

Sermons on Zechariah-Robert Morgan

Introduction - Robert J Morgan is the teaching pastor at [Donelson Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee](#) and is well known for expository messages that are rich in excellent illustrations of Biblical principles.

Zechariah 1:1-6 God's Little Acre of Encouragement

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo: The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: Return to Me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty. Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the Lord Almighty says: Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices. But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your fathers? Then they repented and said, "The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do."

Suppose you inherited a piece of land that was as rich and beautiful as the fabled Ponderosa we glimpse on old episodes of Bonanza. Suppose this acreage consisted of rivers and lakes and mountains and forests. Suppose you had sixty-six acres of dazzling scenery, with trails and roads throughout it. Would you be content to settle down on two or three acres and never see the rest of your property? Would you not want to visit every acre, enjoy every vista, and appreciate every babbling creek and flowery meadow?

Well, we have sixty-six acres in the Bible, for the Bible is made up of sixty-six books; and for the next several weeks I'd like to explore with you one acre that is seldom visited but is remarkably rich and rewarding—and that is the acre we call the book of Zechariah.

Zechariah is the next to the last book of the Old Testament. It has fourteen chapters, and they are remarkable. I'd like to share a quote with you about Zechariah from a well-known Bible reference work called ISBE—the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Under the entry for "Zechariah," this is what we read: The book of Zechariah is "the most messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament."

The author of that assessment told us three things about the book of Zechariah:

First, Zechariah is the most messianic book of the Old Testament. In other words, in proportion to its size, there is more prophetic information about Jesus Christ, the Messiah, in Zechariah than in any other book of the Old Testament.

Second, Zechariah is the most truly apocalyptic book in the Old Testament. The word "apocalyptic" literally means "revelation," and among other things it refers to visions and images about the events of the last days. Zechariah is similar to the book of Revelation in this respect. There are all kinds of unusual images and visions about the End Times.

Third, Zechariah is the most eschatological books of the Old Testament. The word eschatological comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means "last." This book of Zechariah is full of information about the last days. You cannot get a complete picture of what's going to happen in the last days in the Middle East and in Israel and at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem without studying the book of Zechariah.

So I love this little book. But I love it for another reason, too. It is also is one of the most encouraging books of the entire Bible. In fact, the whole purpose of the book of Zechariah is to encourage discouraged workers in the kingdom of God.

I don't know if you realize this or not, but discouragement is the occupational hazard of Christian ministry. Several years ago, I conducted a weekend worship at a particular church in Louisiana. It was a church of several thousand members, and I was only speaking to a small group at a retreat; but we had a great time. As we left the church on Saturday, my host said, "Let me show you

our auditorium.” When we walked in, I almost committed the sin of covetousness. It was a huge place with galleries and balconies and television cameras and the most modern technologies; and I thought to myself, “What would it be like to preach in this sanctuary! What would it be like to pastor this church!”

As we were walking down the hallway to the car to head toward the airport, I saw a wimpish-looking fellow disappear behind a door into a dark room. My host said in a lowered voice, “That’s our pastor. I would introduce you, but he has been so discouraged recently that we have to fly in a counselor every week to deal with him. The numbers are down and the church isn’t growing the way he expected and things haven’t been going very well, and he’s suffering from depression.”

I got on the airplane and thanked the Lord all the way home that I was me and not him!

But I’m not just talking just about pastors and evangelists and missionaries and those in full-time professional ministry, but about Sunday School teachers and small group leaders, and FAITH workers, and children’s teachers, and everyone else. One of Satan’s greatest tools for slowing down the work of Jesus Christ on this earth is to infect Christian workers with the virus of discouragement.

Sometimes people get discouraged with their church, and sometimes they grow discouraged with their Christian life, and sometimes they even feel discouraged with God. Some of the most difficult questions I have to face when people come to me are questions like: Why hasn’t God answered my prayers? Why did God allow this to happen? Why has God forgotten about me?

What do you do when you feel that way? Where do you go?

I can tell you by way of personal testimony that many times through the years as I’ve occasionally faced some discouragement or another in my life or ministry, I have turned to this book of Zechariah.

Every book in the Bible has a distinctive purpose, and the purpose of the book of Zechariah is to encourage God’s people to press on in our work for Him even when the prospects seem bleak and our hearts are laid low. What I’d like to do today is to show you the background for this book, because the story behind the book is a sermon all in itself.

The background for the book of Zechariah is found elsewhere in the Scripture. Turn with me to the end of the book of 2 Chronicles. This chapter presents one of the most tragic days in Jewish history.

2 Chronicles 36:15ff. says about the ancient nation of Judah:

The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through His messengers again and again because He had pity on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against His people and there was no remedy.

He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylonian all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord’s temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God’s temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of His people among you—may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up.

Now turn the page. We come to the book of Ezra who picks up the story:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus

king of Persia to make a proclamation through his realm and to put it into writing: This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel....

And so in 587 B.C. the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple of Solomon was burned to the ground, the nation of Judah ceased to exist, and the survivors of the invasion were driven from the land and scattered to the four winds of heaven. Seventy years later, according to the predications of Jeremiah the prophet, an edict was issued by the Persian Emperor allowing a delegation of Jews to return to the Holy Land to repopulate the ruins of Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple.

Verse 5 says:

Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.

We can hardly imagine the excitement of this remnant of Jews as they prepared to return after all these years to repopulate Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Look at Ezra 2:

Now these are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive to Babylon (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, in company with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, (and others).

Now, I want you to remember those two names: Zerubbabel and Jeshua. They are very important to our story, and we'll see their names mentioned prominently in the book of Zechariah. These two men are the leaders of this remnant who are returning to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel is the political leader, the Governor, and Jeshua is the spiritual leader, the High Priest.

And with these two men are approximately 50,000 Jewish men, women, boys, and girls. Among them, according to Nehemiah 12:16, were an old man named Iddo and his grandson, a little fellow named Zechariah. We don't know what happened to Zechariah's father, for he isn't mentioned in the listing of those who returned to Jerusalem. Many scholars assume he had died, and so we have this quaint and precious picture of an old priest named Iddo returning to Jerusalem with the remnant, and he is accompanied by his little grandson, Zechariah.

Ezra 2:68ff picks up there:

When they arrived at the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site. According to their ability they gave to the treasury of this work 61,000 drachmas of gold, 5,000 minas of silver and 100 priestly garments. The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns.

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem. Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices.

The next step was to clear away the rubble and to lay the foundation stone for the rebuilding of the temple. What a day of rejoicing that was! Look at Ezra 3:10:

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph), with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David the king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: “He is good; His love to Israel endures forever.” And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

I can really identify with this, because throughout the course of my ministry I have launched four building programs. The first was an addition to my former church that gave us more space for classrooms and fellowship. I remember that very well, because the church had accumulated a building fund and for several years had wanted to add to their facilities, but they could never decide how

to go about it. One of the first issues I faced when I arrived there with no pastoral experience was—what are we going to do about our expansion. Katrina and I gathered the church leaders in our little living room and hung a clothes line along the wall. Using clothes pins, we hung up the various proposals and began narrowing down our options until we had a plan.

The second building program was unexpected. One night the parsonage caught fire and burned down, and it almost took us with it. We moved into a trailer, and we led the church to buy a new piece of land and build a new parsonage. We lived in it only a few weeks before coming here to Donelson. The third building program was for our current educational building here, and the fourth was this Celebration Center. Now we're gearing up toward a fifth one, which involves finishing out the lower level as a state-of-the-art children's ministry center and renovating our existing buildings to reflect the necessary changes. I think I'm more excited about this one than about all the others.

There is tremendous excitement when you start a program like that, and we always have a spirit of praise and thanksgiving and anticipation at doing something for the Lord that is visible and concrete and will last for years to come.

And so the people got to work, and the building began going up. That's when the devil sent opposition. Satan doesn't want us expanding our ministries. He doesn't want us building buildings. He doesn't want us pressing ahead with God's agenda. And in Ezra 4, he sent wave after wave of opposition.

When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here."

It was a lie, for they just wanted to infiltrate the project.

But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us."

Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building.

This is exactly what Satan does. He wants to make us discouraged and afraid.

They hired counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Xerxes...

And the chapter goes on to describe the fierce opposition the Palestinians made to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. It's remarkable how relevant this is to our own day. Just think of it. This was approximately 2500 years ago. The temple had been destroyed and was no longer standing on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and the Jews were longing to rebuild their temple and resettle their land. But Arab Palestinians were living on the land and were livid at the thought of that temple being rebuilt.

Things are in exactly the same condition today! Even in this week's newspaper, there is a story that a delegation of 10,000 Jews is going to attempt to visit the Temple Mount in Jerusalem next week, on April 10th, and the Palestinians are doing everything in their power to prevent it.

Well, what happened in Ezra 4? Look at the last verse of the chapter, Ezra 4:24: Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

That verse covers a period of eighteen years. For eighteen years, discouragement prevailed and no further work was done on the temple. Discouragement is crippling, and it can bring the work of the Lord to a total standstill for years and years.

But one thing was happening during these years. That little boy who came with his grandfather was growing up, and God was dealing with his heart and speaking to him. Every day he passed by the ruins of the temple, and he noticed the site was abandoned. There were no workers there. There was nothing but weeds shooting up from the stones. He grew to be a young man, probably in his twenties, and then God choose him to deliver a message, along with another man named Haggai.

Look at Ezra 5: Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied (preached) to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

And by the end of chapter 6, the temple is completed, the building is dedicated, and the Passover is once again being observed in Jerusalem.

What did this young man say? What words could he have used that were so effective? What messages did he deliver that jumpstarted one of the greatest and hardest building projects in history? That is what the book of Zechariah is all about. It's a compilation of the remarkable messages of this young man whom God raised up to encourage the Lord's discouraged workers.

There are three lessons in all this

God Does Not Intend for Us To Be Discouraged

First, God does not intend for you to be discouraged. From God's perspective, discouragement is an illegitimate response to the circumstances of life.

- Think of the twelve spies whom Moses sent to spy out the Promised Land. Ten of them came back discouraged for seemingly logical reasons, and they infected the entire nation with their discouragement; but from God's perspective it was illegitimate, ill-advised and ill-fated.
- Think of the army of Israel in the valley of Elah facing the armies of Philistines and the ravings of a gigantic warrior named Goliath. Their morale collapsed and for seemingly logical reasons. But from God's perspective their discouragement was illegitimate, ill-advised and ill-fated.
- Think of Elijah running from Queen Jezebel after the victory of Carmel. He said, "Lord, these people have killed all the prophets and I am the only one left and they are going to kill me, too!" That seemed to be exactly the truth, but it wasn't; and from God's perspective it was illegitimate, ill-advised, and ill-fated.
- Think of Thomas following the resurrection of Christ. He was as blue as the pavonian sea; but he was wrong to feel that way for Jesus was risen and alive.

Whatever it is we're facing at any particular moment, we may have many emotional responses that are valid; but discouragement is not one of them. Deuteronomy 31:8 says: The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

We Grow Discouraged when We Listen to the Wrong Voices

In Ezra 4, the temple workers listened to the wrong voices. First they listened to their foes; and second, they listened to their fears. The same two voices are speaking to us, and we grow discouraged when we listen to them.

God's Word is His #1 Answer to Discouragement

Third, God's Word is His #1 answer to discouragement. In Ezra 5, the transformation came not because Zechariah performed miracles or called down fire from heaven. He just preached to them. And it was the preaching of God's Word that reinvigorated the workers and set them to building again.

In Hebrews 13, the Bible is called by this title: The Word of Encouragement. This book is the Word of Encouragement from almighty God to each of us; and there are four ways we find encouragement in this book.

First, when it is preached. That's what the book of Zechariah is all about. Zechariah was God's prophet who came and delivered His message to the people, and the preached word was a great encouragement to them. I remember years ago when I was a student at Bible College. I was unsure of the future and not sure what career path to follow. I was unsure about going on for further schooling and about marriage and these great issues that young people face during their college years. We had a banquet at our school and we invited Charles Stanley, the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta, to be our speaker. He came and preached a sermon on God's Guidance, and that message gave me the reassurance and confidence I needed that the Lord was in control of my life and my days and my future. My times were in His hands, and it was for me a word of encouragement.

Then, we find encouragement from the Bible when we read it daily, and when we begin reading where we left off the day before. There's a great power about having a daily reading plan for the Scripture. You can even buy one-year Bibles or other types of devotional Bibles such as Daily Light that give you a section of Scripture to read every day. In my case, I just select a book in the Bible—right now I'm reading through Proverbs—and I read a portion each day. When I finish Proverbs, I might decide to go through

it again or I might select another book. However you do it, just have a daily reading plan of some kind. It's incredible how often, in times of need, the very verse that God has for you is found within your daily reading plan.

One of my favorite preachers is Dr. Warren Wiersbe, whom I'm heard many times. In fact, he and I were on the same program together a couple of years ago at Cedarville College in Ohio. I was very intimidated by it! The other day I was reading his autobiography, and in it he describes a day when he became pensive and depressed. It was a gray, drizzly day and his arthritis was reminding him that he was getting older. He grew concerned about the declining years, and that morning in his quiet time he asked the Lord to give him a specific promise to reassure him as he approached old age. In the course of his regular reading, he came to Isaiah 58:11:

The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

Dr. Wiersbe said, "Thank you, Lord," and that verse became the theme for his senior years and God's special promise to him for that period of his life.

And then, thirdly, we find encouragement through Scriptures that we've memorized and that the Holy Spirit brings to our minds in moments of uncertainty. Joni Eareckson Tada is a well-known author and artist who has been paralyzed from the neck down since a diving accident in the early 1970s. A friend of mine led her to Christ on her sickbed and later wrote her biography. A couple of years ago, Joni wrote about a day when she was in pretty bad shape. Two stubborn pressure sores had forced her to remain flat on her bed for two weeks, and one day she began to feel claustrophobic. She couldn't move a muscle except to turn her head from side to side. She just felt she couldn't take it any longer. Then she looked out the window and saw the sparrows fluttering about the bird feeder; and as she contemplated that the Lord brought to her Matthew 10:29-31: Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Joni later wrote, "That thought...calmed my fears.... For my remaining days in bed, every bird that visited the feeder served as a joyful reminder of God's intimate concern for every detail of my life."

That's why it's important to be in the Scriptures all the time, listening and reading and learning and leaning. We may be tempted to be discouraged with life or with our work for Christ or with the Lord Himself, for we do not always understand His ways. But the Lord Jesus wants to be the Lord and Master of our lives, and He intends to kick discouragement out of our hearts like an unwanted guest who has overstayed his welcome.

Find out what Christ wants you to do for Him, however large or small it seems. Let His Word revive and reinvigorate you, and get back to laboring for the Master from the dawn till setting sun. Who knows how greatly He may use us to reach our generation and to change this world for Him!

Zechariah 1:1-6

The Grace of New Beginnings

Tonight we're continuing our initial studies into the book of Zechariah, the book of encouragement for those who feel discouraged with God, with their Christian lives, and with their Christian ministry. Sometimes we feel like we'd like to scrap everything and get a new start.

When I was a boy in school, we devoted one class period to Robert Frost's great poem, "Birches." It's about the boyish innocence of swinging on Birch trees. Near the end of the poem he says something rather wistful: "I'd like to get away from earth awhile," he wrote, "and then come back to it and begin over."

In school, when I was taking art I was frustrated because I was never very good at drawing or painting. I'd take my page, draw a few lines, and mess up. It felt so good to crumple up the paper, throw it away, and to start with a fresh page.

So many times, we mess up our day or we mess up our task or we mess up our life, and we need a new page. Our God is a God who gives new pages. That's the way Zechariah begins his book. In a sense, the Jewish people had been off the planet and had

now returned to Jerusalem to get a new start. Let's read again Zechariah 1:1-6:

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo: The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: Return to Me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty. Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the Lord Almighty says: Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices. But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your fathers? Then they repented and said, "The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do."

For those who forgot to set their clock and missed this morning's services, let me review very briefly. The background for the book of Zechariah is given in Ezra 1-5 when the remnant of Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. After getting a good start, they grew discouraged by the resistance of the local Palestinians, and so the work on the temple of the Lord stopped for eighteen years. Then Zechariah grew to be a young adult and God touched him and called him to preach to the people. Under the influence of his ministry (and that of Haggai), work resumed on the temple and it was finished. Those incredible and powerful sermons are recorded for us in the book of Zechariah, and the first one occurred in this passage. It had three strands of thought:

God's Warnings are Real

Zechariah talked to the people about the seriousness of God's warnings. His warnings were real and were to be taken seriously. Over and over, God sent prophets to warn Israel and Judah of their spiritual danger and sinfulness;

I've been reading a fascinating account of George Washington's crossing of the Delaware. This happened on Christmas Night, which was bitterly cold, and Washington's army was in terrible shape. He nevertheless led them to cross the Delaware River and attack the Hessian soldiers that occupied Trenton, New Jersey.

Washington's men were freezing, underfed, under clothed, discouraged, sick, and miserable. And yet they pulled off the impossible, beat the Hessians, and turned the tide of the War of Revolution.

But here's the rest of the story.

The Hessian commander was Colonel Johann Rall, and he was attending a local Christmas party that night. He didn't dream that American forces would attack or could attack. As he was enjoying himself at this Christmas party, a local farmer who was a British sympathizer came with a message that Washington's men were on the move and mounting an attack. A servant met the farmer at the door, scribbled down a message, and took it to Colonel Rall. But he was having a good time playing cards, and he didn't want to be interrupted, so he stuffed it in his pocket.

At daybreak, Washington's men attacked, and Colonel Rall was mortally wounded. As the doctor cut away his clothes to treat his wounds, the note fell from his pocket. It was the message warning of Washington's approach. If he had taken the time to read it and heed it, he might have lived to see the Americans defeated and Washington taken prisoner.

Before he died, he had a chance to read the note, and he said, "If I had read this, I would not be here."

He ignored the warning, and as a result he lost the battle and he lost his life and he lost the war.

God warned the Israelites again and again, and He is warning America. Every sermon, every Bible lesson, every natural disaster, every crisis—all of these are part of the early warning system God is giving our nation, calling us to repentance and revival.

God's Wrath is Real

Zechariah also reminded the people that the anger of God was real. Verse 2 says in the literal Hebrew: Jehovah was angry with anger. It means that His anger was intensely aroused by the evil of the people. The Bible speaks of the wrath of God and the anger of Jesus, not in terms of temper tantrums or unrestrained outbursts, but in terms of a righteous and godly indignation against the sin that so mars and harms humanity. It is a judicial response to sin. The Bible says that our God is a consuming fire.

Even those who are not Christians can envision the judgment of God. I want to read you part of an article that appeared in the Jerusalem Post last week. It was entitled: "Koran Scholar: US Will Cease to Exist in 2007." It said:

A thorough analysis of the Koran reveals that the US will cease to exist in the year 2007, according to research published by Palestinian scholar Ziad Silwadi.

The study, which has caught the attention of millions of Muslims worldwide, is based on in-depth interpretations of various verses in the Koran. It predicts that the US will be hit by a tsunami larger than that which recently struck southeast Asia.

"The tsunami waves are a minor rehearsal in comparison with what awaits the US in 2007," the researcher concluded in his study. "The Holy Koran warns against the Omnipotent Allah's force. A great sin will cause a huge flood in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans."

Silwadi... is not a world-renowned scholar. He said he decided to publish the findings of his research "out of a sense of responsibility because what is about to happen is extremely shocking and frightening." His fear, he said, is that the world economy, which relies heavily on the US dollar, would be deeply affected by the collapse of the US.

It would be fair to say that the world would be better off with a US that is not a superpower and that does not take advantage of weak nations than a world where this country does not exist at all," he added. "The world will certainly lose a lot if and when this disaster occurs because of the great services that American society has rendered to the economy, industry and science."

Silwadi said he reached the conclusion that several suras (chapters) in the Koran that talk about punishment for those who perpetrate heinous sins actually refer to the US....

In his lengthy study, which is being circulated in many Muslim countries, Silwadi noted that the US has often been compared to a tree that grows very quickly and bears fruit, but has no roots. In an attempt to find a reference to this metaphor in the Koran, Silwadi said he counted 1776 verses from the beginning of the Koran until he reached (the verse which says): "And the parable of an evil word is as an evil tree pulled up from the earth's surface; it has no stability."

This view has no truthfulness or credibility to it; yet even a stopped clock is right twice a day. There is a coming day of judgment for the United States and for all the world, not from the Allah of Islam, but from the true God of Israel and of His Church.

God's Wondrous Grace is Real

Having reminded the people of God's warnings and His wrath, however, Zechariah pinpoints God's wondrous grace. The prophet's first words were:

Return to me and I will return to you. Do not make the same mistake as your forefathers....

Let's have a new beginning. Come back. Come home. Put the past behind you. Bury the mistakes in the graveyard of forgetfulness, and let's start all over again.

One of the great heroes of Christian history was Columba, who was born in Ireland in 521. His grandfather had been baptized by St. Patrick himself, and Columba's parents were believers of royal stock.

Though he had a yearning for learning and for the Lord, Columba was strong-willed and combative. He possessed a powerful presence with strong features and an authoritative voice; but his fiery temper and iron will lingered, even after becoming a home missionary to his fellow Irish. One day, Columba copied the contents of a book without permission, and when the owner requested the copy Columba refused. The argument took on a life of its own, involving more and more people. Eventually a war erupted in which 3000 men lost their lives.

Full of remorse, Columba committed himself to win as many to Christ as had died in the war. Thus he left Ireland at age 42 to become a missionary to Scotland. With twelve companions, he established himself on Iona, a bleak, foggy island just off the Scottish coast, three miles long and a mile and a half wide. He built a crude monastery which soon became a training center for missionaries, one of the most venerable and interesting spots in the history of Christian missions. It was a lighthouse against heathenism.

From Iona, Columba made missionary forays into Scotland, converting large numbers. An entire tribe of pagans, the Picts, were won to the faith. He confronted the Druids, contesting with them over their alleged magical arts and demonic powers. Legends suggest he performed miracles to counter theirs, convincing the populace of the Gospel's superior power. He spent the rest of his life as the apostle to Scotland and as a trainer of missionaries.

That's the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps tonight you need to be more aware and more responsive to God's warnings and to His wrath; but perhaps you need to respond to His wondrous grace. You can, in effect, leave the world awhile, hidden in Christ, and come back to start all over again by His grace and glory.

Return to Me, He says, and I will return to you

Zechariah 1:1-17

Forward to the Future

Our Scripture reading today is from the book of Zechariah, chapters 1 and 2. We're going to cover a lot of ground today, but I think you'll find it interesting. This is a part of the Bible we don't read as often as we should, and so perhaps you'll find this interesting and encouraging.

It's impossible to appreciate the lesson that God has for us today without knowing something of the background for this text. In a nutshell, here's what we have. Because of their exceedingly sinful and immoral ways, the nation of Judah declined in power and fell to the armies of Babylon in 587 B.C. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple was burned to the ground. Seventy years passed, and a new world power rose to prominence, the empire of Persia, and King Cyrus issued a decree allowing a large delegation of Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and restore the worship of Jehovah. Among those returning was an old priest named Iddo and his grandson, Zechariah. The repatriated Jews started working on the project, but it was a very daunting task and they faced constant threats and opposition from the Palestinians who now occupied that territory. So they more-or-less gave up, and work on the temple ceased for eighteen years. In the meantime, this boy Zechariah grew up; and when he was old enough he began to preach messages of encouragement to these Jewish returnees, and under the influence of the preaching of this young man, they were encouraged to resume work on the temple and to complete it.

Zechariah is thus the prophet of encouragement to those who are discouraged with God, with God's work, or with the Christian life.

Now there are a lot of reasons today to grow discouraged, and from time to time in my life and ministry I've grown discouraged. And discouragement is one of our greatest enemies. As I prepared this message, I thought of an old story that I had once read in the devotional classic, *Springs in the Valley*, and I took time to thumb through the book and find it. It told of a legend of a man who found a barn where Satan kept his seeds ready to be sown in the human heart, and on finding the seeds of discouragement more numerous than the others, learned that those seeds could be made to grow almost anywhere. When Satan was questioned he reluctantly admitted there was one place in which he could never get them to thrive. "And where is that?" asked the man. Satan replied sadly, "In the heart of a grateful person."^[1]

If we have a thankful heart, we're more-or-less immune to discouragement. But sometimes we have to work on it, and through the years I've found the prophet Zechariah to be one of my greatest helps in times when I've struggled with discouragement. So as we read the book of Zechariah, we need to ask ourselves this question. What does this prophet have to say to me? And the answer is: Cast out discouragement and get to work.

Last Sunday night we looked at the first paragraph of this book which gives us the first reason why we should cast out discouragement, which is this: God allows for new beginnings. He gives us a fresh start, and He does it despite repeated failures in the past. He releases us from past failures. Let's just skim that before plunging into the rest of today's text:

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo: The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Return to me," declares the Lord Almighty, "and I will return to you."

In other words, God has not cast you off forever. Yes, you have messed up, you have blown it, you have had some rough days, you have wandered off; but you can return. You can have a fresh start. Let's put the past behind us, and let's press on with the new beginnings that God gives us through His abundant grace in Christ Jesus.

Now, let's go on to today's lesson. Here is another source of divine and inspired encouragement. God not only releases us from

past failure, He gives us a bright future. And now we are going to enter into one of the most remarkable night-scenes in the Bible. Let's begin reading with Zechariah 1:7:

On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo. During the night I had a vision...

Because of our knowledge of ancient history as it relates to the Persian Empire, we can actually date this vision very specifically. It happened on the evening of February 15, in the year 519 B.C. The book of Zechariah, chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 give us an account of eight remarkable visions that Zechariah has during the course of this one night.

Zechariah had a startling series of visions—eight different visions—that came to him from God during the course of that one night. Just so you'll get this all in your mind, the contents of Zechariah 1-6 are a series of eight remarkable visions given to the prophet Zechariah on the night of February 15, 519 B.C.

They were not just written for ancient Israel; they are for us. God included them in the inspired Word for our use today. The immediate interpretation was for the people of Zechariah's day, but the applications are there for us, too, to encourage us in our times of discouragement.

The first three visions are in chapters 1 and 2, and they tell us that God wants to give us a bright future. Let's look at the first vision together.

During the night I had a vision—and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown, and white horses. I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are." Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth."

In other words, Zechariah saw a reconnaissance patrol, a group of strange horses and riders, standing in a valley. Perhaps it was the Kidron Valley on the east side of Jerusalem. They were standing in a grove of myrtle trees. This was evidently a group of angelic agents whom the Lord had sent to patrol the earth and to reconnoiter the world scene.

The Bible teaches that there is a zone or a sphere or a dimension around this world which cannot be seen by normal human eyesight, and it is inhabited by angels and demons. And the Bible indicates that these angels and demons have more to do with world events than we realize. And they are more involved in our lives than we realize.

The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 6: For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

The books of Daniel and Ezekiel indicate that demonic powers are assigned to evil world rulers and dictators. How else do you explain some of the incredible inhuman atrocities that have occurred in human history? I don't have time to explore this in the Bible, but for our purposes today let's just focus on Zechariah 1 where we are given a glimpse of a mysterious reconnaissance patrol, a mounted group of angels who had been sent to patrol the earth. Let's read on in Zechariah 1:11:

And they reported to the angel of the Lord...

That title, the angel of the Lord, is very often a code word in the Old Testament for the pre-incarnate Messiah. In other words, it was very likely Jesus Christ, God the Son, who had come down to this valley to meet with the angels.

And they reported to the angel of the Lord, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace."

Now, on the surface of it, that sounds great. But the fact was, the world was at rest and at peace because of the heavy-handed, oppressive, brutal reign and rule of the Persian Empire. The fact was, the nation of Israel no longer existed, and there was no active political movement to change that. That explains the ensuing conversation between the angel of the Lord and the great God of heaven in the next verse, verse 12:

Then the angel of the Lord said, "Lord (Jehovah) Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?"

Sometimes we grow discouraged because we're in a situation that just doesn't seem to be getting any better. That's what we were dealing with here. Why doesn't God solve our problems more quickly? Why doesn't He resolve our issues right now? Time is a funny commodity. Take five seconds for example. If you're having a good time, playing at the beach or enjoying a relaxing vacation, five seconds isn't long enough. It's like the blink of an eye. But if you're in a dungeon being tortured with a branding iron, five seconds seems like an eternity.

Sometimes when we're in life's dungeons, time moves very slowly and we wonder why God doesn't intervene more quickly. Why doesn't He answer our prayers more promptly? Why doesn't He solve our problems instantly? In this passage, the Jews had been exiled for seventy years, the work on the temple had been suspended for eighteen years, and the people were growing older. They were weary with waiting. And so the question was:

Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years.

And now I want to show you one of those great verses that make Zechariah so special. Look at verse 13:

So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.

Some time ago in my Bible, I underlined those words: The Lord spoke kind and comforting words.

Whenever you have a need in your life, whenever you are discouraged, whenever you are fainthearted, and you open the Bible for help, the Lord will speak kind and comforting words to you. I've been reading a little book by Anne Graham Lotz simply entitled *Why?* and on the very day I was preparing this message, I read something there on this very subject.

One day, Anne Lotz received a terrible phone call from her son, Jonathan, who had just returned from seeing the doctor and had been diagnosed with cancer. Because the doctor surmised that the cancer had been undetected for more than six years, the prognosis was grim. On the day of Jonathan's surgery, Anne rose early to go to the hospital, but before leaving she dropped to her knees for her morning Scripture reading in the devotional book she uses, *Daily Light*. The verse for that day said: He...preserves the way of His saints. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholds him with His hand. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all...

Anne wrote, "The peace that penetrated my heart as I claimed these promises for my son burst into hope and joy! The emotional nightmare I had been living dissipated before I even got to the hospital! I was able to be with Jonathan in total confidence that all was well. And it was! Because I knew that God would be with us regardless of the outcome, that all of Jonathan's circumstances would ultimately be for his own good and God's glory, and that God would be in our midst. I knew we could trust God to keep His Word."^[2]

When we have a need in our lives and we open His Word, God always speaks to us kind and comforting words.

Now, what kind and comforting words did the Lord specifically give to Zechariah in this chapter? Let's read on:

So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. Then the angel who was speaking to me said, "Proclaim this word: 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.'"

If the word "jealous" doesn't make sense to you there, just substitute the word "zealous." That's the idea. God is zealous for His people, and zealous in keeping His covenant love for His people.

"I am very (zealous) for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity."

In other words, I did allow the Babylonians to come and discipline my people, but they went too far.

Therefore, this is what the Lord says: "I will return to Jerusalem, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem," declares the Lord Almighty. Proclaim further: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.'"

This is a huge and significant promise. I don't have time to trace this for you in the Bible, but when King Solomon built the first temple and dedicated it to the Lord, the glorious presence of God Himself fell from heaven and burst into the inner sanctum of the temple and there God dwelled among His people in a rather literal sense for hundreds of years. But the increasing sinfulness of the people of God spoiled all that, and according to the vivid images given to us by the prophet Ezekiel, the glory of God's presence withdrew from the temple, departed from Jerusalem, and vanished from Israel in the days immediately preceding the Babylonian invasion. Now the Lord says, "I will return to Jerusalem with mercy."

How is this prophecy fulfilled? In two ways.

First, it was into this very temple that the Lord Jesus Christ—the glory of God, the presence of God, Emmanuel, God with Us—it was into this very temple that He came. The Jewish builders didn't fully realize that God intended for them to rebuild the temple as a place of ministry for God Himself made flesh! Let me show you a parallel passage. I said last week that there were two prophets who worked side-by-side at this time – the young man Zechariah, and an older prophet named Haggai. The book of Haggai comes right before the book of Zechariah, and I'd like for you to turn back to Haggai 2:6ff:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come...

Who is the Desire of All Nations? It's Christ! Remember that stanza we sing at Christmas in Wesley's hymn, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"? "Come, Desire of Nations, come. Fix in us Thy humble home."

I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the Lord Almighty. And in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty.

This is a phenomenal set of promises! Just think of it. These poor exiles, what could they do? King Solomon had an almost unlimited fortune with which to build the first temple. Everything was gold and marble and ivory and imported cedar from Lebanon. The finest craftsmen in the world were summoned to Jerusalem, and the resulting temple was the finest piece of architecture the world had ever seen.

Now it was all gone, and in its place a handful of unskilled workers without adequate resources were trying to do their best to restore it; but they could never come close to the splendor of the original temple.

Yet God said, "Don't be discouraged! In my providence and in my plan, the glory of the Second Temple is going to be far exceed anything Solomon ever dreamed of, for in its courts and corridors and cloisters will walk the Messiah Himself, teaching His sermon, performing His miracles, sharing His Gospel, and extending His peace.

What a word of encouragement! It reminds me of John Oxenham's little poem:

Is your place a small place?

Tend it with care!—

He set you there.

Is your place a large place?

Guard it with care!—

He set you there.

Whate'er your place, it is

Not yours alone, but His

Who set you there.[3]

It's like the little boy's lunch of two fish and five small loafs of bread—but think of how the Lord used it.

There's an old song that says, "Little is much when God is in it." One of the most encouraging things that I know is that we don't have to do great things for the Lord to do great things for the Lord. He uses us in ways far greater than we know, and nothing that is

done in His Name is ever worthless, useless, or vain. A few weeks ago, I told a true story about how a Scottish plowboy whistled hymns as he worked in the field, and unknown to him, that simple act of witness and worship won a family to Christ and indirectly influenced succeeding generations for the kingdom.

I recently read a book by seminary professor Robert Saucy who knew of a patient in a Turkish hospital. Someone came by—no one knows who or when or why—but he gave the patient a Bible. When the patient returned home, his new book created controversy. The Muslim teacher in the village snatched it from his hands, tore out its pages, and threw them into the street. A passing grocer collected the pages to use as wrapping paper. By this means, the pages of the Bible were scattered all over town. When a Bible agent arrived later wanting to distribute Bibles, he found scores of people eager to buy the Scriptures for themselves, for the torn pages had whetted their appetite for the Word of God.[4]

The greatest things we can do for Christ are often little things, committed to Him and rendered in humble service as an act of ministry.

So this promise in Zechariah 1 was fulfilled by Christ's coming into this very temple five hundred years later; but there is another fulfillment yet for the future. One of the great themes of Zechariah is the Second Coming of the Messiah. And I believe these words will have their ultimate fulfillment when He comes again. This is a great Millennial promise:

Therefore, this is what the Lord says: "I will return to Jerusalem, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem," declares the Lord Almighty. Proclaim further: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.'"

God has given us a lot of prophecy in the Bible. In fact, this book of Zechariah is 69 percent prophecy. If you total up all the verses in the fourteen chapters of Zechariah, there are 211. Of those a full 144 are prophetic in nature.[5] They deal with the future. The reason God has given us so much prophecy in the Bible is because He wants us to anticipate the future. In times of discouragement, God wants us to know that we can have a new beginning, a fresh start; and that we have a glorious future. Things are not always going to be as they are now. We can lift up our heads, for our redemption is drawing near.

1 Mrs. Charles E. Cowman, *Springs in the Valley* (Los Angeles: Cowman Publications, Inc., 1939), p. 250, entry for September 3rd.

2 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Final Perseverance of the Saints—Exposition of Chapters 8:17-39* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 24.

2 Anne Graham Lotz, *Why?* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2004), pp. 86-87.

3 John Oxenham, *Bees in Amber* (American Tract Society, 1913), p. 121.

4 Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), p. 80.

5 Tim LaHaye, *Prophecy Study Bible* (AMG Publishers, 2001), p. 1089

Zechariah 3

Changing Your Mental Image of Yourself

We have begun a series of messages into the Old Testament book of Zechariah, and I'm calling this God's Special Book of Encouragement.

The people of the Hebrews had been defeated by their enemies, exiled from their land, and scattered to the four winds of heaven. The presence of Jehovah had literally departed from the temple. They were a broken people, and every indication said they would be lost to history, swallowed up by the Gentiles, and stripped of their divine destiny. A remnant had returned to the ruins of the city of Jerusalem to try to rebuild the ancient temple, but it was long, hard, backbreaking, discouraging work—and they had grown discouraged and had done nothing for eighteen years. It's terrible to be discouraged for eighteen years, or for eighteen months, or for eighteen days, or for eighteen hours, or for eighteen minutes. God doesn't want us to live in the valley of discouragement, so He gave us this book of Zechariah.

Zechariah started preaching to these discouraged Hebrews, and his words struck a cord. It stirred the people to revival and resilience. It infused them with fresh strength and courage. And historians tell us that it roused the nation and played a major role in the reversal of fortunes and in the eventual victories of the Israeli people. What did the prophet say that was so encouraging?

- In his opening message in Zechariah 1:1-6, we're reminded that we can have a new beginning. "Return to me," says the Lord, "and I will return to you."
- In the next message that comprises the middle of chapter 1, we're reminded that we have a bright future.
- In his third message found in the final paragraph of chapter 1, we're reminded that we have a defeated enemy.
- In his fourth message, found in chapter 2, we're told that we have a personal God who is a wall of fire around us and the glory in our midst, and that we are the apple of God's eye.
- Now today we come to the fifth message, found in chapter 3, and in this message we're told that we have a complete pardon. Let's read this entire chapter together.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."

Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."

Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.

The angel of the Lord gave this charge to Joshua: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.

"Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.

"In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the Lord Almighty."

This is the fourth in a series of visions that took place on the evening of February 15, 519 B.C., and it's one of the most remarkable nocturnal scenes in the Bible. Zechariah had a series of eight visions on this one evening. First he saw an angelic patrol among the myrtle trees, a vision studied last Sunday morning. Then last Sunday night we looked at visions two and three, vision of four horns and the vision of a man with a measuring line. Now today's text is the fourth vision, and it has to do with reassuring the high priest Joshua and all his associates and all of us that when God forgives us, He forgives abundantly. Look at the way he begins in verse 1:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest...

This is not the Joshua that led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land in the book of Joshua. This was a Joshua who lived hundred of years later who was the High Priest of the Reconstruction Period. Two men, Joshua and Zerubbabel, had led the remnant of the Jews back to the ruined city of Jerusalem to rebuild their city and their temple. Joshua was the spiritual leader of the people and Zerubbabel was the political leader. But they had failed. They had caved into pressure. They had been intimidated by the local Palestinians. They had been cowed by the Persian authorities. They had been overwhelmed with the task. They felt like utter failures, and they were ashamed of themselves. Their mental image they had of themselves was self-defeating.

It's like that with us, too. One of the things we have to deal with in life is our sins and our guilt and our shame and our regrets. They create in our own minds a mental image of ourselves that is self-defeating. The other day in Michigan a young man stood before a high school assembly and he warned the students against drinking and driving. His name was Chad Barlow, and he was accompanied to the school by police officers because Chad is a prisoner. He killed two people by driving drunk on his 21st birthday.

One of the victims was his best friend. Here's what he told the students:

I can't tell you how many times I wished I died in that accident. I took two friends away from their families. What I saw that night will never leave my head...I wake up each morning and then remember that my best friend is dead because of me.

How do you live with something like that? Well, in a sense, every single one of us feel that way to some extent about something that has occurred in our past. All of us have sinned, and that sin has, in some way or another, affected another person. We have hurt other people, and we have hurt ourselves, and we have sinned against God. The Bible teaches that all of us have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. Someone here today is carrying around the ball-and-chain of guilt and shame and remorse and regret. It affects our self-image, our sense of self-worth, and the way that we view ourselves. That's the way the High Priest of Israel, Joshua, felt.

Part of the problem for the remnant had been feelings of guilt and unworthiness. They hadn't plunged into this temple re-building program because they felt so unworthy. Feelings of worthlessness and guilt and shame can shred our self-image and drain away any motivation we have to do something for the Lord. It may be that someone is here today, and the reason you aren't teaching a Bible study or working in our Sunday School or singing in the choir is because you feel guilty and unworthy and too ashamed of yourself.

How do you change your mental image of yourself?

Change Your Mental Image of Forgiven Sin

When we come to Jesus Christ and nail our sins to His cross and plead His blood as we confess and turn from our sins, we are forgiven and those sins are abundantly pardoned. And when God forgives us, we can forgive ourselves. But what if we still don't feel forgiven? Well, we have to change our mental image of forgiven sin, and Zechariah 3 gives us three pictures of the pervasiveness of God's pardon.

First, We're Defendants Represented in a Courtroom. We're like defendants in a courtroom who are being represented by the best lawyer in all of time or space. Read verse 1 again with me:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord....

That is Old Testament code for Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, the pre-incarnate Son of God.

...and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

Here Joshua was standing as a guilty defendant in the court of heaven. Satan was the prosecuting attorney, and his briefcase contained the total files of everything Joshua had ever done. All his evil thoughts. All his secret sins. All his faults and failures. All the things he desperately wants to keep hidden. All of it is there. The devil has a file with your name, too, and with mine. In Revelation 12:10 the devil is called the accuser of the brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night.

I believe that Satan studies your life constantly. There was an item in the newspaper this week about a Peeping Tom in Memphis who uses night vision goggles, and he is terrorizing a whole part of the city. Well, the devil is the ultimate Peeping Tom, and he uses night vision goggles. He spots every inconsistency. He sees every sin. He delights in every failure. And he flies to heaven like a fiendish tattletale who takes wicked delight in reminding God of all your faults and failures. At the same time, he knows how to turn our own faults and failures into scourges with which to flog us. There are some people whose self-images are so low because of their sinfulness that they just can't seem to break free. The devil has you bound. I know a young man who was raised in church and who has had periods of great enthusiasm for Jesus Christ. But he fell into sin and committed immorality with a girl, then with another, then with another. And now he feels so guilty that he doesn't feel worthy to come to church. He feels like the biggest hypocrite that ever walked the earth. He doesn't feel worthy to read his Bible. He thinks God won't hear him if he prays. He's ashamed of his behavior, and yet he feels trapped in it. He came to see me just the other day, and there was a layer of depression that covered him like a blanket.

That's the way Joshua felt, and he was supposed to be the High Priest of Israel. He was saying to himself, "How can I help other people when I'm so very guilty myself!"

So Joshua was standing in the courtroom of heaven before Almighty God, the presiding Judge, and Satan was the prosecuting

attorney. But there was another figure in the courtroom. Joshua had an Advocate with the Father. Jesus Christ, the Angel of the Lord, was there, to defend him.

This is New Testament teaching! It was given in the Old Testament, on the night of February 15, 519 B.C., yet it presents New Testament theology. The New Testament teaches in Revelation 12:10, that Satan appears before God the Father pointing out all the faults and failures of the high priest of Israel. He is the accuser of the brethren. But we have an advocate! We have someone who speaks on our behalf, who intercedes for us, who is our defense attorney, and who pleads His own blood for our sakes. First John 2:1-2 says:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

In the whole wide, long history of the human race, in the whole timeline of planet earth, there has been only one answer for sin and guilt and shame and regret—and that is in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. We can only say:

I have no other sacrifice. I have no other plea.
It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.

Second, We're Sticks Pulled from the Fire. That brings us to the second picture of God's forgiveness—we're not only defendants represented in a courtroom, we are sticks pulled from the fire.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

What does that mean? Here's a bonfire, and in the bonfire is a stick someone has tossed. The flames have begun to do their work on this stick. It's grown hot, and the sap is bubbling, and the bark is yielding to the flames, and soon the stick will be turned to ashes. But a man nearby says, "That stick is too good to burn. That stick is useful. I can make a beautiful carving from that piece of wood. I can use that stick for a walking cane." And he reaches into the fire and snatches the stick from the flames.

That stick represents you and me. We'd been cut down by sin and discarded by Satan and thrown into the fires of God's wrath and of hell. But Jesus Christ came walking by. He saw you. He saw me. He said, "That stick's worth something. I can do something with that stick. I can make a beautiful carving. I can make a walking cane. I can make a rod with which to do miracles. I can salvage that piece of wood."

And He reached out with the hand of grace and snatched us from the flames. And now He stands before the throne as our great divine Advocate, representing us before the Father, defending us from the barbs of Satan, and serving as the atoning sacrifice for our sin.

Now we come to the third picture here of God's pardon: We're People Dressed in New Clothes.

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.

The Bible teaches that all our righteous acts are as filthy rags, but when we come to Christ we are clothed in His righteousness.

Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

Visualize that scene in your mind. If you're struggling with guilt and shame and the sins of the past, if you've confessed that sin to God, then put yourself in this chapter. Put yourself in this story. See yourself standing in filthy rags, but you remove those, you take a shower in the blood of Christ that is sprinkled over your life, and you have a new wardrobe laid out for you. Visualize yourself being dressed in the righteousness of Christ. Keep that picture in front of you. Every night go to bed replaying that scene in your mind. Every morning, mull over it as you go to work. It's a biblical picture, and it has the power of Scripture and the power of Christ

behind it.

So how do you change your image of yourself? Think of yourself as a defendant being represented by Jesus Christ Himself in a courtroom. Think of yourself as a stick being snatched from the fire and pressed into service in the Master's hand. Think of yourself as a person who has exchanged a set of filthy rags for the garments of righteousness.

So the first thing is—change your mental image of forgiven sin. The next thing that Zechariah teaches us is to...

Change Your Mental Image of the Forgiving Savior

If you're still struggled with the residual effects of cancelled sin, perhaps it is because you have an inadequate mental image of Jesus Christ Himself. We have to change our mental image of the forgiving Savior, and here in Zechariah 3, Jesus Christ is presented to us prophetically in three ways.

First, He is our Advocate, as we've already seen. The picture we have of Jesus Christ here in the fifth century B.C. is exactly the same as the one John gives us five hundred years later in 1 John 2 when he says, as we've already seen, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. Have you ever visualized Jesus Christ as your lawyer, your defense counsel? That's a biblical picture of Him.

Second, He is our Branch. Look at verse 8: Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come.

In other words, this vision has prophetic and apocalyptic significance. It really is about the future.

I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.

Recently I finished a devotional book on the names of Jesus in the Scripture. I found over 300 different names and titles of Christ in the Bible, and one of the most vivid is this title, The Branch. This was a name for Christ used by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah.

What does it mean?

Isaiah 11:1 says about the coming Messiah:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
From his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him...

In other words, when the nation of Judah was destroyed by the armies of Babylon, it looked as though the house of David had come to an end. The last Davidic king, Zechariah, died in captivity in Babylon. The dynasty of David was cut down like a tree, but a shoot is going to sprout up from the roots—a Branch who will come and bear fruit.

Isaiah 4:2 says:

In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious,
and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory
of the survivors of Israel.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 says:

The days are coming, declares the Lord,
When I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
A King who will reign wisely
And do what is just and right in the land.
In His days Judah will be saved
And Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which He will be called:
The Lord our Righteousness.

In other words, you can visualize Jesus Christ as a tree of grace with thick, heavy, overhanging branches of forgiveness, offering the fruit of righteousness for you. I think you could picture it in your mind's eye like this. Here you are on a hot summer's day. You're parched in the bright sunshine; but here is a beautiful tree planted by rivers of water, and you rest under that tree in that refreshing place, enjoying the summer's breeze, and reaching up for an apple and there you are, resting securely in the shadow of the grace of Jesus Christ. It's similar to the picture we have in the last verse of this chapter: In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree, declares the Lord Almighty.

This is biblical mental imaging! Think of Jesus Christ as your Advocate. Think of Him as a tree of forgiveness and grace under which you can reside. And third...

Think of Him as a diamond. Continue reading in verse 8ff:

Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See, the stone (that is, the jewel, the diamond) I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes (facets) on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it, says the Lord Almighty, and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.

In the Old Testament, the High Priest was given a set of jewels to wear on the breastplate of His clothing, but now that was gone. The precious stones that represented his priesthood had been lost, taken by the Babylonians, plundered by the enemy. But Zechariah said, "Don't worry about what is gone, what is lost, what's in the past. Put that behind you. Look, here is a precious stone more beautiful than any ever before seen. Look at all the facets. The word "seven" in the Bible is a word of perfection and completeness. This is the most beautiful cut stone in all the world. And it is yours.

And the Lord says to you and me: Don't worry about what you've lost in the past. What's gone is gone. But look, here is something so very much greater. He is a precious stone, here is a jewel, here is a diamond, here is your Christ. Picture Him like your most prized possession.

So if you're struggling with guilt and shame and regrets and a battered self-image today, bring your sins to Jesus Christ. Bring your guilt and nail it to His cross. Bring your regrets and give them all to Jesus who died on the cross, shed His blood, and rose again for you. And begin deliberately changing your mental images of your sin and your Savior.

See yourself as a defendant represented by a crack attorney. See yourself as a stick snatched from the fire. See yourself as a person given a new set of clothes.

And see Jesus as your Advocate. As a branch from the root of David who spreads the limbs of His grace over your life. As a diamond more precious than anything you might have lost. And say:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name

Zechariah 5 & 6

A Sinless Tomorrow

After fifty-two years of being on this planet, I've finally figured something out: I only have two problems in life. The first is the sin and stupidity that's around me, the evil in our society. My other problem is the sin and stupidity that's within me, the evil that wants to dominate my own heart.

Increasingly now, when I think of heaven, I'm looking forward to an environment in which sin and stupidity will not be around me or within me. I'm coming to realize that one of the greatest things about eternity will be the absence of sin.

In our study of Zechariah, we're coming to a passage in which Zechariah encourages the people of his day with the promise of a sinless tomorrow. We're in an unusual series of messages from the Old Testament book of Zechariah. It's the next-to-the-last book

of the Old Testament, and it isn't very well known; but it should be! I think it's one of the greatest books in the Old Testament, and it was originally written specifically to encourage people who had given up on the Lord's work.

Here's the background. The story of the Old Testament is largely the story of the history of the nation of Judah, and in 587 B.C., that nation was destroyed by invading hordes of Babylonians. Several years later in the providence of God, a delegation of Jewish patriots returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, to restore the worship of Jehovah, and to reestablish their nation. But they ran into great difficulty. There were financial obstacles and political obstacles. As a result, the work on the rebuilding of the temple stopped and for eighteen years nothing happened. Then two prophets stepped into the gap and began to preach. Their names were Haggai and Zechariah. Evidently, Haggai was an older gentleman and he started out first. Then Zechariah, who was probably in his twenties, took up the chorus. And under the preaching of these two men, the people were encouraged, the work was jumpstarted, and the temple was finished in short order.

So the book of Zechariah is a record of the sermons that roused and revived a discouraged people. That's why I love this book. Sometimes we're prone to become discouraged in life. We may even grow discouraged with God, or with our spiritual lives, or with our work for the Lord. And I've always found Zechariah to be good therapy when my heart is trending toward discouragement.

What did Zechariah say that was so courageous and compelling? The first part of the book is a record of eight visions that came to Zechariah on the night of February 15, 519 B.C. This is one of the most unusual night-scenes in the Bible. On this one night, Zechariah has a series of eight visions, and some of them were very strange. Each one of these visions conveyed a different message. Each contained a different encouragement. This morning we're going to finish our study of these eight visions, so let me review them for you.

In vision #1, we learn we have a bright future: Zechariah saw a mounted angelic patrol who had been surveying world conditions and who reported that the nations of the world were at peace while Israel was still in captivity. The Lord then gave Zechariah and the Israelites kind and comforting words, assuring them that they had a bright future. Judah and Jerusalem would be rebuilt and the temple would be reconstructed.

In vision #2, we learn we have a defeated enemy: Zechariah saw the four horns that had blown the signal for foreign armies to invade Jerusalem. Then he saw four craftsmen who beat and refashioned those horns, indicating that God was going to judge the nations that had scattered the Jews.

In vision #3, we learn we have a personal God: Zechariah saw a man with a measuring line, a surveyor, who promised that Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and that God would return and dwell in that city and be a wall of fire around her and the glory in her midst.

In vision #4, we learn we have a complete pardon: Zechariah saw Joshua the High Priest standing before the Lord, dressed in filthy rags. The Lord removed his rags, forgave his sins, and clothed him with rich garments of righteousness. This would take place through the coming of One called the Branch who would remove the sin from the land in a single day.

In vision #5, we learn we have a supernatural power: Zechariah saw a golden lampstand and two olive trees, and the great lesson was: "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

Now today we are coming to visions 6, 7, and 8, the final three visions that came to the young prophet on this never-to-be-forgotten evening, and I'm going to group these three together because they seem to me to deal with the same theme and to reinforce one another. They tell us that we have a sinless future.

Now hold on to your hat, because these final visions get "curiouser and curiouser." The first is the vision of the flying scroll, found in Zechariah 5:1-4:

The Flying Scroll: Sin Banished from the Nation of Israel

I looked again—and there before me was a flying scroll. He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide."

You just have to visualize this on your own. When I was a boy I read about Indian or Arabian magi who traveled on flying carpets, and sometimes I would drag a rug into my room and pretend it was my own flying carpet. Well, this was like a flying carpet in a way. It was a scroll, but it was unrolled; and it was large—thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. Those measurements are very significant,

because they were the exact measurements of the Holy Place. The Holy Place was the room inside the temple that represented the dwelling place of God among His people, and the Jewish patriots were in the process of reconstructing this Holy Place and rebuilding this temple. And the scroll flying through the air represented the commands and the laws of the Holy God. In fact, we know what was written on this flying document. It was a reminder of God's commands not to steal or to lie, not to commit thievery or to swear falsely. Read on:

And he said to me, "This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. The Lord Almighty declares, "I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain on his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.

In other words, this vision was God's promise that He was going to judge the evildoers who were causing problems in society and banish them. God is going to judge sin and remove it from the land.

In our society, we try to do this as much as we can; and that's what our prisons are for. When someone kills someone else, if they are caught and convicted, we try to send them to prison. But it's an imperfect system, and sometimes the guilty go free and the innocent are wrongfully convicted. But one day, God will judge and purify this world, and this is a specific promise that one day He would judge and purify the nation of Israel. This very same promise is given in a more literal way in Zechariah 13:

On that day a foundation will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land."

I believe this will be fulfilled with Christ comes again and establishes His millennial kingdom in Israel at the end of time. These are prophetic pictures, but how encouraging! There's coming a day when sin and stupidity will be banished from the land of Israel.

Now let's go on to the next vision, which is one of the most bizarre pictures in the Bible.

The Flying Basket: Sin Banished from the Pages of History

Then the angel who was speaking to me came forward and said to me, "Look up and see what this is that is appearing." I asked, "What is it?" He replied, "It is a measuring basket." And he added, "This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land."

Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman! He said, "This is wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth. Then I looked up—and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth.

"Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me. He replied, "To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place."

This vision is extraordinarily significant. Zechariah looks up and sees two storks flying through the air, and they are carrying a basket between them, something like a large bushel basket. As Zechariah watches, a woman sticks her head out of the top of the basket. She conveys the image of pure evil and wickedness, and her head is shoved into the basket and a lead cover is thrown on top, sealing her in. The basket is being transported to the land and to the city of Babylon, not far from the modern city of Baghdad in Iraq.

In the Bible, Babylon is consistently represented as the opposite and as the enemy of God in this world. In the book of Genesis, the city of Babel rises from the plains of Mesopotamia in proud self-dominated opposition to God.

We have this same prophecy and prediction amplified for us in the book of Revelation where we're told that somehow the city of Babylon will become the headquarters for the antichrist during the Great Tribulation. In the latter days, evil will become headquartered and concentrated in Babylon.

One of the most interesting things to speculate is whether this is literally the ancient city of Babylon rebuilt--or whether the name "Babylon" here is symbolic, a code-name, for some other great city of the world, perhaps one now in existence. The ancient city of Babylon is currently little more than a heap of ruins about 50 miles south of Baghdad, but has a very interesting biblical history.

Now, as we look at this subject we have to keep two things in mind. First, even in our vernacular today, cities come to symbolize certain things. Detroit is called "Motor City" because of its historic production of automobiles. If we read in the newspaper that Detroit unveiled its newest models, we understand that it doesn't refer to the streets of Detroit or to the buildings or even the people. The word "Detroit" symbolizes the automobile industry--General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, and so forth.

In the same way, the word Babylon in the book of Revelation doesn't mean merely a city. It represents the false religion of the end time. It represents the one-world government of the end time. It represents the world economy of the end time.

Thus far in chapter 17, the angel has been explaining to John what he was about to see. Now, beginning in verse 3, the vision actually begins. Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman (representing the city of Babylon and its evil religious, economic, and political systems) sitting on a scarlet beast (the antichrist) that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.

The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead:

MYSTERY

Babylon the Great

The Mother of Prostitutes

And of the abominations of the earth.

I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

Then, continuing on to chapter 18, the fall of the city is discussed in its political and economic ramifications.

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illumined by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

Then I heard another voice from heaven say:

"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts 'I sit as a queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her; death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her...."

"Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!"

The vision in the book of Zechariah is simply a foreshadowing of what we later read in the book of Revelation, telling us that one day sin and stupidity in the world will be concentrated in this vile and evil city codenamed Babylon that will serve as the world capital for the antichrist, and at the very end of history that city will be dramatically and decisively destroyed by the wrath and judgment of God; and sin will be banished from human history.

Now there is one final vision, and it tells us that not only will sin be one day be banished from the land of Israel, and not only will sin be banished from human history, but sin will be banished from planet earth. Look at the last of Zechariah's visions, found in Zechariah 6:

The Flying Chariots: Sin Banished from the Face of Earth

I looked up again—and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains—mountains of bronze! The first chariot had red horses, the second black, the third white, and the fourth dappled—all of them powerful. I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?"

The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south." When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And

he said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth. Then he called to me, "Look, those going toward the North Country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north."

In this vision, Zechariah sees four horses and chariots coming from between mountains of bronze, being sent from God to the four corners of the earth to judge sin and to remove evil from the earth.

This will set the stage for the millennial reign of Christ; but even more, in the future, after the rise and fall of time itself, in the endless realms of eternity, we will have a new heaven and new earth, and for the people of God sin will be no more.

As I studied this subject, I turned again to the last two chapters of the Bible and I noticed something I'd never quite seen as I saw it this week. In these last two chapters of the Bible, we have an extensive and wonderful picture of eternity painted for us. We have the new heavens and the new earth. We have the city foursquare. We have the streets of gold and the gates of pearl. We have the Crystal River and the Tree of Life. But as I read these chapters again from the perspective of today's message, I was amazed at how much material there is in these two chapters telling us that one of the greatest aspects of eternity will be the total absence of sin and stupidity. Let me show you:

Revelation 21:6: It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

And Revelation 21:27, describing the celestial city: Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And Revelation 22:14: Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

One day evil will be banished from the nation of Israel. Evil will be banished from the pages of history. Evil will be banished from the face of earth, and one of the greatest things about heaven will be the total and eternal absence of sin around us or within us.

How will it be for you? The Lord Jesus, the Messiah, became sin for us on the cross, and when He rose again, He defeated sin, death, hell, and the grave. We all have sin and stupidity within us and around us, and the only answer is the blood of Jesus Christ. We have to confess with our mouths that He is Lord and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead. We have to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. If you don't know Christ and His forgiveness, you have no escape from the coming judgment; and that's why I urge you to give your life today to the Christ of the Cross.

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
(Elisha Hoffman, 1878)

Zechariah 6

Crown Him Lord of All

Recently I've been reading the biography of Samuel Logan Brengle, an American leader in the early Salvation Army movement. He did evangelistic work, traveling by train and ship from place to place, living an itinerant life as a tramp for the Lord, as someone put it. Because of his work, he was seldom home with his wife or children.

Brengle was married to a wonderful woman, and the two of them loved each other deeply. They wrote to each other constantly, and their love letters are among the most tender I've ever read. They had hoped, I suppose, to finally be together without the separation of travel and ministry in their later years. But then both of them developed illnesses. Brengle had to have surgery, and while he was recovering from very painful surgical wounds, his wife fell ill. One day, Brengle's doctor entered the room with a grave expression on his face. He told him that his wife was dying. I want to read you what Brengle later wrote:

A thousand times, in distant lands and lonely hours, I have been stabbed by the thought that possibly my darling might die before I could cross oceans and continents and reach her side. Now, lying only a hundred miles away, she was dying—and I was at the point of death and couldn't go to her. It seemed as though my heart would break, and it seemed as though God didn't care if my heart did break. But I did not go by appearances. I had preached all round the world that God does care, that all things do work together for good to them that love the Lord, and I didn't cast away my confidence and charge God foolishly. I was very weak, but I took my Bible and songbook and I read the promises and nestled down upon them, and I read the hymns of comfort and guidance and heaven and I nestled down into the will of God. I said, "O Lord, Thou knowest how I love my darling and how desolate I shall be if Thou dost take her, but I don't know what is best for her or for the dear children or for myself. Thy will be done." And peace entered my heart.[1]

As it happened, three weeks later he was able to go to her side and be with her during the final hours of her earthly life and as she slipped into the presence of the Lord. But as I read those words, I thought to myself: In every situation however bleak or bright, we have to nestle down into the promises and into the providence of God and say Thy will be done; and we have to crown Him king of our lives. In every situation in life, we need to bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of all.

That's the theme of today's message, and my question this morning is this: Is Jesus Christ King of your life? Does He reign and rule over your daily life, over your thought life, over your ambitions and goals, over all there is of you? Is He on the throne of your heart? That's our subject today. We're in a series of sermons from the book of Zechariah, a seldom-read portion of Scripture near the end of the Old Testament. It's the second-to-last book of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Let me briefly review the background for anyone who is visiting today for the first time. Zechariah was a young man living in Jerusalem during the days of the reconstruction. Approximately seventy years before, the Babylonians had invaded his land, burned down the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the holy temple of Jehovah, abolished the daily sacrifices, and exiled the survivors. Now a remnant of Jews had returned to try to rebuild it all, but they had grown discouraged. Their two leaders were discouraged. These two leaders were Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua. But Zechariah was God's young prophet, sent to encourage these two men and the entire remnant and to motivate them to get back to work and to finish the rebuilding of His temple

In Zechariah 1-6, we have a series of eight different visions that came to Zechariah, all of them given on one particular never-to-be forgotten night. Last week we finished our study of these eight visions, but I want to go back for a moment to the fourth vision, which is found in Zechariah 3. It involves this High Priest, the spiritual leader of the remnant, Mr. Joshua. Look at how chapter 3 opens:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.... Joshua the High Priest was suffering from feelings of guilt and shame and inadequacy. He was the spiritual leader of Israel, but he had failed to rally the hearts of the people to go forward with this building project. Satan, the accuser of the brethren, was accusing him before God.

The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you..."

I'll not recount the rest of the story or the message of this chapter since we've already studied it a few Sundays ago, but I do want to draw your attention to one very interesting sentence in verse 8: Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.

This verse tells us that High Priest Joshua was a symbol of someone to come. He was a type, a prototype of a coming Messiah, the Branch. This is telling us that there is much symbolism and Messianic typology about this man Joshua, the High Priest. He was one of God's chosen men in the Old Testament who served as a forerunner and prototype of Christ.

Now today we are coming to the last part of chapter 6, and we again encounter this remarkable fellow, Joshua, the High Priest of Israel. For today's Scripture reading, I'd like to turn you to this passage, Zechariah 6:9-15:

The word of the Lord came to me: "Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Sephaniah. Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak. Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Here is the man whose name is the

Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two." The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the Lord, and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God (Zechariah 6:9-15, NIV).

It is impossible to understand this passage or to interpret it correctly without remembering what we read in chapter 3—Joshua is symbolic of Him who is to come. He is a type of Christ, and this passage is all about the Messiah. The last half of Zechariah 6 is all about Jesus Himself. It is prophetic. It is Messianic.

Here's what happened. One day God spoke to Zechariah and said to him, "There are some more Jewish exiles coming back to Jerusalem from Babylon to help with the rebuilding of the temple. They're bringing a sizable contribution to help finance the building project. I want you to take some of the silver and some of the gold, and go down to the metalworker and have it cast into a beautiful and elaborate crown. Then take the crown and gather people together and place the crown on the head of the high priest, Joshua."

Now this was shocking, as I'll explain in a few minutes, but it is wonderfully symbolic. This story of the crowning of Joshua is all about the role of Jesus Christ. There are three aspects of our Lord's ministry that are here predicted four hundred years in advance.

Jesus is the Branch of Israel

First, He is the Branch of Israel. Verse 12 says: Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and He will branch out from His place. This was addressed to Joshua, but it wasn't really about Joshua. It was about the one symbolized by Joshua, the coming Messiah. He is called the Branch. We saw this title earlier for the Messiah, in chapter 3. It's a common Old Testament name for Jesus, and the significance is this: The Messiah will be a branch, a shoot, springing up from the stump of David. God had promised King David that one of His descendants would sit on the throne of Israel forever, but Zedekiah, the last Davidic king, had died in captivity in Babylon. What had happened to the line of David? It had been chopped down, as it were. But Isaiah 11:1 says about the coming Messiah:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
From his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him...

Now Zechariah says that there's another aspect to this title for Christ. Look at verse 12: Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and He will branch out from his place....

In other words, He will spread out. His influence will spread. He will be like a Banyan Tree that spreads over wide acreage, branching out from Israel until His kingdom covers all the earth.

Jesus is the Builder of the Temple

Second, He will be the real builder of the temple. I think there are two fulfillments to this. First, the New Testament compares the Old Testament temple with the New Testament church. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:16: Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

And Peter told us (in 1 Peter 2:4ff.) that we as Christians are a spiritual temple, built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, being built into a spiritual house for His glory.

The other fulfillment concerns the Millennium. During the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth following His return, there will be a great Millennial Temple, described for us in the final section of the book of Ezekiel. Zechariah was saying, "Don't be discouraged because this temple looks so small and the work is so rigorous. When the Messiah comes He will establish a temple that eclipses every other building or edifice the world has ever known."

Jesus is Both Our Priest and King

And now we come to the primary point of this lesson. When the Messiah comes, He will be the Branch, the Builder of the temple, the Majestic One, and most importantly, He will combine in His Person the two great Jewish offices of priest and king. Let's keep reading:

Verse 13: It is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on His throne. And He will be a priest on His throne. And there will be harmony between the two.

Do you remember during the days of the Exodus, when Moses and Aaron led the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the desert of Sinai, Moses was the political leader and his brother Aaron was appointed as the spiritual leader, the High Priest of the Jewish people. There was established a dichotomy between these two roles. Let me show you a couple of Scriptures bearing this out.

In 1 Samuel 13, we read the story of King Saul, who became king when he was thirty years old. One of his early tests had to do with attacking the Philistines, and Samuel told him not to go to war before the sacrifices had been offered. But when the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns, and day after day Saul waited for Samuel to show up. Finally Saul's men began to scatter, and King Saul felt he had to do something to save his troops, so he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. "What have you done?" asked Samuel. And as a result of King Saul's attempt to usurp the office of the priest, the kingdom was torn from him and given to David.

We have a similar story in 2 Chronicles 26, and this story must have come vividly to mind as the remnant watched Zechariah place the royal crown on the head of High Priest Joshua. It concerns King Uzziah, one of the final kings of Judah. Uzziah started out all right, but look at 2 Chronicles 26:16:

But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the Lord followed him in. They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the Lord God."

Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the Lord has afflicted him.

King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house—leprosy, and excluded from the temple of the Lord. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.

Now, this story was very, very well known to the remnant of Jews in Zechariah's day. It was just as well known to them as the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the Watergate Affair of Richard Nixon is known to us. And when Zechariah placed the crown on the head of the chief priest, Joshua, they must have gasped; but it was prophetic. He said, "One day the Messiah is coming, and He will combine in His own person the two great Jewish offices of High Priest and King.

The book of Hebrews presents Christ as our great High Priest, the fulfillment and ultimate personification of this Old Testament type. He represents us before Almighty God, makes atonement for our sins, sympathizes with our weaknesses, and intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And He is King, the King of the Jews, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne.
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity.
He Unites both Jew and Gentile

Conclusion

Now let's finish the chapter. Zechariah 6:13ff says: It is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on His throne. And there will be harmony between the two.

That is, between the two offices of Priest and King.

Now, verse 14 is very intriguing to me: The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. Zechariah tells them to take the crown and place it in the temple as a reminder of this prophecy and to await Him who is coming. This is remarkable to me. Here we have some men who came from Babylon with a financial contribution for the rebuilding of the temple. Zechariah took their silver and gold and had it fashioned into a beautiful crown. He gathered everyone together and momentarily placed the crown, not on the head of the political leader Zerubbabel, reinstating the kingship, but on the head of the High Priest, Joshua. Then he said, "This man Joshua is symbolic of Him who is to come. We have a Messiah coming, the Branch, who will build the temple and who will be crowned both King and Priest, bringing harmony between these two roles. Then he removed the crown from Joshua, gave it back to the men who had brought the gold to begin with, and told them to place it in the temple that was under construction so that it would be a reminder of the prophecy that had been made on that day and so, presumably, it would be there awaiting the Messiah when He came.

I wonder what happened to that crown. We don't know. It was never mentioned again as far as I can tell in the Old Testament, and it never showed up in the Gospels.

Jesus came four hundred years later, He came into that very temple, He came as King of the Jews, He came as High Priest of Israel, He came exactly as Zechariah had predicted. But no one brought out that crown to place it on His head. No one thought of it. He came unto His own, but His own received Him not. He came as king, but the crown wasn't fetched.

I wonder today if someone needs to crown Him as King of your life. Recently I've been reading about the early history of major league baseball in the United States. One of the central characters in popularizing baseball as America's favorite pastime was John McGraw, who served as the innovative, autocratic field manager of the New York Giants for thirty-one years. He was called the "Little Napoleon," and he managed more future Hall of Fame players than any other skipper in baseball history. But I want you to listen to the way his wife, Blanche, described him: "Life without baseball had very little meaning to him. It was his meat, drink, his dream, his blood and breath, his very reason for existence."^[2]

Well, we all need to have something that fills our hearts and that gives meaning to our lives. We need something or someone to be our meat and drink, our dream, our blood and breath, our very reason for living. But I suggest something greater than baseball. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can fill that role in our lives. For His purposes we were and are created, and He is our all-in-all. Let Him be the King of your life. Let Him be Lord. Let Him be God. Today, let Him rule and reign on the throne of your heart.

All hail the power of Jesus Name,
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all.

1 Clarence W. Hall, Samuel Logan Brengle: Portrait of a Prophet (Atlanta: The Salvation Army Supplies and Purchasing Dept., 1933), pp. 217-218

2 Jonathan Eig, Luckiest Man: The Life and Death of Lou Gehrig (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p. 30

Zechariah 7 and 8

SDG: Soli Deo Gloria

Introduction: From the beginning of my ministry, I have preached series of sermons rather than fifty-two miscellaneous sermons each year. This isn't the way I was raised. When I was growing up, my pastor never, to my knowledge, prepared and preached a single series of sermons on any topic or text. Many of the great preachers in history did not preach consecutive series. But I'm not good enough not to do it. The ability to preach series of messages consolidates my study time and helps me focus on one topic or text for an extended period. I think it is also biblical. Take Zechariah, for example. Tonight I'd like to show you a series of four sermons that he preached, and the four are summarized for us in chapters 7 and 8 of his book. His series of four sermons arose from a question posed from some Hebrews from the town of Bethel, twelve miles up the road from Jerusalem.

Scripture: Zechariah 7:1-3 – The date given is December 7, 518 B.C. This is nearly two years after the eight visions (chapter 1-6), and it was midway through the temple building project. Since the fall of Jerusalem in 587, the Jewish people had been fasting each

year, begging God to reestablish His presence in Jerusalem. This delegation from Bethel came with the question—how long should we keep up this fast? Is this a tradition we should maintain through perpetuity or should we discard it. In response, Zechariah offers four messages, each of them beginning with the same words:

- 7:4 – Then the word of the Lord Almighty came to me...
- 7:8 – And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah...
- 8:1 – Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me...
- 8:18 – Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me...

In this series of four messages we have four answers to the question about fasting, and in looking at them we can find four important questions to ask ourselves about our religious and Christian observances.

1. Are We Really Doing This for the Lord? (7:4-4). Key: v. 5: Was it really for Me that you fasted? This goes to our motive, the most untrustworthy part of us. Why do we do the things we do for Christ? Is it really for Him? J.S. Bach noted each of his composition with the letters SDG: Soli Deo Gloria – for the glory of God alone. Those letters should be stamped across our lives every day.

2. Are We Really Practicing Mercy? (7:8-14). It's one thing to maintain rituals in our religion, but remember what James said in James 1:26-27.

3. Are We Anticipating the Coming of Christ? (8:1-17). The third installment in Zechariah's series of messages pointed to the future, to the coming of Christ in glory, and to His Millennial reign. We should constantly have our minds on the coming of Christ and His coming Kingdom.

4. Are We Celebrating Jesus? (8:18-23). Now at last Zechariah answers the question posed by the delegation from Bethel. The answer is—feasting is better than fasting. The Christian life is a celebration of joy. Our lives in Christ are a constant festival.

Conclusion: There are times for tradition, and there are times for fasting. But these four questions are always relevant. What is our motive? Are we merciful? Do we love His appearing? Is our life a celebration of His goodness?

Zechariah 9

The Secrets of Self-Confidence

Before my message today, I want to make a comment about what we've been reading and hearing in the news this week. There has been indignation and rioting and killing across the Muslim world recently because of a faulty report in Newsweek Magazine that a copy of the Koran was flushed down the commode during an interrogation session with Islamic prisoners at the United States base at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba. The Muslims were consumed with fury over this report. I think we'd all agree that everyone has a basic human right to their religion and we would never condone flushing a copy of the Koran down the commode.

But somehow the same news media that all too quickly filed that story failed to report another one, or at least it wasn't widely reported. Do you remember back in 2002 when Islamic terrorists seized Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, and there was a shootout there with Israeli troops. According to a May 15, 2002 report in the Washington Times, these Muslims, who were members of Yasser Arafat's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, used copies of the Bible as toilet paper during the siege.[1]

Where was the outcry about that? Why is it that no one in the media has bought that up? In the 55 Islamic-dominated countries in the world, there is not a one of them in which the Bible is revered or can be freely and openly read. And in some of them, a person can be killed merely for possessing a copy of the Scriptures.

I just thought I should point that out. And while I'm at it, I'd like to take a moment to quote another man's sermon. Ibrahim Mdaires is the preacher at an Islamic Mosque in the Gaza Strip, and he preached a sermon this week which was broadcast on Palestinian television. Here is what he said:

We have ruled the world before, and by Allah, the day will come when we will rule the entire world again. The day will come when

we will rule America. The day will come when we will rule Britain and the entire world—except for the Jews. The Jews will not enjoy a life of tranquility under our rule, because they are treacherous by nature, as they have been throughout history. The day will come when everything will be relieved of the Jews, even the stones and trees which were harmed by them. Listen to the Prophet Muhammad, who tells you about the evil end that awaits Jews. The stones and trees will want the Muslims to finish off every Jew.[2]

World events are building toward a climax, and right in the middle of it is the powder keg of history—the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; and the ancient people of God, the Jews, are at the center of the events that will occur at the end of the age. This is the subject of the last chapters of the prophet Zechariah.

Let me review for just a moment, then we'll plunge into Zechariah, chapter 9. Here is the outline for the book of Zechariah, as we have studied it so far. I think it helps to have an outline in our heads because we can begin to get a handle on the contents of the book.

- Zechariah 1a: Introductory Message
- Zechariah 1-6 Eight Visions and the Symbolic Crowning of Joshua
- Zechariah 7-8 A Question about Fasting
- Zechariah 9-14 Two Sermons on the End Times

Now, this morning and this evening, I just want us to study a chapter in the Bible that you've probably never studied before or even read very carefully: Zechariah 9. I know that sometimes I deal with arcane and obscure passages of Scripture, but I do so based on the conviction that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable. There is something in this passage—and every passage—that is necessary for the health and well-being of our lives. So if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Zechariah 9 and let's read it together. Instead of reading all seventeen verses at once, we'll read it in segments and I'll annotate it as best I can.

This chapter divides into three parts, and it is all prophetic. It is all predictive. And the first half of these predictions have been fulfilled with remarkable accuracy.

Alexander Is Coming, and He Will Enter Jerusalem in Peace
Zechariah 9:1-8

Zechariah 9:1-8 tells us that Alexander the Great is coming, but Jerusalem will be spared. He will enter the Holy City in peace.

The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus—for the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the Lord—and upon Hamath too, which borders on it, and upon Tyre and Sidon, though they are very skillful. Tyre has built herself a stronghold; she has heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets. But the Lord will take away her possessions and destroy her power on the sea, and she will be consumed by fire. Ashkelon will see it and fear; Gaza will writhe in agony, and Edron too, for her hope will wither. Gaza will lose her king and Ashkelon will be deserted. Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. I will take the blood from their mouths, and forbidden food from between their teeth. Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites. But I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch.

This is one of the most remarkable predictions regarding secular history in the Bible. Zechariah lived about 500 years before Christ. Half a millennium before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The world was dominated by the Persian Empire and it seemed invincible. A handful of Jews were back in the land of Israel trying to rebuild their temple, but they did not possess anything like an independent nation. The ruler of the world was Darius I, the fourth ruler of the Persian Empire, who was called Darius the Great. The world was in relative peace, and the Empire seemed secure.

But in this passage, Zechariah predicted that a foreign power would come and defeat one city after another, one region after another. They are listed here: Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, the great cities of Tyre and Sidon, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ashdod, Ekron and the land of the Philistines—every city and region would be devastated by a coming invader except for one city and one city only—Jerusalem. Jerusalem would be spared from the violence of marauding forces.

Now let me tell you what happened about 150 years later. There was a ruler in the north of Greece named Philip II of Macedon who had a little boy he named Alexander. Alexander was a wonder child, and he grew up to be a tall, handsome, visionary, natural leader of men. When Philip died, Alexander assumed the throne; and he was only twenty years old. He seized the reigns of government and set off with his armies to conquer the world, and as he pushed eastward, he defeated and destroyed city after city—the very cities and regions mentioned here and in virtually the same order as Zechariah gave them.

And what about Jerusalem? Well, as we've seen, the Jews had been kindly treated by the Persian overlords who had allowed them to repopulate their city of Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, and as a result the Jews had been loyal to the Persians. This infuriated Alexander the Great, who determined to march through Palestine and annihilate the Jews who were there. He intended to destroy the rebuilt temple, kill the Jews, and enslave the survivors. He had already destroyed Tyre and Gaza, and he aimed his armies toward Jerusalem.

When he arrived there, instead of shutting up their city and defending themselves, the Jewish leaders opened their gates and welcomed him. The High Priest came marching through the gates, followed by a procession of priests and peoples wearing white robes. In his hands, the High Priest carried a scroll of the prophet Daniel, because Daniel 8 and 9 gives us an even more detailed prophecy of the coming of Alexander the Great. The High Priest opened the scroll and read the passages that predicted the coming of Alexander, and Alexander was bowled over by this. He saw for himself that the details of his coming had been predicted years in advance, and he embraced these prophecies as coming from Jehovah. Alexander became a friend of the Jews. All of this is recorded by the Jewish/Roman historian Flavius Josephus in his Antiquities of the Jews.[3]

Jesus is Coming, and He Will Enter Jerusalem on a Donkey

Zechariah 9:9

All of this is predicted in Zechariah 9:1-8. But now we come to verse 9, and this one verse gives us the second movement in the chapter. Jesus is coming, and He will enter Jerusalem on a donkey.

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Five hundred years later—one half a millennium—Jesus the King of the Jews approached the city of Jerusalem from the East, from the Mount of Olives. He sent two of His disciples to fetch a donkey, and the disciples brought the colt of Jesus. Jesus mounted the little creature and rode up the precipitous dirt road, toward the walls of the ancient city, through the gates, as crowds of worshipers threw palm branches to pave His way and as young and old alike cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Two kings entering Jerusalem, and they are contrasted side by side—Alexander the Great and Jesus Christ the Lord—both of them predicted in advance by this young Jewish prophet who lived and preached hundreds of years prior to the events he described.

Jesus is Coming Again, and He Will Enter Jerusalem in Victory

Zechariah 9:10-17

Now, the last part of the chapter describes events yet to be fulfilled: Jesus is coming again, and He will enter Jerusalem in victory. This is prediction of the Second Coming of Jesus.

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

In other words, when Jesus comes again He will interrupt the battle of Armageddon, disarm the nations, and usher in a period of peace. In order to make this as simple and plain as possible, I'm going to switch versions on you and read the remainder of this chapter from the Living Bible. You can follow along with whatever version you have, but I think you'll grasp the sense of what Zechariah is saying here, beginning with verse 14, which describes how Jesus will return suddenly at the moment of the Battle of Armageddon and deliver Israel and establish His kingdom:

The Lord shall lead His people as they fight! His arrows shall fly like lightning; the Lord God shall sound the trumpet call and go out against His enemies like a whirlwind off the desert from the south. He will defend His people and they will subdue their enemies, treading them beneath their feet. They will taste victory and shout with triumph. They will slaughter their foes, leaving horrible carnage everywhere. The Lord their God will save His people in that day, as a Shepherd caring for His sheep. They shall shine in His land as glittering jewels in a crown. How wonderful and beautiful all shall be! The abundance of grain and wine will make the young men and girls flourish; they will be radiant with health and happiness (Zechariah 9:14-17, TLB).

Now what does all this say to me? This is a confidence-evoking chapter. There was a book published some time ago entitled Ultimate Secrets to Total Self-Confidence. I didn't read it, but I think we all would like to know the ultimate secrets to total self-confidence. Well, that's what Zechariah is about. He tells us that we can only be self-confident if we are God-confident. This

chapter tells us:

First, we can have confidence in the Bible. Here is solid proof right before our eyes that the Bible is self-authenticated by its own prophecies and the accuracy in which they have been fulfilled. The Bible predicts the future with unfailing accuracy, and one of the reasons we can trust what the Bible says about coming days is because it's been proved accurate in its predictions that have already been fulfilled in human history.

Second, I can have confidence in the future. I was talking to a man this week who recently lost his infant son, and we were discussing the fact that the Bible evidently wants us to think a great deal about the future because that is such a prominent topic in the pages of Scriptures.

In 1952 there was a young swimmer named Florence Chadwick who determined to swim all the way from Catalina Island to the shore of mainland California. The waters of the Pacific were cold and choppy, but she sat out. She was a world-class champion swimmer who had already swam across the English Channel. The weather that day was so foggy that she could barely see the boats that accompanied her, and after swimming for fifteen hours in the cold and dark waters, she lost heart. Her mother, who was in one of the boats, told her that she was near the coast, and so she gave it a little more effort, but finally she just quit swimming and had to be pulled from the water. She discovered that the shore was less than a half-mile away, and she told reporters the next day, "All I could see was the fog.... I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it."^[4]

In the fogs of life, we have to turn to the Bible and meditate on the future and see the shore. It gives us the strength and confidence to make it.

Third, we can have confidence in Jesus. In this chapter, Zechariah 9, God deliberately sets two men side-by-side for us to compare. They represent contrasting kingdoms. They represent two different styles of ruler. Remarkably, both young men died in their early thirties, and the poet compared them for us like this:

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three,
One lived and died for self; one died for you and me,
The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross,
One's life a triumph seemed, the other but a loss,
One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone,
One shed a whole world's blood; the other gave His own,
One won the world in life and lost it all in death,
The other lost His life to win the whole world's faith.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three,
One died in Babylon; and one on Calvary,
One gained all for self; and one Himself He gave,
One conquered every throne; the other, every grave,
One won all the earth, to lose all earth and heaven,
The other gave up all, that all to Him be given,
The Greek forever died; the Jew forever lives
He loses all who only gets; and wins all who truly gives
(Charles Ross Weede)

Who is the ruler of your heart? Do you have confidence in the Word of God? Confidence in the future? Confidence in Jesus Christ as the only Lord and God? Today I invite you to meet the Galilean, to give your life to the matchless Son of God, and to do it now, for there is coming a day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

¹http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=44324, accessed on May 18, 2005.

² Reported in the Jerusalem Post, May 19, 2005 under article entitled "Shaath: Suspend Inciteful Preacher." Accessed on May 19, 2005 at: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1116469379377>.

³ Josephus: The Antiquities of the Jews, 11.8.4 – 11.8.5.

Zechariah 11-14; Revelation 16

The Battle of Armageddon - Part IV

Preached June 15, 1997 ----

This is the fourth and final message in our series of sermons on the Battle of Armageddon. The previous messages have been little more nor less than an extended exposition of Revelation 16-19. In brief, they describe this: After the sudden & unexpected rapture of the church a global government will evolve on this earth. A masterful politician will arise, rebuild the city of Babylon, establish peace in the Middle East, and become the most powerful world ruler in history. But he will also desire to be worshipped, and that desire will lead him to erect his image in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The Jews will resist, and a period of distress and tribulation will ensue, lasting 42 months. Near the end of those terrible days, a series of natural disasters will befall the world as the armies of the earth converge in the Middle East to encircle Israel and destroy the Jews. The headquarters for this incredible military operation will be a valley in the north of Israel known as the Valley of Megiddo, or Armageddon. But just as the battle is about to begin, an earthquake will strike the world. The city of Babylon will explode in fire and destruction. The sky will split open. The Lord Jesus Christ will return. The antichrist and his armies will direct their weapons and missiles toward the returning Christ, but the Lord will slay them with the sword that comes out of his mouth--that is, with the words of his mouth. 2 Thessalonians says the Lord will overthrow them with the breath of his mouth and destroy them by the splendor of his coming. And so the Battle of Armageddon will be over, almost before it begins.

Today, we're going to look at this same subject from the perspective of the Old Testament. There is a striking series of predictions found in the Old Testament book of Zechariah. The prophet Zechariah lived about 500 years before Christ, and he was a preacher sent to encourage the Jewish remnant who had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the famous temple of Solomon which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. In chapter 11-14, we have a remarkable series of predictions. While we don't have time to study these four chapters in detail, I would like to walk through them and point out 20 distinct predictions made by this insightful Old Testament personality. We will begin in Zechariah 11 where the prophet predicts that two shepherds will come to Israel. The first is a good shepherd who will be rejected. The second is an evil shepherd, an anti-shepherd, who will tyrannize them.

Prediction #1: A Good Shepherd Will Be Sent By God To Israel. Zechariah 11:4 says, "This is what the Lord my God says: 'Pasture the flock...'" That is, someone is being sent by God Almighty to pastor his flock, the Jewish people, Israel. It is described here as a flock marked for slaughter, a people who will endure great suffering and death and attempted annihilation. But God loves them and wants to send them a special shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a prediction of the first coming of the one who said, "I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:14).

Prediction #2: The Good Shepherd Will Come. Zechariah 11:7 says, "So I pastured the flock...." But what happened?

Prediction #3: The Good Shepherd Will Be Rejected. Zechariah 11:8 says, "The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them and said, 'I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh.'" Even so, when the Good Shepherd came, he was detested and rejected.

Prediction #4: The Flock Will Fall From Favor And The Covenant Will Be Broken. Verse 10 continues, "Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. I was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the Lord." Jesus "came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11).

Prediction #5: The Flock Will Place A Low Value On The Rejected Shepherd--30 Pieces of Silver. Verse 12 says, "I told them, 'If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me thirty pieces of silver."

Prediction #6: The 30 Pieces Of Silver Will Be Thrown On The Temple Floor. Verse 13 says, "And the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'--the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord (the Temple) to the potter." This, as you may remember, is exactly what happened. The 30 pieces of silver were thrown on the floor of the temple.

Prediction #7: The Silver Will Be Paid To A Potter. The verses twice refer to the silver going to the potter. Verse 13 again: "And the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'--the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord (the Temple) to the potter." Matthew's Gospel tells us that the priests didn't know what to do with the 30 pieces of silver. They didn't want to add it to the temple treasury, for it was blood money. So they gave it to a local Jerusalem potter who evidently had a field in which he excavated his clay. The Jewish authorities bought this potter's field to make it a burial

site for strangers.

Prediction #8: An Evil Shepherd Will Come To Dominate and Tyrannize The Jews. Having rejected the Good Shepherd, the Jewish people will find that a great and powerful leader, a politician, an anti-shepherd, an antichrist, will arise. He is described here in verses 15-17: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs. Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock!'"

Who is this worthless shepherd who pretends to have an interest in Israel? It is the man of lawlessness, the antichrist. According to the book of Daniel, the antichrist, when he comes, will initially take a careful interest in Israel and sign a peace treaty with them and allow them to rebuild their temple. But then he will turn on them, erect his own image in their temple, demand to be worshipped, and seek to slaughter them.

And thus we have the first eight predictions, all of them unfolding in the last half of Zechariah 11. Now we turn to Zechariah 12. What will happen after the Jews detest the Good Shepherd, value him 30 pieces of silver, throw the money to the potter, and reject him? What will happen after the evil shepherd comes, betrays them, and turns on them?

Prediction #9: All the Nations Will Gather Against Israel. Zechariah 12 goes on to say: "This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him..." This is a very formal preamble or introduction to the highly consequential predictions that are about to be given. In other words, Zechariah is saying this: "What I am about to tell you is so remarkable, so amazing, and so important that it could only be given by the Lord who stretched out the heavens, who laid the foundation of the earth, and who formed the spirit of man within him. So listen closely and hear him well." Verse 2: "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem immovable rock for all the nations."

This is exactly what we saw in Revelation 16. The nations of the earth under the command of the false shepherd, the antichrist, will gather against Israel, besiege Judah, and surround Jerusalem. But Zechariah goes on to tell us something very incredible, very wonderful. It is at that moment of danger when tiny Israel is encircled by her enemies that a spiritual revival will occur which will sweep the Jewish people back to God and which will open their eyes to the true shepherd they had previously rejected, to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Prediction #10: God Will Pour Out A Spirit Of Grace On The Jews. Zechariah 12:10 says, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced..."

In other words, the eyes of their hearts and minds will be opened, and the incredible realization will dawn on them. The one they pierced with the nails on the cross, the one they pierced with the crown of thorns, the one they pierced with the spear--they will recognize that he was, after all, the Messiah.

Prediction #11: They Will Mourn. Verse 10 goes on to say: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn of him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping of Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives."

In the great Welsh Revival of 1905, the predominant emotion was weeping. There was a young coal miner, Evan Roberts, who was God's chosen instrument to bring revival to the churches of Wales. He would be invited to speak here and there, but often he said very little. The crowds would gather and just begin to cry and weep over their sins and over the coldness of their hearts.

So will it be in this great Israeli Awakening. Just as Jerusalem is surrounded by the armies of the world, just as Israel is facing annihilation by the forces of the false shepherd, she will recognize the true shepherd. It will suddenly dawn upon this race of people, upon this noble, chosen nation, that the Messiah had come to them as a Good Shepherd and that they had detested him and rejected him and crucified him. Their hearts will break, and the nation will mourn with uncontrollable tears and sorrow. Now we move into chapter 13 with the next prediction.

Prediction #12: The Nation Of Israel Will Come En Masse To Jesus Christ And Be Cleansed, Restored, And Saved. Zechariah 13:1 says, "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." Paul speaks of this day in Romans 11:

I do now want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliver will come from Zion;

he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

Prediction #13: There Will Follow A Great, Cleansing Reformation Throughout Israel. Zechariah 13:2 continues, "On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land...." The rest of chapter 13 describes the moral and spiritual reform that will sweep through the Jewish people as they embrace the Savior, Jesus Christ, as their Messiah. Then what? Then the final world battle will begin. Just as the encircled Jews are discovering the Good Shepherd, just then the false Shepherd will launch his attack.

Prediction #14: Jerusalem Will Be Attacked. Zechariah 14:2 says, "I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it."

And Prediction #15: Jerusalem Will Experience An Initial Defeat And Will Appear Doomed. Verse 2 continues: "The city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city." But then comes Prediction #16.

Prediction #16: The Lord Will Go Out And Fight Against Those Nations. Verse 3 says, "Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle." This is Zechariah's prophecy regarding the moment when the Lord Jesus Christ will suddenly, dramatically return to this planet. The Lord will go out, with fire in his eyes and a sharp sword in his mouth. That is, he will go out of heaven and come again to earth.

What Zechariah says here corresponds exactly to what we read in Revelation 19. We're told in Revelation 19 that the Battle of Armageddon will be sudden, swift, and quick. The Lord's will appear in the sky, his eyes blazing fire, and his only weapon will be the words on his lips. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians that when the Lord appears, he will overturn his enemies by the breath of his mouth and by the splendor of his coming. Perhaps it will be like some sort of Light Bomb going off. Look at the added information Zechariah gives us in chapter 14, in verses 12-13: "This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that day men will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other."

Prediction #17: The Lord's Feet Will Stand On The Mount Of Olives. Verse 4: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem." If you are familiar with the Gospel record of the life of Jesus Christ, you know that this is the very spot from which Jesus ascended to heaven following his earthly ministry. Luke tells us that Jesus led his disciples to this mountaintop on the eastern side of Jerusalem, then he blessed them and was taken up before their very eyes. And two angels dressed in white stood beside them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking to the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). In the same way--and evidently to the very same place.

Prediction #18: When His Feet Touch The Mount Of Olives, It Will Split In Two. Zechariah 14:4 continues, "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. [We don't know where Azel is. This is the only time it is mentioned in the Bible.] You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him."

Prediction #19: It Will Be A "Unique Day." Verse 6 says, "On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime--a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light."

Prediction #20: The Living Waters Will Flow From Jerusalem And The Lord Will Be King Of The Earth. Verse 8 says, "On that day living water will flow out of Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea [I don't know if this is speaking figuratively of God's grace or if literally refers to vast underground rivers that will bubble up from the earthquake and flow through the valley to the Mediterranean on the one side and to the Persian Gulf on the other]. The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name."

One of the evidences for the authority and truthfulness of Scripture is the incredible unity of Scripture. If you and I were to try to write a chapter in the English language describing how the world might end, we would have two totally different accounts. Yet here are two writers--John and Zechariah-- living 600 years apart, writing in two different languages and in two different countries. Yet their predictions compliment and correspond to each other's perfectly. And as it relates to the first coming of Christ, the accuracy of fulfillment is one hundred percent.

And add to that all the other biblical writers who have given us the history of these coming days in advance. Over 8300 verses of predictive prophecy in the Bible. Why? One of the reasons is to give us fair warning. Jesus said, "I will come again like a thief in the night." If someone warned me 8300 times to be ready for their coming, how do you think they would feel if they showed up and I wasn't ready?

One of the most tragic thoughts in the Bible is that many who have been countlessly warned, who have had innumerable opportunities to receive Christ, will be unprepared for his coming. Today, heed his words, confess your sins, make him the Lord of your life, and let him be your Savior, King, Lord, and Master today.

Zechariah 12 Soon and Very Soon

This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends people reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations" (Zechariah 12:1-3, NIV).

Some of you know that my wife and I are expecting two grandchildren. Our youngest daughter Grace is having a little boy; and our oldest daughter, Victoria, is having a little girl, which will be their fourth. Victoria told me that this week that one day she was very emotional, due to her pregnancy. She's uncomfortable and only days from delivery and tired and trying to take care of three preschoolers; and, she said, she just broke down and cried and cried the other day. She said, "I was emotional all morning." Her mood finally took an upward change when five-year-old Christiana came to her and, with a certain simple childlike sternness, said, "Mommy, I've had just about all of this I can stand!"

Well, sometimes I wonder if the Lord doesn't feel that way about you and me. We mope and cry and carry on and we're beset by problems and temptations; and our attitudes get out of whack. And sometimes I think the Lord has had just about all of it He can stand. After all, He has given us sixty-six books full of revealed information, much of it forward looking and dealing with the future He has planned for us. He wants us to become people of hopeful attitudes.

In fact, that is one of the primary things that distinguishes the Christian and sets us apart from others on this planet. The apostle Peter indicated that it was one of our most effective witnessing tools, and that we should always be ready to give a reason to those who ask us about the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15).

Studying the subject of prophecy in the Bible is like throwing firewood into our internal furnaces of hope and anticipation. The more we study God's plan for the future, the greater will be our excitement and sense of expectancy. And that's why we're devoting two or three weeks to the final chapters of the prophet Zechariah.

If you want to study the subject of the End Times in the Bible, where do you go? We could go to the prophecies in the book of Daniel. We could go to our Lord's Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25. We could read the two little letters that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. We could go to the book of Revelation.

But one of the most informative passages is one that we don't look at as often as we should. It's in the book of Zechariah, chapters 12, 13, and 14; and that is going to be our study for our final sessions in this series of messages entitled the Zechariah Zone.

Let's take a moment to refresh our memories about this book. Here's the background: The armies of Babylon destroyed the nation of Israel in 587 B.C., and for approximately seventy years, the land was deserted as far as a functioning Jewish government and populace was concerned. Then there was a change of world empires, and the Persian Empire announced a change of policy. A remnant of Jews was allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and reestablish Jewish worship. Fifty thousand returned under the leadership of the Jewish governor Zerubbabel, and the Jewish High Priest, Joshua or Jeshua. But the work became bogged down because of troubles and opposition and pressures; and for eighteen years nothing was done.

And then Zechariah began to preach and to deliver these remarkable messages from God. He had a series of visions. He had object lessons. He used role play. He preached didactic sermons. And he was doing two things under the anointing and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. First, he was encouraging the people to get to work; and in this role he still speaks as the prophet of encouragement to the discouraged workers of God. But second, he used the occasion of the building of the Second Temple to make predictions about the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the Antichrist, and the events that will take place during the time of

the Third Temple, the Temple of the Tribulation Period.

Four Temples

Now before we plunge into Zechariah 12, I think it would be helpful to delineate something. According to the Bible, there are going to be four Jewish temples that sit atop Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In fact, you can understand the whole history of the world, the history of the Jewish people, and the outline of End Time events just by understanding the sequence of the four Jewish temples.

When the shepherd boy David was anointed King of Israel by the prophet Samuel, God gave him a promise that one of His descendants would rule and reign on the throne of Israel forever, that the throne of David would be an eternal throne. David was born in Bethlehem, but he established Jerusalem as the capital city of his nation. Jerusalem was at that time a small town about five miles from Bethlehem. On the slopes of a hill there, called Mount Zion, David built himself a house—a royal palace—and that became the enduring capital of the Jewish state. As time progressed, it came into David's heart to build a worship center—a temple—on the hill above his palace. We call this the Temple Mount. The Lord informed David, however, that it would be his son, Solomon's, task to build the temple; and the story of the building of that first Jewish temple is given in 2 Chronicles, chapters 1 through 7.

That temple was destroyed by the Babylonian invasion of 587 B.C.

The building of the Second Temple took place in the days of the prophet Zechariah. After the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Persians, an edict was issued allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their city and their temple. They returned under the leadership of Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua. The building project became mired in red tape, opposition, controversy, and discouragement; but the prophets Haggai and Zechariah came and preached such rousing messages that the work was resumed, and the Second Temple was finished and dedicated shortly afterward. It stood there for five hundred years, and then King Herod—the same King Herod who tried to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem—decided to refurbish and renovate it. So sometimes this temple is called Herod's Temple; but we still consider it the Second Temple. It was in this temple that Jesus Christ ministered, and in Matthew 24, He predicted that it would be destroyed with not one stone on top of another. That took place just a few years later, in AD 70, when the Roman Empire destroyed Jerusalem, slaughtered the Jews, and again destroyed the beautiful Jewish Temple on Temple Mount.

The only part of the entire Temple Mount that survived was the Western Retaining Wall which is commonly called the Wailing Wall. It was not the Western Wall of Herod's Temple. It's simply the Western retaining wall of the Temple Mount itself. Today it is the holiest site in Judaism.

Six hundred years passed, and in the early 600s, the Holy Land was conquered by the Muslims, and in 691 A.D., a beautiful Islamic shrine—the Dome of the Rock—was built on the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, and it is called the Dome of the Rock. A decade later, the construction of an Islamic Mosque is completed nearby, called the al-Aqsa Mosque. Both of these Muslim structures date to the seventh century. They are thirteen hundred years old and go back almost to the beginnings of Islam.

That presents the world's most unsolvable political problem. How can the Jews rebuild their temple on their Temple Mount when the Islamic Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque is sitting squarely on the spot? Some scholars say that the First and Second Temple sat to the north of the Dome of the Rock and that the two buildings could conceivably sit side by side; but most scholars believe that the Dome of the Rock is sitting squarely over the site of the ancient temple.

Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that during the coming days of Great Tribulation, the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt; and that will be the Third Temple or the Tribulation Temple.

Now, the Bible also describes a Fourth Temple that will be built during the Thousand Year Reign of Christ. This Millennial Temple is described for us in the final section of the book of Ezekiel, but I don't have time to go into that now.

Four References to the Third Temple

It is the Second and the Third Temple that concerns us today; because Zechariah was instrumental in the completion of the Second Temple; but many of His prophecies speak to the Third Temple and to the time of Great Tribulation. Why do we think there will be a third temple, a Tribulation Temple? There are four passages in the Bible that deal with this.

A. The first passage is Daniel 9:27: He (the antichrist) will confirm a covenant with many (the nation of Israel) for one (period) of seven (years). In the middle of the seven (years), he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

In other words, after the rapture of the Church, the antichrist will arise as a cunning and charismatic world ruler, and he will make a treaty with the nation of Israel. But after three-and-a-half years, he will break that treaty and set up an idolatrous image that desecrates the Jewish temple. This implies, of course, that the Third Temple will be in existence during the Tribulation Period.

B. The second passage is Matthew 24:15: So when you see standing in the holy place (that is, in the Jewish temple), the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains... For then there will be great distress (tribulation) unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.

Matthew 24 is our Lord's great sermon on the Signs of the Times and the End of the Age. Earlier in this message, He predicted the destruction of the Second Temple. But now He says that at the end of the age, a Third Temple will be built; and when the Jewish people see the image erected there by the antichrist, they should flee to the mountains for that will mark the beginning of a time of trouble such as the world has never seen—the Great Tribulation.

C. The third biblical reference is by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff: Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report, or letter, supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed (the antichrist), the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple proclaiming himself to be God.

Paul's prophecy corresponds perfectly with those of Daniel and Christ. During the Tribulation Period, the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt and the antichrist will come to Jerusalem and set an image of himself there and demand to be worshipped by the Jews, thus desecrating the temple and placing himself in the place of God Himself.

D. The fourth and final reference to the Third Temple in the Bible will be in Revelation 11:1ff: I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months (or three and a half years).

These four Scriptures indicate that a Third Temple will be built on Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and it will be in existence by the time of the tribulation or it will be rebuilt during the first part of the Tribulation Period. The antichrist will then come to Jerusalem, set an image there (perhaps an image of himself), and he will demand to be worshipped. This will trigger a reaction among the Jews and lead to the three-and-a-half-year period of Jacob's Distress. "Thus the Bible teaches throughout the Old and New Testaments, the construction of the tribulation temple."^[1]

In rage and fury and wounded pride, the antichrist will summon the armies of earth to the Middle East to annihilate Israel and destroy the Jewish race forever. These armies will muster to the north of Jerusalem in that great valley between Judah and Galilee which is the breadbasket of Israel and is called the Valley of Jezreel or the Valley of Armageddon.

This battle is described for us many times in the Bible, but nowhere with greater vividness than in Revelation 16:12ff:

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East (the armies coming from Asia and China). Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are the demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed. Then they gathered the kings together to the place that is called in the Hebrew Armageddon.

And now I come at last to my main point: What is going to happen on that day is the subject of Zechariah 12, 13, and 14. This morning I just want to look at the preamble or introduction to this message, and tonight we'll work our way through the whole of Zechariah 12. Look at the majestic way in which Zechariah opens this section.

Four Things that God Does

Notice the dramatic and extended preamble in verse 1, for here Zechariah tells us four things that God does: This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel.

Not concerning the church. Not concerning the world. Not concerning the nations. This has to do with the Jewish state, the nation of Israel.

The Lord, who stretches out the heaven, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares....

There is nothing else like this in the book of Zechariah. Many times, Zechariah said, "The Lord said..." or "the Word of the Lord came to me." But look at this three fold introduction. He describes God in three ways.

First, the Lord who is making these predictions is the same one who stretches out the heaven. If we could transport ourselves back 2500 years to the days of Zechariah, one of the things we would notice would be how differently the stars looked back then. Today when I sit on my back porch and look up into the sky, I can barely see any stars at all. There's too much light here in Nashville. The invention of electricity had nearly destroyed the ability of modern city dwellers and suburbanites to appreciate the stars. When I sit on the back porch of my family home in Roan Mountain, I can see more stars; but there are nearby streetlights and the lights of other houses and the glow of all the lights within a ten or fifteen mile radius—all that diminishes the sky. But when I visited our mission friends in Doropo, and they turned off the electric generator at nine o'clock, and there was not an electric light within a hundred miles, it looked like a different sky. That's the way it would have looked during the days of Zechariah; and God put those stars and planets in the sky to demonstrate to us His greatness. The Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1).

The God who created the universe and bespangled the starry sky is about to make a promise.

Second, He is the God who laid the foundation of the earth. This week we had a mini-staff retreat at a State Park, and I took my bicycle and did some riding. The lakes and waterfalls and trees and hills are so unbelievable beautiful that their very beauty speaks of the existence of a Creator. The same God who placed the earth under our feet is about to make some predictions.

Third, He is the God who formed the spirit of man within him. We are wonderfully and fearfully made, body, mind, and soul.

Fourth, He is the God who tells us what is going to happen in the future. Here's the significance of what Zechariah 12:1 is saying: Here is an official pronouncement. This is a divine proclamation. The same God who made the sky above us, the earth beneath us, and the spirit within us is about to tell us what lies before us in human history. And what He has to say we'll look at tonight.

Let me just end the way I began. God is telling us all this not to frighten us, but to reassure us. He knows the end from the beginning. If He formed the heavens over our head and the earth under our feet and the spirit inside our bodies, He knows what's ahead on our calendars. He sees beyond the horizon of human history, and He is in control.

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight;
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll.
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

In his book, *Today Matters*, John Maxwell tells about a ninety-two-year-old independent woman who was moving into a nursing home. She was legally blind and had recently lost her husband of seventy years. She was waiting in the lobby for a long time until the nursing home attendant told her that her room was ready. While being escorted down the hallway, she listened as the attendant described her room, and the older woman spontaneously exclaimed, "I love it!"

"But you haven't even seen the room yet. Just wait." The elderly woman replied, "That doesn't have anything to do with it. Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how I arrange my furniture but on how I arrange my mind."

When you look at the circumstances around you, you can either be distressed and trusting. When you look toward the horizons of history, you can either be frightened or faithful. It all depends on whether or not you arrange your mind around the promises of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know Him as your Savior today. He's coming soon and very soon. What if it were today? Are you ready? Jesus said when

you see all these things taking place, look up; for our redemption is drawing near.

[1]Bibliotheca Sacra : A quarterly published by Dallas Theological Seminary. 1996, c1955-1995. Dallas TX: Dallas Theological Seminary

Zechariah 13 On That Day

I want to thank all of you who prayed for our safety while we were in Israel. Forty-four people connected with our church spent ten days touring the land of the Bible, and we did not have one bit of problem at any point along the way. And I think I learned more on this trip than I ever have. These Holy Land trips are study trips for me. With this most recent trip, I especially gained a much better understanding about the geography around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, both in Bible days and in our own. I wish I had time to share with you some of the things I discovered; but as time goes by I'm sure these things will creep into my sermons. I was deeply impressed with how events taking place in our day are fulfilling biblical prophecy and pointing toward the return of Christ. I think all of us need to keep one eye on Israel and the other eye on biblical prophecy, and one of the books we should read over and over is the book of Zechariah.

Today and next Sunday, we are finishing our study of the book of Zechariah; and the final three chapters of Zechariah represent his concluding sermon about the events of the Last Days. There is one phrase that keeps repeating itself over and over again in these chapters, and it is the phrase "on that day." I pointed this out Sunday night before last, but I'd like to go back and show you again just by way of orientation.

Zechariah 12:1-3: On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her.

Zechariah 12:4: On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness," declares the Lord.

Zechariah 12:6: On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile."

Zechariah 12:8: On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12:9: On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12:11: On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

Zechariah 13:1-2: On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land.

Zechariah 13:4: On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision.

Zechariah 14:4: On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.

Zechariah 14:6: On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day.

Zechariah 14:8: On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem.

Zechariah 14:9: On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

Zechariah 14:13: On that day men will be stricken by the Lord with great panic.

Zechariah 14:20: On that day HOLY TO THE Lord will be inscribed on the bells of the horses.

Zechariah 14:20: And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord Almighty.

So we could call Zechariah's sermon in chapters 12-14, "On That Day." He is talking about the day when the Lord Jesus comes again at the end of the Great Tribulation period as the nations have gathered against Jerusalem to destroy finally and forever the state of Israel. Today I'd like to actually back up and start with Zechariah 11 and show you how in his final chapters, Zechariah presents a remarkable vision of the future. There are several events that will characterize the days preceding the return of Christ.

The Good Shepherd Will Be Rejected

Zechariah 11a

The Good Shepherd will come and be rejected. This is the first half of Zechariah 11. We've already looked at this so I'm not going to read these verses, but Zechariah says, in effect, the Good Shepherd will come to pasture His flock, but they will detest Him and reject Him and sell Him for thirty pieces of silver which will end up being thrown into the temple and being given to a potter. Five hundred years later, that is exactly what happened.

The False Shepherd Will Arise

Zechariah 11:15-17

Second, the false shepherd will arise. This is referring to the man of lawlessness whom we sometimes call the antichrist. Look at the last part of Zechariah 11:

Then the Lord said to me, "Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the flock, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs. Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded."

This is referring to the coming of the antichrist. Zechariah 11 is a description of two shepherds, and they are placed side by side for comparison. One is the good shepherd who was rejected by the flock and sold for thirty pieces of silver. Zechariah 11a is a prediction of the coming of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The last part of Zechariah 11 describes the false shepherd, the Antichrist.

Management and leadership experts have a vocabulary all their own, and in recent years a great deal of discussion has developed around what are called C-level jobs. It all began when the title CEO became popular—Chief Executive Officer. Then came COOs—Chief Operating Officers. Now we have CIOs, CFOs, CMOs, CTOs, CPOs, and CAOs. One of the most coveted positions in America is a C-level leadership position in a company, organization, or firm.

It points out the critical need that human beings have for leadership. In her book, *Executive Charisma*, D. A. Benton writes, "People want a leader. Animals choose leaders. Preschoolers choose leaders. Gang members choose leaders. Workers choose leaders."

Can you think of one organization in the world that works without leadership? Can you think of one company that can thrive in today's marketplace without leadership? Can you think of one country that can achieve greatness without good leaders.

Now, think of this. We live in a world and on a planet that does not have a leader. There is no world leader. We have 193 separate countries in the world, and each one has its own leader at any given time. But taken together, there isn't a world leader; and we don't want one. We're justifiably afraid of a one-world government. It's a terrifying thought to contemplate that all the power and oversight and management of the globe might be in the hands of one person.

And yet that very scenario is going to be played out at the end of world history. The world ruler is the person that we typically call the Antichrist, but that's not the way the Bible usually refers to him. He is mentioned over and over in Scripture, but only one writer in the Bible calls him by the title antichrist; and that is the apostle John—and he uses the word five times. Let me show you:

- 1 John 2:18: Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. In other words, John said something like this: "It's common knowledge among Christians that the antichrist is coming. We talk about that quite a bit as we discuss the future. But in fact, in a general sense there are many people who are anti-Christ and anti-Christian. An anti-Christian bias is in fact one of the characteristics of these last days in which we are living.

- 1 John 2:22: Who is the liar? It is the man that denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. I think in an ultimate sense John is referring to the ultimate antichrist, but he is telling us that there's another sense in which anyone who is anti-Christ and anti-Christian is a sort of antichrist.

- In 1 John 4:3 he makes the same point: Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.
- 2 John 1:7: Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Such a person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

So in every one of these passages, John is saying: There is a diabolical man of evil coming known as the antichrist, but between now and then the spirit of antichrist will dominate the culture and there will be many rulers and leaders and influencers who are anti-Christ and anti-Christian. Just get ready for it.

These are the only times that the word “antichrist” appears in the Scripture, and none of John’s references give us an extended picture of who this man is or what he’s like. But we don’t have to look very hard to find more about him in the Bible, because he is predicted again and again.

I’d like to show you a handful of passages that describe this coming man of evil.

Daniel 8:23ff: In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power (he will be empowered by Satan Himself). He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people (Jews). He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of Princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.

Now, in its immediate context this prophecy was fulfilled by a particularly dark and evil man in history named Antiochus IV Epiphanes who was a Syrian. But Antiochus was only a partial fulfillment, for this vision concerns the distant future. Antiochus was simply a miniature preview, a prototype, of the coming antichrist who is the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy.

Daniel 11:36 also describes this coming man of evil: The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses...

And look at verse 45: He will pitch his royal tents between the seas.... That is, between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, or perhaps the Mediterranean Sea. In any event, this sounds like the location of the Valley of Jezreel or Armageddon, which will evidently be the field headquarters for the antichrist during the battle of Jerusalem.

But look at the way the verse ends: Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

The apostle Paul describes this man in 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff.: Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report, or letter, supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed (the antichrist), the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple proclaiming himself to be God.

But verse 8 says about him: ...whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

In other words, the reign of terror unleashed by the antichrist will suddenly come to a dramatic halt on that day when Jesus Christ returns. Paul continued:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

As you might imagine, this man of lawlessness is described at some length in the book of Revelation. I’m only going to show you one reference to it, in Revelation 13:5ff, where he is called “the beast.” Revelation 13:5ff. says:

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months (three and a half years). He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

This antichrist is pictured in the book of Zechariah as a foolish shepherd who devours the flock.

This man will rise to power during the seven-year period of tribulation, will establish peace in the Middle East, will sign a treaty with Israel; but after three and a half years, he will break this treaty by placing his own image in the Third Jewish Temple. This will trigger a holocaust against the Jewish people, three and a half years of distress such as the world as never seen before and will never see again. All of it will lead up to a cataclysmic climax which is described for us in Zechariah 12-14.

The Nations Will Surround Jerusalem

Zechariah 12:1-3

Third, the nations will surround Jerusalem and Judah. That's Zechariah 12:1-3, which we looked at the other Sunday night. Verse 3 says, "On that day when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations."

On our recent trip to Israel, we stood on Mount Carmel and looked over the vast spreading Valley of Armageddon; and I tried to visualize the great masses of armed forces that will someday gather on that battlefield. And then, something truly unexpected and marvelous is going to happen.

Israel Will Recognize Her Rejection of Messiah

Zechariah 12:10-14

Israel will recognize her rejection of the Messiah. Zechariah 12:10 is one of the most remarkable Messianic prophecies in the Bible: And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly as one grieves for a firstborn son.

- Messiah is going to come to Israel
- He will be an only begotten Son
- He will be rejected by Israel
- He will be pierced
- But in the last days of the Tribulation, God will pour out a spirit of grace and supplication on Israel and the Jewish people will suddenly realize what she did and will mourn like a bitterly bereaved parent.

On the way from Frankfurt, Germany, to Tel Aviv, I sat next to a young Jewish computer specialist who works on a kibbutz in the southern regions of Israel. Like many of the Jews, he is completely secular. He has no religion. I asked him about spiritual things and about the temple and about his faith; and he just had no religion at all. Like so many of the Jews flooding into Israel, he is completely secular and non-religious. I asked him if he had ever wondered how so many of the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures had been fulfilled by the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and he shrugged and said he thought he had studied something about it once in school. He represents so many modern Israelis. There is a great spiritual void today in the land of Israel. He came unto His own and His own received Him not, but to as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become sons of God.

Do you have the same need? Is there a spiritual vacuum and void in your life that only Christ Himself can fill?

And so Zechariah 12 ends with Israel in a state of terrible mourning for her sins and especially for her rejection of the Messiah. Now let's go on to Zechariah 13. Here's the fifth thing that will happen in the sequence of events

Israel Will Embrace Jesus Christ

Zechariah 13:1

And now, at its climactic and critical moment of destiny, the Jewish people will finally discover and embrace Jesus Christ as Messiah, Lord, and Savior. Chapter 13 begins: On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

That fountain, of course, is the blood of Jesus Christ, for there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved.

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

The most wonderful thing that I can say today is that this experience can be yours right now. Jesus Christ is alive and available. He is here and He is waiting.

My parents purchased a television right about the time I was born. Back in the early 1950s, television was just coming of age; and my Aunt Louise and Uncle J.B. had the first color television set in our family. One of the first television programs to come out in color was Bonanza, and one of the stars of Bonanza was Michael Landon, who played "Little Joe." He later went on to star in the popular "Little House on the Prairie" program and on another show called "Highway to Heaven." He died relatively young of cancer.

Unfortunately, Michael Landon's real life wasn't as wholesome as the ones he played on television. He had an affair with the make-up artist on the set of Little House on the Prairie, and the resulting scandal destroyed his family. At the time, Michael Landon had a fifteen-year old son who was named for him. The young man adored and idolized his dad. But one day he came home from school and his uncle was there with red eyes. "Your dad has left," he said. "Your mother is upstairs. She's a wreck and she needs you to comfort her."

Michael Landon, Jr. went into a moral and emotional tailspin. He later said that his world just crumbled. He went from being an honor student to just barely getting by. He started experimenting with marijuana and alcohol. He went to USC, but got kicked out. His life was a mess. He later said, "It was that sense of just nothing solid underneath."

In the meantime, his mother found someone to talk to. It was her manicurist, a woman named Louise. Louise was a Christian, and over the course of time, Mrs. Landon started going to church with Louise and she was eventually saved. That's when she started working on her son. Michael Landon Jr. was eighteen, and he finally gave in and went to church, too. Then he went again and again, and just before his nineteenth birthday he gave his life to Jesus Christ.

Michael Landon Jr. is forty years old today, working in Hollywood, very open about his relationship with Christ, and making movies with Christian themes. You want to run the race the best as you possibly can," he says, "yet I believe that without His grace there's just no way to do it." [1]

I wonder if anyone here feels that way today, that there's nothing solid underneath you. You want to run the best race in this life you possibly can, but without His grace there's no way to do it. Christ shed His blood and opened up a fountain of forgiveness for all who come to Him and call upon Him and give their lives to Him.

So the Jewish nation will turn en masse to the Lord Jesus Christ. I think this is the clearest, plainest passage in all the Scripture to make this prediction, but it isn't the only one.

Look at Ezekiel 36:24ff:

For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

Paul explains this same thing in Romans 11:25ff:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited; Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

We see the firstfruits and forerunner of this in today's Messianic Jewish movement. I read in preparation for this message that among the fourteen million Jews in the world, there are now twenty or thirty thousand who are Messianic Jews and who believe in Jesus. I think the number is probably higher. Another article said that there are ten thousand Messianic Jews in Israel today. But

certainly the number is small and it will remain small but growing until this wondrous day described here in Zechariah 13.

Spiritual Revival Will Sweep Over Israel

Zechariah 13:2-6

That leads to the sixth event described by Zechariah—spiritual revival will sweep over Israel.

“On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more,” declares the Lord Almighty. “I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, ‘You must die, because you have told lies in the Lord’s name.’ When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him. On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet’s garment of hair in order to deceive. He will say, ‘I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.’ If someone asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your body?’ he will answer, ‘The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.’”

Zechariah 13 ends with a parenthesis, a poem, which Zechariah inserts into the middle of his sermon the way I do and most preachers occasionally do. This poem summarizes the entire history of Israel that brought them to this point.

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the Lord Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land,” declares the Lord, “two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’”

And now, we’re ready for chapter 14, the climax to the book of Zechariah and the climax to human history. The return of Jesus Christ.

On the way home Thursday from our connecting flight in Frankfurt, Germany, I sat next to a young African-American soldier who was returning from an extended deployment in Saudi Arabia. We became instant friends. I don’t know when I have ever enjoyed being with someone so much that I had just met. He had grown up with some problems, and one day had attacked a man with a crowbar, almost killing him. In jail, he faced the fact that he might go to prison and he cried out to the Lord, saying, “Lord, if you will somehow get me out of this mess, I promise I’ll serve you with all my heart.” Two minutes later, the door of the jail swung open and he was released on bond and never had to return to prison. He instantly gave his life to Jesus Christ. Now he’s married and has three little children; and he was coming home to see them for the first time in a long while. He was reading a Christian book and full of praise and prayer and Hallelujahs. He could hardly wait to be back on American soil. After several hours I nudged him and pointed out the window. There was the coastline of the United States of America, and a huge smile broke out across his face. He said, “We’re traveling at 500 miles an hour, but it’s not fast enough for me.” When our wheels touched down in Atlanta, I thought he was coming out of his seat, he was so excited, so eager to see his wife and his three little children.

I think Jesus is eager to come back, to touch down on the Mount of Olives, to be reunited with His children. I think He’s on His way, and He’s full of Hallelujahs. And blessed are all those who love and are looking for His return. Blessed are all those who keep an eye on the Eastern skies and who frequently whisper the last prayer of the Bible, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

[1] Based on interviews from ChristianityToday.Com and at http://www.cbn.com/700club/Guests/Interviews/Michael_LandonJr050905.asp, accessed May 30, 200

Zechariah 14 A Day is Coming

Earlier this year, President George W. Bush was sworn into office, and I took time to watch a little of the inauguration. I was impressed with how every single moment of that day was planned and coordinated by the White House, Chief of Protocol, and a myriad of other agencies and offices in Washington. The planning notebooks for that event must number in the thousands. Everything is planned out in exacting detail, and every contingency is considered. From the first twinge of sunlight on that day until the final presidential ball, every split second is accounted for and planned, down to the smallest detail—especially that moment at high noon when the oath of office is administered.

Now, if we know how to plan our great events on earth, don't you think that Almighty God has a complete and thorough plan covering every detail for that great day when Jesus Christ returns and is installed as King of all the earth? Wouldn't you like to peek inside His planning notebook? Wouldn't you like to know exactly what will happen on that day?

The return of Christ is described several times in the Bible, but I've found one chapter in the Bible gives us a fuller description of that day than any other. It is Zechariah, chapter 14. We can read about the return of Christ in Revelation 19, but the language there is largely figurative and symbolic. We can read about it in Matthew 24, but the description is brief. But God chose this young prophet, Zechariah, to convey to us the fullest account of exactly what will take place when Christ returns, and that's why we should often refer to Zechariah 14 when we study the events on the day when Christ returns to earth.

I think we can divide this chapter fairly evenly into six different segments giving us a six-fold sequence of events that will take place, all on this one unique day.

Jerusalem Will Be Under Siege

Zechariah 14:1-2

First, when the sun rises on the last day of human history, so to speak, the city of Jerusalem will be under siege.

A day of the Lord is coming...

Notice those words: "A day... is coming!"

A day of the Lord is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

Zechariah has been telling us about how the nations of the earth will be gathered against Israel. He said in Zechariah 12:2-3: I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations.

We also read about this in Revelation 16. When the end of the world comes, it will be in the Middle East with the armies of the antichrist encircling the city of Jerusalem, and in fact, attacking the city. It will appear that there's no hope. Jerusalem will appear to be doomed, and Satan will be on the verge of fulfilling his grand agenda of annihilating the Jewish race from whom the Messiah has descended. But just at that moment, help will arrive from above. Read on:

Jesus Will Return to the Mount of Olives

Zechariah 14:3-4

Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle.

"Go out" is a military term for a king going out to battle. Suddenly the eastern sky will split in two, and the King of Kings will descend leading the armies of heaven and the hosts of the saints. Compare this with Revelation 19:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Now back to Zechariah for one important detail: On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.

On our recent trip to Israel, we stood on this very mountain and I lectured there; and two things stuck me. First, how close this mountain is to Jerusalem. My son-in-law, Joshua Rowe, traveled with us to Israel; and later I asked him what had most impressed him. He said, "I was surprised at how small the land is and how close the places are to each other. For example, the Mount of Olives isn't a mountain several miles outside of Jerusalem. It is right there."

The second thing that impressed me is how carefully Jesus has thought everything out. When He designed and created this part of

the world, He mounded up a spot of land for the city of Jerusalem, surrounded on all sides by ravines, and then He constructed this beautiful mountain on the eastern side. It was on the lower slopes of this mountain that He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but Thine be done." It was on the upper slopes of this mountain that He gave His famous sermon—we call it the Sermon on the Mount of Olives, or the Olivet Discourse—about the signs of the times, the end of the age, and the Second Coming. It was by deliberate plan that Jesus took the disciples here and ascended to heaven. And it was here that the angels gave the great promise that the Jesus who ascended into heaven will come again just as He left. And it is to this very spot that His feet will touch the earth again when He returns. I can't help but think of the old Cliff Richard's song that says, "Yes, it is His Land—all of it His. He stepped it off and marked it there to be His earthly thoroughfare, and He blessed it with His hand. Yes, it's a great land!"

But now a third thing will happen—cataclysmic changes will take place in the geography and topography of the land. The second our Lord's feet touch the earth, the earth will burst asunder.

The Geography Will Change

Zechariah 14:5-8

On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.

When we were in Jerusalem a couple of weeks ago, I stood for along time and studied the profile of the Mount of Olives. I found a spot I'd never seen before where, with one look, I could see the Western Wall of the Jews, the Temple Mount, the Islamic Dome of the Rock, and the Mount of Olives. I noticed an indentation I'd never seen before in the mountain, a place where the ridge of the mountain is broken; and I wondered if that's where the split will occur. The Bible clearly teaches that when our Lord's feet touch down on the earth, the earth will rumble and quake; and the Mount of Olives will split in two, half going toward the north and half going toward the south, creating a remarkable valley through which these newly converted Messianic Jews will escape. It's just like what happened at the Red Sea, only instead of the Red Sea parting, the Mount of Olives will part. The passage goes on to say:

You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel.

We don't know where or what Azel is. That's a mystery. It's evidently an unknown place not far from Jerusalem which will be a place of safety for the Jewish survivors.

You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with Him.

Zechariah goes on to say that there will be other strange phenomena that occurs on that day.

On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light.

Other passages tell us that there will be strange happenings in the sky and on the earth.

Isaiah 13:10& 13 say: The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light... I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of His burning anger.

Isaiah 34:4 says: All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine...

Joel 2:10 says: The earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord thunders at the head of His army; His forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey His command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

Joel 2:30: I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 3:14ff: Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for His people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her.

Jesus said: Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky.

Now, there is another change in the geography and topography of the land that is worthy of our attention. When the Mount of Olives splits in two, an enormous underground spring will be released which will create a new river in the land of Israel, one that flows from the Dead Sea on the East to the Mediterranean Sea on the West?

Let's read on. Zechariah 14:8 says: On that day living (running, flowing, fresh) water will flow out from Jerusalem; half to the eastern sea (that is the Dead Sea. Look at any map of Jerusalem and you'll see that the top of the Dead Sea is directly to its left or east) and half to the western sea (that would be the Mediterranean), in summer and in winter.

Both Joel and Ezekiel also mention a river that will evidently flow out of Jerusalem from somewhere underneath the Temple Mount, and it will be a primary geographical feature during the Millennium. Joel says in Joel 3:18: In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water, a fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias.

Ezekiel 47 describes this river in great detail and it says that the fresh, living water from this river will turn the Dead Sea into a living sea and it will turn the desert into a paradise.

The Lord Will Reign

Zechariah 14:9

And then what? And then the Lord will reign from Jerusalem. Look at verse 9: The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

His Enemies Will Perish

Zechariah 14:10-15

That leads to event number five—His enemies will perish. Now the Bible teaches in several places that the sudden return of Christ is going to be almost like a nuclear explosion for the antichrist and for those armies that are poised to destroy Jerusalem.

Revelation 19 says: Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

2 Thessalonians says that Christ will slay them with the breath of His mouth and with the splendor of His coming.

Look at Zechariah 14:12ff., and see if this doesn't sound like a nuclear attack:

This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that day men will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other. Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected—great quantities of gold and silver and clothing. A similar plague will strike the horse and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps.

The Millennium Will Begin

Zechariah 14:16-21

And then, with His city secured, His enemies destroyed, and His people with Him, the Lord will reign on earth for a thousand years. The last paragraph of Zechariah describes this glorious period when Jesus will reign on the throne of Israel, the nations will stream into Jerusalem, and all the promises and prophecies made to the land of Israel will be fulfilled.

Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The Lord

will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (this is the most joyous of all the celebrations of ancient Israel). This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

On that day, Holy to the Lord will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord Almighty.

In other words, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem will no longer be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles.

And we are taught both at the beginning and at the end of the New Testament to pray for the coming of this day. At the beginning of the New Testament, in His first recorded sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And at the end of the New Testament, the last prayer of the Bible says, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." God is giving us His prayer request that we pray for the hastening and the speeding of this day. And so we pray...

You are coming with the sunrise;
Soon Your feet again shall stand
On the rising Mount of Olives,
With the world at Your command.

Even so, come quickly, Jesus,
King of Kings and Lord to me,
True and Faithful, Pure and Precious,
Soon Your glory I shall see.

Give me hope's anticipation,
For the coming of my Lord,
In His hands a golden scepter,
From his mouth a flaming sword.

Even so, come quickly, Jesus,
King of Kings and Lord to me,
True and Faithful, Pure and Precious,
Soon Your glory I shall see