by a band of robbers.

A friend recently came upon a dangerous situation along the free-way. He saw a truck swerve to miss a reckless driver and then crash into a guardrail. As he approached the scene, he noticed gas leaking from the truck's fuel tank. Fearing an explosion, he screeched to a stop, jumped out of his vehicle, and pulled the dazed driver out of his cab. He was a modern-day Good Samaritan. He too took a risk to help a "neighbor."

If we take seriously Jesus' teaching in Luke 10:25-37, we will sacrifice our time and money to help all kinds of people. We may not have the opportunity to do something dramatic, as my friend did, but we can offer kindness to a discouraged divorcee, a person dying with AIDS, or a misunderstood teenager. Showing mercy to others is a way to express our gratitude to God for His salvation. When we reach out to others, we show our desire to obey Jesus' command to love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves. Getting involved, even when it means taking a risk, is a good risk. —H. V. Lugt

How much we are willing to sacrifice is the measure of our love.

Zechariah 8:14-17 8

Two Pats of Butter

October 7, 2002 — by Dennis J. De Haan

Honesty must be woven into the fabric of our character if we are to have an effective testimony for Christ. Even the secular world recognizes the importance of integrity.

A promising young man applied for a job at a bank. He was one of several applicants, but the president was especially impressed by his credentials. Before hiring him, the president invited the man to lunch with several of the bank executives.

As the group went through the cafeteria line, the young man put two pats of butter on his tray and slipped them beneath the outer rim of his plate so the cashier wouldn't see them. The company president, who was right behind him, observed his actions. If this fellow would be dishonest with two pats of butter, he thought, how could he be trusted at a teller's window? Right there the president decided not to hire him. Deception takes many forms, whether an outright verbal lie, or the cover-up of two pats of butter, which in this case amounted to stealing.

An 11-year-old boy who reads Our Daily Bread wrote, "I am the sort of kid who can't lie or I get tingly feelings in my stomach." Oh, that we all were that sensitive! Lord, make us people of unquestioned honesty and integrity in all things—whether large or small. — Dennis De Haan

Lord, help me to be honest

In all I do and say;

God, grant me grace and power

To live for You today. —Fitzhugh

A person of integrity has nothing to hide.

Zechariah 8:14-17

Commandment 9—Tell The Truth

September 19, 1994 — by Dennis J. De Haan

How prone we are to lying! With a stroke of exaggeration here, an omitted detail there, or a misleading silence we distort the truth. Yet truth is the foundation and superstructure of all relationships. Remove the girders of truth, and society crumbles in on itself. This moral absolute is so self-evident that even criminals punish their own who lie to them.

The ninth commandment forbids purposeful deceit against our neighbor and underscores the sacredness of truth in all our dealings. The two Hebrew words used for “false” in Exodus 20:16 and in Deuteronomy 5:20 mean “untrue” and “insincere.” Any expression of insincerity and untruthfulness, therefore, is bearing false witness against our neighbor.

This commandment also exposes two underlying motives that God hates—malice and pride. When we lie, it is usually to cast a person in a bad light or to place ourselves in a good light. The first springs from malice, the second from pride.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). The closer we are to Him, the more truthful we will become with ourselves and with others. The question is, “Are we followers of Him who is the truth?”

Lord, cleanse my heart of all deceit

And teach me what is true;

Help me to have integrity

In all I say and do. —Sper

Nothing weakens the truth more than stretching it

Zechariah 9:9

The Cross And The Crown

April 9, 2005 — by Herbert Vander Lugt

On the day we call Palm Sunday the Lord Jesus presented Himself to Israel as their King when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Had He been astride a spirited horse, He would have looked more kingly. But Zechariah had prophesied He would come in the humble way that He did.

Why? Kings of the East rode donkeys when on errands of peace. The horse was used as a charger in war.

The multitudes thought in terms of earthly prosperity and freedom from Rome. So they cried, “Hosanna in the highest!” (Mark 11:10). Yet a few days later, the shouts of the crowd became: “Crucify Him!” (15:13).

Some who declare themselves admirers of Jesus do not recognize Him as the Savior of sinners. But our deepest need cannot be met until our sin problem is overcome. For this reason Christ rode into Jerusalem on a donkey with His face set toward the cross, knowing full well the shameful and painful death He would suffer there. Now, having paid the price for human sin, He is highly exalted at God’s right hand and will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords. His cross had to precede His crown.

If we want to be part of His heavenly kingdom, we must trust Him as our Savior now.

If in heaven a crown you'd wear

And bright palms of victory bear,

Christ the Savior you must claim;

Find redemption in His name. —Anon.

There would be no crown-wearers in heaven had Christ not been the cross-bearer on earth.

Zechariah 9:9

Parades have traditionally been celebrations of great achievements. In American history, the greatest parades focused on people such as pilot Charles Lindbergh, the Apollo 11 astronauts, and war heroes. These celebrations were marked by ticker-tape showers and adoring crowds lining the streets of a major city as bands and celebrities passed in review.

But the greatest parade of all time was quite different. It happened in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. It was a simple one-man donkey ride. Instead of ticker tape, the way was lined with garments and palm branches.

Perhaps the most remarkable element of Jesus' ride into the Holy City was its prophetic significance. In Zechariah 9:9, the prophet described the scene that would unfold more than 500 years later. When Jesus rode that donkey into Jerusalem, fulfilling prophecy as He went, He was giving us one more reason to shout, "Hosanna!" He was, and is, the promised Messiah. --J D Brannon

If we believe in Jesus' Kingship, we'll bow to Him in worship.

Zechariah 9:9

Donkey Mentality

June 19, 2006 — by David C. McCasland

A minister referred to Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and asked: "What if the donkey on which Jesus was riding had thought all the cheering was for him? What if that small animal had believed that the hosannas and the branches were in his honor?"

The minister then pointed to himself and said: "I'm a donkey. The longer I'm here the more you'll come to realize that. I am only a Christ-bearer and not the object of praise."

In recording Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, Matthew referred to the prophecy of Zechariah: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey'" (Matthew 21:5; see Zechariah 9:9).

On Palm Sunday, the donkey was merely a Christ-bearer, bringing the Son of God into the city where He would give His life for the sins of the world.

If we could develop a healthy "donkey mentality," what an asset that would be as we travel the road of life. Instead of wondering what people think of us, our concern would be, "Can they see Christ Jesus, the King?" Rather than seeking credit for service rendered, we would be content to lift up the Lord.

O what can I give to the Master,

The One who from sin set me free?

I'll give Him a lifetime of service

To thank Him for dying for me. —K. De Haan

A Christian's life is a window through which others can see Jesus.

Zechariah 9:9

One Hundred Percent Right!

We have ... a more sure word of prophecy ... 2 Peter 1:19

It's amazing what can be done with statistics. By a clever arrangement of facts, framed in a shrewdly worded context, it is possible to make even a poor situation sound good. For example, a weatherman once boasted, "I'm 90 percent right—10 percent of the time!" His claim sounds quite impressive until it is analyzed. He needed such a manipulation of statistics to cover up his poor record. Such, however, is not necessary with the Bible. Its predictions are 100 percent right. There's no need for double-talk when it comes to the Scriptures.

The Lord Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem as prophesied by Micah (Mic. 5:2); of a virgin (Isa. 7:14); at the time specified by

Daniel (Dan. 9:25). Infants in Bethlehem were massacred as foretold by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:15); Jesus went down into Egypt and returned as prophesied by Hosea (Hos. 11:1). Isaiah foretold His ministry in Galilee (Isa. 9:1, 2); Zechariah predicted His triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding upon a colt (Zech. 9:9); His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12); and the return of this money for the purchase of a potter's field (Zech. 11:13). David lived 1,000 years before the birth of Christ, and had never seen a Roman crucifixion; yet in Psalm 22, he penned under divine inspiration a graphic portrayal of the death Jesus suffered when He died upon a Roman cross. Isaiah 53 also gives us a detailed picture of our Lord's rejection and death. These few prophecies alone should impress the worst of skeptics with the reliability of the Bible.

Since these predictions have all been fulfilled to the smallest detail, let us also accept with confidence that which the Bible says about the future. Remember, we have a sure word of prophecy which is 100 percent right—all of the time!

I'll trust in God's unchanging Word

Till soul and body sever;

For though all things shall pass away,

His Word shall stand forever! — Luther

Through the pages of the Bible, as through a window divinely opened, men can look into the future of earth and the glories of Heaven. —T. Carlyle

Zechariah 9:9

Always Right

December 21, 2003 — by Richard De Haan

A weatherman boasted, "I'm 90 percent right—10 percent of the time." That's a ridiculous statement, but some people resort to that type of doubletalk to cover up a poor record.

The Bible's prophetic record, though, truly is accurate. Let's look at a few examples.

The Lord Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) at the time specified (Daniel 9:25). Infants in Bethlehem were massacred as prophesied (Jeremiah 31:15). Jesus went down into Egypt and returned (Hosea 11:1). Isaiah foretold Christ's ministry in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1-2). Zechariah predicted His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a colt (Zechariah 9:9) and His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (11:12-13). David had never seen a Roman crucifixion, yet in Psalm 22, under divine inspiration, he penned a graphic portrayal of Jesus' death. Isaiah 53 gives a detailed picture of our Lord's rejection, mistreatment, death, and burial. These few prophecies (and there are many more) should impress us with the reliability of the Bible.

Since these predictions have all been fulfilled, let us also accept with confidence what the Bible says about the future. Remember, we have a book of prophecy that is right—all of the time!

I'll trust in God's unchanging Word

Till soul and body sever;

For though all things shall pass away,

His Word shall stand forever! —Luther

You can trust the Bible—God always keeps His word.

Zechariah 14:3 14

Victory Day

May 9, 1998 — by David C. Egner

I spent the first 2 weeks of May 1997 in Magadan, Siberia, teaching at a Bible college. May 9 was V-Day, a national holiday in the former Soviet Union. Schools were closed, as well as most businesses. In the town square, military leaders and city officials made speeches. A band played patriotic songs, and there was a parade and fireworks.

When I think of all that the Russian people suffered during World War II— of the millions of soldiers and civilians who died horrible

deaths—I understand the reason V-Day is so widely celebrated there. The Russians have reason for rejoicing, because a tragic yet heroic period of their history had come to a triumphant end.

As believers in Christ, we know that another Victory Day is coming. The forces of Satan have caused immeasurable suffering in their war against God. It will get worse in the endtimes. But one day the Lord Jesus will lead the armies of heaven to do battle with the hordes of the devil. The battle will be short and decisive. Jesus Christ will be victorious.

We don't know when this will happen. But we can be confident that God will someday bring about ultimate justice and Christ will reign over all the world. Our Victory Day is coming!

A glorious day of victory is nearing,

When Christ the Captain of the host appears!

He said that one day He would be returning—

Our great anticipation through the years! —Hess

Someday the scales of justice will be perfectly balanced.

Zechariah 14:7

The Glorious Sunset

April 11, 2006 — by M.R. De Haan

It is wonderful to be young, with clear sight, acute hearing, elastic step, pulses drumming to the march of exhilarating health. But old age has glories that youth cannot know. It is a blessed old age indeed if it ends brightly at evening time.

Old age celebrates the harvest—youth the sowing. Like fruit in the fall, the harvest of old age will either dry up and wither, or grow mellow and sweeter as it ripens.

You cannot escape the advancing years. Youth stays long enough only to strengthen our shoulders for the burdens ahead. Life leads inevitably to the evening time. But the best things are the oldest things—things that have endured and stood the test of time. God Himself—though not bound by time—is called the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9).

So don't be ashamed to own your age. Everything that abides must become old: mountains, rivers, oceans, stars.

But the evening time of life can be bright only if we have the One who is the Light as our evening Sun. Nothing is sadder than an aging person facing eternity without Jesus. And nothing is sweeter than a gently mellowing Christian, still growing and resting in Christ as he faces God's tomorrow with confidence.

So I journey with rejoicing

Toward the city of God's light,

While each day my joy is deeper,

And the pathway grows more bright. —Hoffman

It is a strange thing that, while all would live long, none would be old. —Benjamin Franklin