

ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

October 16, 2022 | Return and Restoration [Zechariah]

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Zechariah is primarily a forward-looking book. How will this alter how you think about application in this lesson?

Read Zechariah.

Pray that the renewal and restoration foreseen in Zechariah would characterize your life in Christ.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God desires repentance from His people. In response, the blessings He has in store for the future will be realized.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Focusing on our future hope can help us remain faithful in the present.

MEDITATE

“And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to him he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments’” (Zechariah 3:4).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will examine Zechariah 1:1–6. These verses create the framework in which the remainder of the book functions.

Q: *Have you ever remodeled a home or car? What challenges did you face?*

Q: *Why would a people returning from exile continue to struggle with sin?*

Like Haggai, Zechariah ministered among the earliest Jews who returned to Jerusalem following the exile. It was an exciting time for the people of God. After several decades, they had returned to their homeland. Homes were being rebuilt. Construction of a new temple began. This was all a sure sign that God had not completely abandoned them. But it was also a confusing time for the people of God. Although they recognized that God was working in their midst, there were still signs of stubbornness and sin among the people. Furthermore, their resolve to follow God's law did not run very deep. Their situation was like a remodeled home. Some things were new, but the vestiges of the old remained and caused problems.

Zechariah reminded the people they were following in the steps of their fathers (Zechariah 1:2). Unless the returned exiles wanted to repeat the pattern of their fathers, they needed to repent (Zechariah 1:3–6). Zechariah's ministry would help them see their need for repentance and give them a glorious vision of the future if they did.

Q: *How would hope in the future encourage you to remain faithful in the present?*

Q: *Zechariah pointed the returnees to their fathers. How does looking to the past encourage you to remain faithful in the present?*

APPLICATION POINT – The people had returned from exile, but things were still far from where they were supposed to be spiritually. The people were still caught in many sins and awaited a time when God would act decisively and remove sin from them. Like the exiles, we also live in a time of “already/not yet.” We have already received the blessings of Christ's resurrection, but we have not yet fully recognized them. Zechariah encourages us to remain faithful in the present based on our anticipation of all that God will do in the future.

🔲 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Zechariah has a straightforward structure. After a short introduction, the book begins with a series of eight “night

visions.” The prophet then gave a short address to the exiles before concluding with two oracles of their future restoration.

1. ZECHARIAH’S NIGHT VISIONS
2. COMPASSION AND FUTURE BLESSING
3. FUTURE RESTORATION

GOING DEEPER

+This section will investigate Zechariah in more detail. It will overview each section and offer a personal application for each.

1. ZECHARIAH’S NIGHT VISIONS

■ ZECHARIAH 1:7–6:15

Q: *What connotations are sometimes associated with night? How might these influence our understanding of “night visions”?*

Q: *What do the visions in Zechariah 1:7-17 and 6:1-15 have in common?*

The first section of Zechariah is known as the night visions. This series of visions is introduced in Zechariah 1:8 with the phrase “I saw in the night.” The phrase “I lifted my eyes and saw” occurs multiple times throughout Zechariah 1:7–6:15, revealing the visionary nature of these episodes. The “night” element of these visions refers to their timing and may indicate these visions were dreams. There is nothing foreboding or sinister about the “night” or “darkness” aspect of these visions.

These visions follow a concentric pattern, meaning the centermost visions in the sequence share similar themes and the visions before and after, working outward from the center, also share themes:

- A. Vision 1: The nations
- B. Visions 2 and 3: Obstacles to rebuilding
- C. Vision 4: Joshua and the temple
- C. Vision 5: Joshua and the temple
- B. Visions 6 and 7: Obstacles to rebuilding
- A. Vision 8: The nations

The outer two visions in this group contain elements addressing the nations. They each begin with horses of various colors that “patrol the earth” (Zechariah 1:10) and go “out to the four winds of the heavens” (Zechariah 6:5). Both phrases refer to the entire world and all the nations within it.

In the first vision, an angel asked God if He would continue to be angry with the nation as has been the case for the seventy years of exile (Zechariah 1:12). God responded that He would have grace and mercy on the people (Zechariah 1:13, 16). Furthermore, He condemned the nations for bringing worse actions on His people than He had allotted them (Zechariah 1:15). The second vision contains an unexpected development. Joshua, the high priest, was given a crown and along with it the responsibility of rebuilding the temple (Zechariah 6:11–13). But he would not do so entirely on his own strength (Zechariah 6:15). Those who came from far off (gentile nations) would help in the completion of the temple.

🔗: *What does God’s concern for the other nations reveal about His nature?*

🔗: *How does the role of the nations in building the temple anticipate the church?*

APPLICATION POINT – Incorporating the nations into His plan to rebuild the temple reveals God’s sovereignty over the whole earth. There is no person or people over whom God does not reign and from whom God does not warrant praise. Ancient peoples believed every nation had their own god or gods, but the God of the Old Testament would not be pinned to one people group. Today, people like to speak of “your God,” meaning belief in God is fine for those who choose to do so, but if they do not choose God, then He has no authority over their lives. Zechariah’s prophecy does not allow for this. The God of the Bible is the God of all nations and over all people regardless of whether they believe in Him. This is one reason that evangelism and missions are so central to the Christian faith. Unbelief does not diminish God’s claim over all the earth. It only endangers the souls of those who refuse to believe.

Q: *What do the horns in Zechariah 1:18 represent?*

Q: *Who would come into the land in Zechariah 2? What exits the land in Zechariah 5? Why would these movements be significant for the building of the temple?*

It is important to remember that Zechariah's visions are apocalyptic in nature. Apocalyptic visions frequently use present realities to describe events that will come to pass in the future. Apocalyptic visions also make heavy use of symbolism. Each of these elements is observable throughout Zechariah.

The prevailing concern for those returning from exile was the rebuilding the temple and their homes, but there were many obstacles in their way. One difficulty was the extent to which the people had been scattered among the nations. Zechariah's second and third visions address this. Zechariah saw four horns, likely representing the four cardinal directions to which Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem had been scattered (Zechariah 1:18). In apocalyptic literature, horns often represent hostile enemy powers. In this case, the horns are the nations that had scattered God's people. Their work, however, would be undone by the four craftsmen (Zechariah 1:20–21). The four craftsmen simply correspond to the four horns and represent the work God would do to oppose the actions of the hostile nations. In Zechariah 2, God called His scattered people from among the exiles (Zechariah 2:6–13). They will fill the eschatological city described at the beginning of the third vision (Zechariah 2:1–5). The continuation of the exile and hostility of the nations were obstacles to rebuilding, but these visions reveal that God was working to overcome them. He would bring back the exiles to the land, and they would even be joined by many nations.

Zechariah 5 contains the sixth and seventh night visions. Both visions concern the removal of sin from the land. Sin was the cause of the exile. For rebuilding to take place, this sin had to be removed. The flying scroll is a curse that would come upon and remove all the thieves and liars in the land (Zechariah 5:1–4). The basket contained the sin and wickedness of the land (Zechariah 5:5–8). This basket was removed from the land and placed in the land of Shinar, which is Babylon (Zechariah 5:9–11). The removal of sin from the land would allow the rebuilding to begin.

Q: *What often impedes the spiritual growth of new believers?*

Q: *How can mature believers help newer believers grow in their faith?*

Those returning from exile hoped to rebuild their land, but merely returning did not make everything right. The people continued to struggle with spiritual sin that impeded the physical rebuilding. New believers often struggle to grow spiritually because many of the destructive sins that characterized their old life apart from Christ remain. Even people who have been Christians for a long time can find themselves caught up in sin that impedes their spiritual growth. Confessing Christ as Savior covers the guilt of sin with the blood of Christ, but sin does not automatically go away, and it can continue to subvert the spiritual growth of believers. These visions in Zechariah show us the importance of identifying and removing sin throughout the course of our Christian lives.

Q: *Why would Joshua's filthy garments be disastrous for the people [Zechariah 3:3-4]?*

Q: *How would Zerubbabel rebuild the temple [Zechariah 4:6]?*

The fourth and fifth night visions focus on two leaders. Zerubbabel led the returning exiles and functioned as their governor, and Joshua was the first high priest among them. These two men were crucial figures in the rebuilding of the nation and faced seemingly insurmountable difficulties in fulfilling their roles. In Zechariah's fourth vision, Joshua was found in filthy garments (Zechariah 3:3), accused before God by Satan. The high priest represented the people before God. It was his job to ceremonially cleanse the people and remove their sin, but if he were filthy from sin himself, the people had no hope. In response to Satan's accusations, God commanded for the filthy garments to be removed and replaced by clean ones (Zechariah 3:4-5), representing the removal of sin and the hope for restoration of the people.

The fifth night vision is one of the most enigmatic for modern readers and apparently for Zechariah too (Zechariah 4:5, 13). The main idea is that God would strengthen Joshua to fulfill the task of rebuilding the people (Zechariah 4:6). The olive tree was a symbol frequently used for fruitful and prominent leaders among God's people (Judges 9:9; Job 15:33; Hosea 14:6). The rebuilding of the temple was crucial for restoring God's presence among them.

Q: *Joshua was made clean by God's command, and Zerubbabel would restore the temple with God's power. How does this encourage modern believers seeking to grow in their faith?*

Q: *God has charged leaders in every church with the responsibility of building up the body of Christ. In what ways can you encourage the leadership of Oakwood?*

APPLICATION POINT – The gospel teaches that our salvation is accomplished not by our works but by God's work on our behalf. Zechariah's fourth and fifth night visions remind us of this. It also reminds us that our continued spiritual growth is also accomplished by God's strength. Zerubbabel was called to rebuild the temple, but the task would have been impossible in his strength alone. In the same way, God calls every believer to grow in sanctification, but this growth does not come from our strength; it comes from God's continued grace in our lives.

2. COMPASSION AND FUTURE BLESSING

■ ZECHARIAH 7-8

Q: *How did Zechariah respond to the men from Bethel regarding fasting?*

Q: *Zechariah 8 contains multiple indications of restoration for the people. What are some of the most prominent ones you notice?*

In Zechariah 7, a group from the northern town of Bethel arrived in Jerusalem and asked if they should continue mourning and fasting during the fifth month of the year (Zechariah 7:1-3). God spoke through Zechariah to reveal that He cared more about their compassion for others than their keeping a fast. This was a common sentiment among Israel's prophets (Isaiah 1:10-15; Jeremiah 7:5-7, 21-26; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:1-8). Anyone who had no compassion on others would not take part in the future restoration of God's people, regardless of how many fasts they practiced.

In Zechariah 8, God announced His plan to fully restore the people of God, bringing them out of the countries into which they had been exiled (Zechariah 8:7–8). In addition to God’s covenant people, the nations would also seek the Lord’s favor in Jerusalem. Zechariah 8 also includes a plea for compassion and justice among God’s people.

🔗: *Why are justice and compassion essential in the restored community of God?*

🔗: *In what ways are you able to show justice and compassion to others?*

APPLICATION POINT – These chapters anticipate the future full restoration of the people of God, partly by encouraging the people to practice now the justice and compassion that will characterize that future assembly. This is a lesson we dare not forget today. We can never become complacent about injustice in this life or think we can be unconcerned with the well-being of brothers and sisters in Christ as long as Christ has not yet returned. God desires to see the fruit of the restoration kingdom evident in our lives today.

3. FUTURE RESTORATION

📊 ZECHARIAH 9-14

🔗: *The main point of Zechariah 9–11 is the restoration of the people. In Zechariah 9:1–13 what role does the judgment of Israel’s enemies play in the restoration of the people?*

🔗: *Zechariah 10:3 and 11:1–17 condemn the shepherds of Israel. Why does the failure of the shepherds often coincide with the spiritual failure of the people?*

The final section of Zechariah contains two oracles, each beginning with the phrase “the oracle of the word of the Lord” (Zechariah 9:1; 12:1). The first oracle recounts the restoration of God’s people from exile. It begins by announcing God’s judgment on the surrounding nations. As seen previously in the Minor Prophets, the judgment

of these nations was viewed as a blessing for the people of God. One of the primary themes in this first oracle is the contrast created between the coming king who would bring peace to the people and the nations (Zechariah 9:9–13) and the failure of the previous leadership of the people of God (Zechariah 10:3 and 11:1–17). The unfaithful shepherds only led to the people’s destruction.

❓ *Who is the coming king who will lead the people out of exile and into restoration? Why was it odd for Zechariah to anticipate the people’s return and restoration from exile?*



❓ *Why is poor spiritual leadership so challenging to overcome?*

APPLICATION POINT – Zechariah anticipated the return and restoration of the people from exile when the people had already returned to the land. But there was a larger sense in which the exile was not over, coinciding with humanity’s exile from the presence of God. The king described in Zechariah 9:9–13 is fulfilled in Christ. He brings restoration to God’s people, which includes speaking peace to the nations (Zechariah 9:10).

❓ *How does the transformation in Zechariah 12:10–13:9 differ from that in 14:10–21? Who is transformed?*

❓ *What is the key to the transformations in Zechariah 12–14 [Zechariah 13:2–6]?*

The second oracle is divided into two parts that closely mirror each other. They both begin with a vicious assault upon Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:1–9; 14:1–9). Then, the people of God are rescued and transformed. This transformation would begin with the hearts of the people. They would forsake idolatry and false prophets (Zechariah 13:2–4), submitting to God’s will and worshipping Him (Zechariah 14:16). The first transformation is limited to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zechariah 13:1), but the second includes representatives from all nations (Zechariah 14:16). Again, this suggests continuity between what God was doing with the people specifically identified as His in the Old Testament and what He will do for His people gathered from among all the nations.

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- Q: *Zechariah foresaw horrific assaults upon God's people. How can you be prepared for escalating persecution as the return of Christ approaches?*
- Q: *The conclusion of Zechariah emphasizes God's universal rule. How should this inform our understanding of nations and politics today? How does this vision give us hope for the future?*

APPLICATION POINT – Zechariah concludes with a vision of God's universal rule. Human history is replete with the horrors of war and conflict among the nations. These conflicts can be difficult for us to comprehend, both the violence used to carry them out and the depravity that often leads to them. All of this will come to an end when Christ returns in glory. The pain and turmoil brought on by human conflict will be gone, and all people will be united by their submission to God. As conflict and war come today, be reminded that it will not always be this way.

NEXT STEPS

Project planners frequently begin with the result they want and plan backward for what they need to do to get that result. Zechariah and other prophetic texts offer us an opportunity to do the same thing. God has given us a picture of what it will look like when He restores all things. What will it take for our lives to get there? Keep in mind that this restoration ultimately rests on the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but the Bible consistently calls us to be conformed to His image, which is what we will become when God's people are finally fully restored to Him. Make a list of areas in your life that you recognize are in need of Christ's transforming work.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Father, thank you for restoring your creation to yourself, including me. I do not deserve your life-giving work in my life, but you have given it.

Jesus, Zechariah anticipates your coming. Help me to eagerly look forward to your return.

God, help me to see the idolatries in my life and get rid of them by the sanctifying power of your Holy Spirit.

Father, give me a vision, even a glimpse, of what life in your restored creation will be like. Help this vision to guide everything I do.

