

# Triennial Torah Study – 4<sup>th</sup> Year 08/06/2013

sightedmoon.com /triennial-torah-study-8-year-04042015 /

By Joseph F. Dumond

We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at [https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon\\_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf](https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf)

Deut 21	Zechariah 1-5		2 Tim 1-2
---------	---------------	--	-----------

## Family and Societal Laws (Deuteronomy 21:1-21)

In cases where a murder was committed that could not be solved, it was first necessary to determine which town's jurisdiction the crime fell in—as it would be that town's responsibility to do all it could to investigate the matter. Yet upon finding no answer, there still had to be some type of atonement to avoid defilement of the land (compare Numbers 35:33). Thus, in lieu of executing the perpetrator, the elders of the closest city had to take a heifer that had not yet been used for work down to a running stream and break its neck—though a few translations say it was beheaded. The elders then had to wash their hands over the heifer's neck, thereby indicating their innocence and obtaining atonement (verses 1-9). Another specific type of heifer, i.e., a red heifer, was also used for certain purifications (compare Numbers 19:2). And demonstrating how pervasive in the ancient world was the public washing of one's hands to indicate innocence, Pontius Pilate would later wash his hands to declare himself innocent of the murder of Jesus (Matthew 27:24). The running stream may also symbolize the defilement of the land being carried away.

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 allows for an Israelite to marry a foreign woman among the war prisoners. Note the requirement that she “shave her head and trim her nails.” According to The Nelson Study Bible: “this ritual was intended to give the woman time to adjust to the new culture and to mourn over the forceful separation from her family. It was also a symbol of cleansing. She was preparing to become part of a new community” (note on 21:12). Inasmuch as God clearly prohibited an Israelite from marrying pagans who engaged in idol worship, this woman had to have accepted the true God of Israel (as verses 12-13 somewhat imply, showing that the woman had come under the authority of the husband).

Verses 15-18 discuss the undesired situation in which a husband had two wives, the one loved more than the other, and the consequences for the firstborn son of the unloved wife. God still required that the firstborn son was to receive the double portion of his father's inheritance allotted to him. People have wondered why men were permitted to marry more than one wife in ancient times. The answer is that this was not God's original intent. Jesus said that in the beginning, when He created Adam and Eve, “the two” were to become “one flesh,” and “the two” were not to be divorced. Because of the hardness of man's heart, God allowed men to have more than one wife, as He also allowed men to divorce their wives (compare Matthew 19:1-9). The biblical record shows, however, that having more than one wife brought about many problems for the family. The difficulties, in this respect, of Abraham, Jacob and Solomon are telling examples.

Verses 18-21 dealt with a rebellious son given over to drunkenness and gluttony, who stubbornly refused to obey his parents—obviously referring to an older adolescent son and not a young child. Yet this was not just “typical” adolescent rebelliousness. Rather, it denoted one who had established a reputation as a “good for nothing” over a lengthy period. To prevent others from emulating the son's abominable lifestyle—and to prevent the son's flagrant disregard of parental authority from growing into disregard for all authority, including God's, to the point of him eventually posing a danger to society—his parents had to report him to the elders, and he had to be executed.

Such a punishment may sound harsh to our ears today. But keep in mind that God's laws were designed to create a peaceful, productive, safe society for all people. This particular punishment, though severe, was designed to safeguard others. Knowing human nature, God realized that when a young man showed a rebellious, stubborn attitude over an extended period of time, if he dishonored and rejected the authority of his parents and others, if he showed little or no self-control or willingness to take responsibility for his actions, it would be only a matter of time before his defiant attitude would lead him to injure or even kill someone else. So if over time he showed no inclination to change, the problem was taken care of before he had the opportunity to hurt or kill others. This punishment would "put away the evil from among" Israel and cause others to "hear and fear" (verse 21).

How different would our societies be today if young men knew they were subject to such a penalty at a relatively early age if they chose to reject all authority and decent standards of behavior? Many problems that plague our societies, such as career criminals, gangs and teenage mass murderers, would be snuffed out before they had a chance to get started. All of society would be much safer and better off, and innocent people would not have to live in fear of criminal thugs. Keep in mind, too, that this wasn't the absolute end for such people. God knew that he would ultimately resurrect them in a future world in which they will be able to better understand the consequences of their behavior and repent (see Revelation 20:5, 11-12; Ezekiel 37:1-14; "The Last Great Day: Eternal Life Offered to All," God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind, 1999, pp. 51-57). God truly is a god of justice, mercy and loving concern for the well-being of all.

## **Zechariah**

### **Introduction to Zechariah (Zechariah 1:1-6)**

Ezra 4:24-5:2 says that in the second year of the Persian king Darius, the Judean governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua or Joshua recommenced the work on the second temple in response to the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Haggai 1:14-15 tells us that the work was resumed on the 24th day of the sixth month (corresponding to September 22, 520 B.C.). Yet the first message of the book of Zechariah is dated to the eighth month of the same year (late October to late November)—one to two months after the work's resumption. Evidently Zechariah preached with Haggai prior to the 24th day of the sixth month but didn't receive the message from God that begins his book until the eighth month. In other words, Zechariah's ministry began prior to the writing of his book.

Zechariah is the 11th of the 12 Minor Prophets—the second of the three Postexilic Prophets. He refers to himself as "Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo" (Zechariah 1:1). Ezra refers to him as "Zechariah the son of Iddo" (Ezra 5:1; 6:14)—"son" in this case meaning "grandson." "Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was not only a prophet but also a priest. He was born in Babylonia and was among those who returned to Palestine in 539-537 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua (cf. Iddo, Neh 12:4). At a later time, when Joiakim was high priest, Zechariah apparently succeeded his grandfather Iddo (Zech 1:1, 7) as head of that priestly family (Neh 12:10-16). Since it was the grandson (Zechariah) who in this instance succeeded the grandfather (Iddo), it has been conjectured that the father (Berechiah, Zech 1:1, 7) died at an early age, before he could succeed to family headship. Though a contemporary of Haggai, Zechariah continued his ministry long after him (cf. Zech 1:1 and 7:1 with Hag 1:1; see also Neh 12:10-16). Considering his young age in the early period of his ministry (Zech 2:4, 'young man'), it is possible that Zechariah continued into the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.)" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, introduction to Zechariah). Chapters 1-8 of Zechariah are dated to the time of the temple's reconstruction. Chapters 9-14 are undated and believed by many to have been written much later.

The name Zechariah, a common one in the Old Testament, means "Yhwh Remembers." Expositor's notes: "The three names in the complete patronymic formula (Zechariah, Berechiah, Iddo) mean 'the Lord remembers,' 'the Lord blesses,' and 'timely (?).' [Commentator Charles] Feinberg... combining the three names, believes they signify that 'the Lord remembers,' and 'the Lord will bless' at 'the set time,' which, in a sense, is the theme of the book" (note on 1:1). Zechariah's message is that God will not forget or forsake His people—He will remember and restore them. This was already evident through the restoration God was then accomplishing. And in due time God would send the Messiah to bring them eternal salvation and glory.

“Zechariah is frequently called the ‘prophet of hope’.... [His] book is filled with references to Christ. Messianic references include mentions of Christ’s lowliness and humanity (6:12). They describe His betrayal by Judas (11:12-13), His deity (3:4; 13:7), His priesthood (6:13), and His kingship (6:13; 9:9; 14:9, 16). Zechariah also speaks of the Messiah’s being struck down by the Lord[’s command] (13:7), His second coming (14:4), His glorious reign (9:10; 14), and His establishment of world peace (9:9-10; cf. 3:10). In few Old Testament books do we find such constant attention given to the coming Saviour” (Bible Reader’s Companion, introduction to Zechariah).

In his book *The Minor Prophets*, Charles Feinberg states: “The prophetic horizon of Zechariah is far broader than that of the other minor prophets. His book has been called an apocalypse because of the presence of a number of visions. He dwells on the Person and work of Christ more fully than all the other minor prophets together” (p. 273).

Zechariah’s message was no doubt an encouraging one. Like Haggai, he experienced a positive response from the people of Judah. This leads to a question about what became of this particular prophet. Jesus later mentions the horrifying martyrdom of “Zechariah, son of Berechiah...murdered between the temple and the altar” (Matthew 23:35)—the location seeming to imply that the victim was a priest, as only priests were permitted in this area. Yet it would seem odd for the author of the book of Zechariah to have been meant considering that Ezra and Nehemiah make no mention of such a vile act—one that would have represented a drastic change in the orientation of the people. It is, however, possible that Zechariah lived beyond the completion of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and that his martyrdom came at that later time—perhaps by people who felt his messianic proclamations had failed. Alternatively, commentators typically conclude that Christ was referring to Zechariah “the son of Jehoiada” who was stoned to death in the temple court (2 Chronicles 24:19-22)—seeing Jehoiada as actually his grandfather and Berechiah as his father though not named in Scripture (or Berechiah as a second name for Jehoiada). Chronicles was the last book of the Bible in Jesus’ day, and it is argued that His statement “the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah” was intended to signify martyrdom “from one end of Scripture to the other.”

#### **“Return to Me...and I Will Return to You” (Zechariah 1:1-6)**

The prophet Zechariah’s book opens with a call to repentance (Zechariah 1:1-6). Though God had stirred the hearts and minds of the people to resume work on the temple, it is evident that they were not fully reformed. Working on the reconstruction was not enough. They needed to completely reorient their lives toward God, serving Him wholeheartedly with the right attitude. And they needed to stay the course—remaining consistent in obedience (a rather tall order for a people who did not have the indwelling strength of God through His Spirit). Haggai had already addressed the disappointment of many over the scope of the new temple as compared with Solomon’s (Haggai 2:3). Discouragement could have led to neglect and giving up as it had some years before. So Haggai urged a steady strength. Through Zechariah God urges “return”—repentance. It was imperative for the people to recognize their tendency to sin and the possibility that they could fall into their forefathers’ pattern of rejecting God. (Indeed, as 1 John 1:7-8 makes clear, even true, converted Christians do not always succeed in their ongoing struggle against sin—and must regularly and constantly “return” to God and His ways.) Nevertheless, the admonition that the people not follow in their forefathers’ footsteps should have served as an encouragement. The returned exiles had a choice in the matter—they did not have to go the way of their ancestors.

The great God was with them to help and guide those who would trust in and submit to Him—and to correct and chasten those who would not. “Note the title ‘Lord of Hosts’ [Yhwh Sabaoth] throughout this passage and the entire prophecy as well. It is the characteristic name for God in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, occurring more than eighty times. The Greek translation of the Old Testament renders it ‘the Almighty.’ God is Lord of the stars, the powers of heaven, and all the forces of the universe—a most inclusive and comprehensive name for God” (Feinberg, p. 275).

Zechariah 1:5-6 offers an important perspective about the prophetic pronouncements of the Bible. Many earlier prophets had warned of future national destruction to come on Israel and Judah for their failure to obey God but died before the destruction came to pass. Many looked on their deaths as justification for viewing their warnings as false alarms. And yet their pronouncements came true. “Though the messengers may be gone, God’s words

live on to be fulfilled (cf. Isa 40:6-8)” (Expositor’s, note on verses 4-6). Many today scoff at end-time prophecy, claiming that those who issued apocalyptic warnings are long since dead and gone—their pronouncements nothing to worry about. This kind of thinking is foolish. Almighty God is still alive. He’s the one who actually made the pronouncements through His servants—and He will ensure their fulfillment.

In verse 6, the phrase “So they returned” or “Then they repented” [NIV] (‘came to themselves,’ ‘changed their minds’) is apparently a reference to what happened to the preexilic forefathers and/or to their offspring during the Exile and immediately afterward.... They had to acknowledge that they had brought the divine discipline of the Exile on themselves because they had refused to ‘listen,’ or ‘pay attention,’ to the Lord and to his words of warning through his servants the prophets. They also had to acknowledge that the Lord was just and righteous in his judgment, for he had done to them what their ways and practices deserved, all in accord with what he had ‘determined to do’ (cf. Lam 2:17)” (Expositor’s, note on Zechariah 1:4-6).

The Exile had vindicated the rejected former prophets—their words had come true. The people of Zechariah’s day needed to learn the lessons and live their lives according to God’s will. Of course, the message was not only for Zechariah’s day. These words were written for us as well.

### **Night Visions: Horses Among the Myrtle Trees (Zechariah 1:7-21)**

Haggai’s book ended on the 24th of the ninth month in Darius’ second year. Zechariah’s book resumes exactly two months later, on the 24th of the 11th month (1:7)—corresponding to mid-February of 519 B.C. Zechariah 1:7-6:15 records a sequence of eight visions (or seven, depending on how they are reckoned) that the prophet experienced that night followed by the symbolic crowning of the high priest Joshua, as we will later see. In this section, “Zechariah pursues the same end as Haggai, rebuilding the temple as the center of worship and world rule, and as a place of pilgrimage for the nations (8:20-23; Hag. 2:7-9)” (The Nelson Study Bible, note on Zechariah 1:7-6:15). Yet in going through these visions, we will likely find some of them to be among the most cryptic and enigmatic in the entire Bible.

The first vision (1:7-17) portrays a man on a red horse standing in a hollow or ravine among myrtle trees. “Myrtle is an evergreen tree that was once very common in the vicinity of Jerusalem (Neh. 8:15)” (note on Zechariah 1:8). The “man” is identified in verse 11 as “the Angel [malakh or ‘messenger’] of the Lord.” Many have viewed this phrase here as a reference to the preincarnate Christ, as it often is in the Old Testament. This is probably the case since the figure here is apparently the same as the Angel of the Lord in the fourth vision of the night who, as we will later see, is evidently divine (see 3:1-4).

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary further notes: “In Revelation 6:4 the red horse (see also Zech 6:2) is associated with a sword, the instrument of war and death, which may also be the significance of the color here (cf. Isa 63:1-6).... In Nehemiah 8:15 [cited above] myrtle trees, which are evergreen, are associated with the Feast of Tabernacles for making booths; and in Isaiah 41:19 and 55:13 they are included in a description of messianic kingdom blessing. Perhaps, then, they speak of the hope and promise of the future, the restoration from Babylonian exile being but the initial stage in the progressive fulfillment of that promise. The trees are situated in a ravine. At the foot of the Mount of Olives are myrtle groves in the lowest part of the Kidron Valley. The ravine may picture Judah’s lowly condition at the time; but, as suggested above, there is a ray of light or hope for the future. Behind the horseman were red, brown, and white horses—presumably [or, rather, possibly] with riders on them, since they report to the angel of the Lord in v. 11. These other riders or horses apparently represent angelic messengers (cf. v. 10). White horses are associated with vengeance and triumph (cf. Rev 19:11, 14 [and the conquest aspect of 6:2])” (note on Zechariah 1:8). It could be that the horses themselves represent angels, as they also may in Revelation 19:11 and verse 14 (compare Psalm 18:10). It may be that there were seven reconnoitering angels here in all who walk “to and fro throughout the earth” (Zechariah 1:11; compare 4:10). We will see the figure of horses of different colors again at the end of Zechariah’s night visions in chapter 6, where they are “eager to walk to and fro throughout the earth” (verse 7)—in that case to deliver divine judgment on the nations.

The report the horses or horsemen give to the Angel of the Lord in chapter 1 is that all the earth is resting quietly (verse 9). This is not a description of the peaceful messianic Kingdom to come. Rather, we must view this report in light of the comment God makes in verse 15: “I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease.” This description fit the circumstances of the time this prophecy was given. Recall that the first two years of the

reign of the Persian emperor Darius (522-520 B.C.) were wracked with turmoil, as he put down one rebellion after another as recorded in his famous inscription high on the Behistun (or Bisitun) cliffs in western Iran (see [www.livius.org/be-bm/behistun/behistun01.html](http://www.livius.org/be-bm/behistun/behistun01.html)). But by the end of 520, he had established control throughout the empire.

So the Persian Empire was secure and Judah remained in a lowly, oppressed position. “The report of the horsemen must have disappointed God’s chosen people because it told of rest and peace among the nations, when, instead, they were expecting the ‘shaking of all nations’ (Hag 2:6-9, 20-23) as the sign of returning favor and full blessing to Zion” (Expositor’s, note on Zechariah 1:12).

In verse 12 the Angel of the Lord, again probably a reference to the Being who would later be born as Jesus Christ, intercedes with God on Judah’s behalf (compare Hebrews 7:25). In response, God declares His zeal for Jerusalem and His anger with the nations. God had been “a little angry” or, probably better translated, “a little while angry” with His sinning people (see Expositor’s, note on verses 13-15). But now His anger turns to the gentile powers. While He had used them to punish Israel and Judah, the personal motivation of the gentile nations in their assault on God’s people was evil (verse 15). Given the end-time element to the prophecies of this section, we should recognize the peace and ease of the nations in verses 11 and 15 are probably mainly referring to a period in the last days—when the gentile powers seem triumphant, things seem quiet for a time and Israel and Judah are subjugated.

God promises that He will yet show mercy to Jerusalem, the stretching of the surveyor’s line of verse 16 demonstrating God’s intent of rebuilding the temple and the Jewish capital.

Considering this prophecy in the light of what we’ve already seen from Haggai and what is yet to follow in Zechariah, it seems that God building His house in verse 16 applied on one level to the temple reconstruction in the time of those prophets, on another level to the building of the spiritual temple, the Church (which would begin in Jerusalem and be referred to as spiritual Jerusalem and Zion), and then on another level to the millennial Jerusalem and temple and beyond. Note the mention of cities again expanding and prospering in verse 17, clearly pointing to the physical, national application of the prophecy. Besides simply referring to Judah’s ancient return, this surely represents—considering the evident end-time focus in the series of visions here—the future restoration of all Israel.

Commentator Charles Feinberg gives a good summary of the first vision: “The distinctive features of comfort for Israel in this first vision are: (1) the presence of the Angel of [Yhwh] in the midst of degraded and depressed Israel; (2) His loving and yearning intercession for them; (3) the promises of future blessings. We may say, then, that the import of the vision is this: although Israel is not yet in her promised position, God is mindful of her, providing the means of His judgment on the persecuting nations, and reserving glory and prosperity for Israel in the benevolent and beneficent reign of the Messiah. The series of visions carry us through God’s dealings with Israel from the time of their chastisement by God under the Gentile powers until they are restored to their land with their rebuilt city and temple under their Messiah King. The first vision gives the general theme of the whole series; the others add the details...When the world was busy with its own affairs, God’s eyes and the heart of the Messiah were upon the lowly estate of Israel and upon the temple in Jerusalem” (quoted in Expositor’s, note on verses 16-17).

The same commentator also proposes that the first vision sets the stage for those that follow. “All eight visions form a unit, and the first is the key to all of them” (Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 1952, p. 275).

#### Four Horns and Four Skilled Workmen (Zechariah 1:7-21)

Having in mind the above view, that the first vision is the key to the other visions of the night, Zechariah’s second vision (verses 18-21) is understood to be an amplification of God’s wrath on the nations at ease in verses 11 and 15.

Zechariah sees four horns “that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem” (verse 19) followed by four craftsmen or workmen who come to terrify and cast out the horns (verses 20-21). The symbol of horns is a common one in Scripture. Based on these being the implements with which many animals fight, horns symbolize the power and strength of nations or their rulers (see Daniel 7:7-8, 24). As for the craftsmen, “the Hebrew word is used for any skilled workman in wood, metal, or stone” (p. 278). Some render the word as

“smiths.” Here we have an image of those who smite with the hammer, grind down, break into pieces, plunge into fire, reshape what is usable and throw away what is not. In essence, they are workers skilled in destruction.

Who exactly the four horns are is not entirely clear. They seem to be described as having scattered (past tense) the people of Israel and Judah, which would seem to point to events that had already happened. However, the Hebrew verb could also be translated scatter (present tense, see Expositor’s, note on Zechariah 1:18-19), which could point to scatterings yet to happen.

The horns are most commonly identified either as (from a solely past-tense perspective) Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia or (from a past-to-future perspective) as identical with the four empires of Daniel 2 and 7—Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. One problem with the first interpretation is that it does not continue to the time of Israel’s ultimate restoration in the messianic age, in line with the rest of the visions in this section. One problem with the second interpretation is that it leaves out the nation that scattered the northern kingdom of Israel—Assyria (see again verse 19). Another problem with both interpretations is that the Persians did not scatter the people of Judah (see verse 21). Neither did the Greeks, even during the Seleucid persecutions.

All this being so, a more likely interpretation of the four horns would seem to be: 1) ancient Assyria, which deported Israel and part of Judah; 2) ancient Babylon, which deported Judah; 3) ancient Rome, which would later deport the Jews of Judea; 4) the end-time revival of all these empires in the same power bloc, which will deport both Israelites and Jews from their homelands. The four smiths who remove these horns would then be: 1) ancient Babylon, conqueror of Assyria; 2) ancient Persia, conqueror of ancient Babylon; 3) the Gothic hordes who would bring down the Roman Empire; 4) the Messiah, who will ultimately defeat the end-time Roman-Babylonian-Assyrian power bloc.

In the end, God tells us in Psalm 75:10, “All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.”

### **Measuring Jerusalem for Future Expansion (Zechariah 2)**

Zechariah 2 brings us to the third vision of the night (verses 1-13). Feinberg states: “If the second vision be seen as an amplification of the truth of 1:15, then the third vision is an elaboration of the promise in 1:16” (p. 279). This seems entirely reasonable, as 1:16 related not only the temple being built but also a surveyor’s line being stretched out over Jerusalem, signifying the future reconstruction and expansion of the city. This is also described in 2:1-2. Notice that Jerusalem will be like “towns without walls” (verse 4). The populace will overflow the city walls, the prophecy continues, as the people will not need to huddle within them. This is because God Himself will serve as the people’s defense. Yet the absence of defensive fortifications has not characterized the city of Jerusalem from the time of Zechariah until now. Indeed, the setting is clearly the messianic age. “The wall of fire, indicating security and safety, is reminiscent of the pillar of fire in the Exodus. (Note Ex 14:24 [and verses 19-20, where the pillar stood between the Israelites and Egyptians], also Is 4:5 and Zec 9:8.) God will be her wall of salvation and protection (Is 26:1). The Shekinah glory is promised here” (Feinberg, p. 280). The presence of God’s indwelling glory also ties back to Zechariah 1:16, which this section appears to be amplifying. It was there mentioned that God’s house, His dwelling, would be in Jerusalem. Again, it seems likely that there is a partial fulfillment of this verse in spiritual Jerusalem, the Church of God, which experiences God’s indwelling presence and miraculous protection in lieu of physical defensive fortifications. But clearly what is written here is mainly a prophecy for the last days. As Feinberg remarks: “Surely it will not be denied that the fulfillment of this prophecy is in millennial times (Hab 2:14). The theme of the vision is the rebuilding and resettlement of Jerusalem, bearing out the words of 1:16-17, and the full accomplishment of these words will be the establishment of Jerusalem in the earth as the city of God’s dwelling. Blessed day for Israel and all the earth that will be” (p. 280).

The remainder of the third vision (2:6-13) gives more details regarding the future expansion of Jerusalem, both spiritual and physical, and it’s becoming God’s permanent dwelling.

Verses 6-7 states that more people who are to be of Zion need to flee out of Babylon. This probably has several levels of meaning. First of all, there was an application for Zechariah’s own time. Recall that when the Persian king Cyrus entered the city of Babylon he preserved it intact. But it would fare worse later. Darius had just crushed two rebellions there. And Darius’ successor, his son Xerxes, would sack Babylon in 482 B.C. After later

rebellion, it was conquered yet again by Antiochus III Ochus around 340 B.C. It seems reasonable to believe that, on some level, Zechariah was warning the Jews still dwelling comfortably in Babylon of these upcoming invasions and resultant destruction.

Additionally, consider that God is addressing those He has “spread...abroad like the four winds of heaven” (Zechariah 2:6). This may be speaking to Jews all throughout the Babylonian Diaspora (or Dispersion) from Zechariah’s time until today—that they return from a Babylonian-rooted society to dwell in Jerusalem or its environs, thereby swelling its population. Quite likely there is also a sense of spiritual return to God intended here. Those who would be part of spiritual Zion, are to come out of the “Babylon” of this world’s false ideologies and values. And there is clearly an end-time application to escaping from Babylon, just as with God’s nearly identical admonitions to do so in other passages (see Jeremiah 50:8; 51:6; Isaiah 48:20; Revelation 18:4). The terminology “daughter of Babylon” (Zechariah 2:7) may even imply the end-time counterpart of the earlier system.

In verse 8 we find the “Lord” saying, “He has sent Me...”—that is, evidently, the preincarnate Christ is saying that God the Father has sent Him—in this case to bring judgment on the nations that have acted against His people. Touching—harming—God’s people is like touching the “apple of His eye,” meaning the eye’s pupil, one of the most important and guarded parts of a person’s body. In short, God says, attacking His people is like poking Him right in the eye. God will give these nations as spoil to the ones they’ve oppressed, that is, to both physical and spiritual Israel (verse 9).

Yet this is not a hopeless message for the nations. For when God comes to dwell in Zion (verse 10), “many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day” and they will become His people too (verse 11)—thereby vastly expanding the “city of God,” in both the physical and spiritual sense. Indeed Jerusalem, as in many prophecies, represents the entire nation of Israel, and all other nations must become part of Israel spiritually to be God’s people and, ultimately, part of His Kingdom. In that Kingdom they will dwell with Him and He will dwell with them as one family for all eternity. Incidentally, the phrase “the Holy Land,” though rather commonly used today, occurs in Scripture only in verse 12.

The conclusion in verse 13 for the world to be silent in anticipation of God’s intervention and judgment is essentially repeated from Habakkuk 2:20.

### **Joshua the High Priest and the Coming Branch (Zechariah 3)**

Zechariah’s fourth vision of the night concerns the high priest of his day, Joshua or Jeshua, yet as a type of the entire nation, as we will see. Recall that the high priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel had led the initial effort in resuming worship in Jerusalem and commencing construction on the temple—and later, after allowing the construction to lapse, responded in repentance to the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, leading the nation then in renewed effort.

In verse 1, the “he” showing the prophet the current scene is either the interpreting angel who has spoken to him in the previous visions or God Himself, who was referred to in the preceding verse (2:13) and who was earlier mentioned as showing images to him (see 1:20).

The high priest Joshua stands before the Angel of the Lord (3:1). As this particular figure is able to remove iniquity (see verses 3-4), the reference is apparently to the preincarnate Christ. Indeed, in verse 2 we see the “Lord” calling a rebuke down from the “Lord”—evidently Christ calling a rebuke down from God the Father.

The rebuke is called down on Satan. “The Hebrew is literally ‘the Satan,’ meaning ‘the Accuser’” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 1)—or, similarly, “the Adversary” or “the Opponent.” The word “oppose” in verse 1 could also, in a legal setting, be rendered “accuse.” “Satan’s accusation invests [the scene] with a judicial character. The position of standing at the right side was the place of accusation under the law (Ps 109:6). Satan knows the purposes of God concerning Israel and therefore has always accused the Jews and accuses them still.... Satan is the accuser, not only of Joshua (i.e., Israel), but also of all believers (Job 1-2; Rev 12:10)” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on Zechariah 3:1). It is interesting to recall that the Samaritans, as agents of Satan to thwart the restoration of Judah and its worship, had constantly brought the Jews before the Persian imperial court (Ezra 4:4-5).

The reason for Satan's accusation in Zechariah 3 is evidently Joshua's impurity, as symbolized by his defiled garments. Expositor's states in its note on verse 3: "The Hebrew word soim ('filthy') is 'the strongest expression in the Hebrew language for filth of the most vile and loathsome character' (Feinberg...). Some interpreters maintain that Joshua was covered with excrement—only in the vision, of course! Such clothes represent the pollution of sin (cf. Isa 64:6). To compound the problem, Joshua (i.e., Israel), contaminated by sin, was ministering in this filthy condition before the Angel of the Lord."

Joshua had been guilty of sin, having previously abandoned the reconstruction of the temple while continuing in priestly service. "The high priest represented the people before God (see Ex. 28:29) and under no circumstances was to become defiled or unclean (Ex. 28:2; Lev. 21:10-15)" (Nelson, note on Zechariah 3:3). It is interesting to consider the high priest as representative of the nation, for the figure of Joshua is clearly being used that way in this passage. The whole nation, this priestly nation (see Exodus 19:6), stood guilty before God.

The national identification is clear from verse 2. Responding to Satan's accusation against Joshua, the One who would later become Jesus Christ responds, "The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!" He follows with "Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" God had earlier told the people of Israel in Amos 4:11, "I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning." That prophecy was dual, referring to both ancient and end-time Israel. The current vision is the same in this regard. Expositor's notes: "The reference to the burning stick snatched from the fire is an additional indication that Israel, not Joshua, is ultimately in view. Israel was retrieved to carry out God's future purpose for her (cf. Amos 4:11). The 'fire' refers to the Babylonian captivity. Metaphorically, Israel was snatched as a burning stick from that fire. However, this event may also look back to the deliverance from Egypt (cf. Deut 4:20; 7:7-8; Jer 11:4) and forward to the rescue from the coming tribulation period (cf. Jer 30:7; Zech 13:8-9; Rev 12:13-17)" (note on Zechariah 3:2).

Satan is justly rebuked by God because his accusations are, as is always the case, the pinnacle of blasphemy, hypocrisy and twisting of fact. For one, Satan's accusations actually impugned God, calling into question how a perfect and just God could accept a defiled person or nation in His service—and perhaps implying that God's whole plan was a failure. Furthermore, Satan himself was the principal reason for the defilement! While the high priest and nation did in fact stand guilty—as do the people of all Israelite nations today and in fact all of mankind (Romans 3:9-19)—Satan, as the "tempter" (see Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5), is the main instigator of all the sin in the world, in fact the very father of sin (John 8:44). Ultimately, God intends to reconcile humanity to Himself and lay on Satan the guilt and condemnation for his leading role in mankind's sins (see "The Day of Atonement: Removal of Sin's Cause and Reconciliation to God" in our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, pp. 38-43).

In Zechariah 3:4, the Angel of the Lord (see verse 3)—again evidently the One who would become Jesus Christ—removes Joshua's iniquity. At the beginning of this verse, He tells "those who stood before Him" to take away Joshua's filthy garments. Many interpret the others standing here to be angels, tying back to the previous visions. Yet in what way they were the instruments of removing Joshua's defiled garments is unclear. It could be that God's other human servants are in mind here. It was through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah that the high priest Joshua repented. In fact, it was through their preaching that the whole nation repented. God has always worked through such representatives. And yet, as the end of verse 4 states, it is Christ Himself who actually removes Joshua's iniquity and clothes him with new garments—through His sacrifice (whereby He would actually bear the defilement of all of humanity's sins as the sin-bearer and take them with Him to the grave) and then living His resurrected life within those who will receive Him.

"Joshua was to be clothed with rich garments—God's representative clothed in God's righteousness. God's servant went from filthy garments to festive garments. The festive garments (the Hebrew word is used only here and in Isa 3:22) speak of purity, joy, and glory; but their chief significance is that they symbolize the restoration of Israel to her original calling (Exod 19:16; Isa 61:6). There is a contrast here: Joshua in filthy garments—Israel as a priest but defiled and unclean; Joshua in festive garments—Israel's future glory in reconsecration to the priestly office" (note on verse 4).

The beginning of verse 5 is often seen as Zechariah's enthusiastic expression of wish that the priestly restoration be completed. Yet this could be part of the quotation of God from the previous verse.



In verses 6-7, God promises Joshua (both the actual high priest and, in type, the nation of Israel) that faithfulness to His ways will result in authority and responsibility within God's house and courts—in Zechariah's day meaning the rebuilt temple but in an overall sense a reference to the Kingdom of God. Those standing with God are, again, either the angels or His human servants, the saints (such as Haggai and Zechariah), who will receive the Kingdom.

In verse 8, "Joshua and his companions were a sign because the reinstatement of the priesthood made public God's continuing intention to fulfill his promises to His people" (Nelson, note on verse 8). Indeed, God's restoration of Joshua and the priesthood was to serve as a powerful example of how God would restore the entire nation. The removal of Joshua's iniquity in verse 4 was meant to directly symbolize the future removal of Israel's iniquity (verse 9)—at the commencement of the millennial Kingdom (compare verse 10).

And there is another aspect to this sign. God says Joshua and his fellow priests were "a wondrous sign, for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH" (verse 8). The Branch is the Messiah, Jesus Christ (see also 6:12; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). "Now it is clear why Joshua and his fellow priests are typical [i.e., representational] persons: the act of forgiving grace and cleansing look on to that of the Messiah whereby the nation will be not only potentially but actually redeemed, and their iniquity forever removed" (Feinberg, pp. 287-288). Even the name Joshua (or Jeshua, as Ezra renders it) meant "The Eternal Is Salvation." It is from the later Greek form of this name that we derive the name Jesus—the very One through whom redemption and salvation would come, the ultimate High Priest of whom Israel's human high priest was only a type.

As we will later see, Zechariah 6:9-13 makes it clear that Joshua was, on one level, a type of the Messiah. Indeed, there are striking parallels in chapter 3. As Joshua was defiled by sin (that of the nation and himself), so also would Christ (though perfect Himself) bear the defilement of sin as the sinbearer of the people. As Joshua was opposed by Satan, so also would Jesus be. And as Joshua was, in vision, reclothed in rich garments to serve as a fitting high priest for the nation, so would Jesus bear sin no longer and instead be clothed in glory as the perfect and ultimate High Priest. Joshua standing before the Angel of the Lord (Jesus) in the figure would represent Jesus Himself standing before God the Father. So we see in this amazing vision the redemptive work of Christ in both His first and second comings—similar to a later prophecy in the book of Zechariah (see 9:9-17).

It should be stated that all this still fits with the aforementioned picture of Joshua as also representative of Israel—both physical and spiritual—since the "Servant" motif of 3:8 is used of both the priestly nation and its Messiah (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 42).

The stone of Zechariah 3:9 could be another reference to the Messiah. Feinberg remarks: "Many are the interpretations given to the stone mentioned here; it is said to be the foundation stone of the Temple, the capstone of the Temple, the jewel in Messiah's crown, all the stones of the Temple in building at the time, Zerubbabel, an altar, a jewel on the breastplate of the high priest or upon a royal crown, and the finished temple itself. The manner in which it is introduced, and because of what is stated concerning it, the reference can scarcely be to an ordinary material stone. We have already declared our position that this is the Messiah. Scripture proof will be found in Genesis 49:24; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16; Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; and 1 Peter 2:6" (p. 287).

The stone's "seven eyes" are thought by some to represent full or complete vision—omniscience—since the number seven often signifies completeness in Scripture. However, the seven eyes could be those referred to in the next chapter, the "seven...eyes of the Lord, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:10), possibly synonymous with or related to the angels who walk "to and fro throughout the earth" and report back to God (1:11). The phrase "these seven...eyes" in 4:10 could also refer to the "seven lamps" of 4:2, as Jesus later explained that "the lamp of the body is the eye" (Matthew 6:22; Luke 11:34).

We will see more of this in our next reading, but consider for now that in the book of Revelation, the apostle John receives a vision of Jesus Christ amid seven golden lampstands with seven stars in His right hand (1:12-16). He is told, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands...are the seven churches" (verse 20). So perhaps the image in Zechariah 3:9 is of the spiritual temple, the Church of God. It is built upon the foundational Rock, Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 2:19-22). As the Church is the Body of Christ, the "lamps" of His Body would be "eyes." And these seven lampstands,

these seven churches (constituting the whole), are each committed to the responsibility of one of seven representative angels—also referred to as “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God” (Revelation 4:5; 3:1)—who in this sense also serve as God’s watchful “eyes.”

We should also consider that while seven eyes “upon” the stone can mean that the stone has seven eyes, it could also mean that seven eyes are looking upon the stone—making it the focus of attention or the one looked to for direction and help (compare Psalm 141:8).

Many who identify the stone with the Messiah see the engraving on it as referring—especially given the mention that immediately follows of the removal of iniquity—to the cutting up of Jesus’ flesh in His sacrificial offering to provide atonement. Alternatively, the engraving could perhaps relate to Hebrews 1:2, where Jesus is said to be the “exact image” or “imprint” of the Father’s person—the Greek here being the word *charakter*, meaning “engraving,” from which we derive our English word “character” (Strong’s No. 5481). God’s character is also to be engraved into the hearts of all believers.

A further possibility regarding the engraved stone laid before Joshua is that it could parallel the reference in Revelation 2:17 to the “white stone...[with] a new name written” given to believers who overcome. Such a stone could signify acquittal from legal charges or a reward for victory (see The Nelson Study Bible’s note on this verse). We will examine this verse more when we come to the book of Revelation in the Bible Reading Program. Suffice it to say for now that such a meaning would not preclude the concept of the stone also being the Messiah Himself, as He is the source of forgiveness, new life, victory and reward for all of God’s people.

As already explained, the removal of Joshua’s iniquity in verse 4 was meant to typify the conclusion of verse 9, where God says, “I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” What Judah experienced in Zechariah’s own day was only a small forerunner of this prophesied event. What God is here referring to is the repentance of the whole nation at the return of Christ (see Zechariah 12:10-14)—as well as the purging away of those who refuse to repent. The rebuke against Satan (3:2) will be fulfilled when He is banished at that time of national atonement and his accusations cease (see Revelation 20:1-2). “And so,” Paul writes, “all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins’” (Romans 11:26-27).

The time frame is made clear in Zechariah 3:10, which repeats the millennial prophecy of Micah 4:4 (see verses 1-5). Yet now added is the element that not only will everyone sit under his own vine and fig tree, signifying personal prosperity, but all will invite neighbors to join them—signifying not just individuals reaching out to each other, but all nations of the world being invited to share in Israel’s blessings. Israel will at long last be the righteous priestly nation God intended it to be.

#### **“Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit” (Zechariah 4)**

In Zechariah’s fifth vision of the night, we see that he is “wakened...as a man who is wakened out of his sleep” (verse 1). This seems to imply that he was in reality still asleep, but was roused from a period of unconsciousness to a dream state to experience the next vision—this time of the golden lampstand, two olive trees and a message for Zerubbabel.

The description of the golden lampstand—a candelabrum with seven pipes and lamps—evokes, as it would have for the people of Zechariah’s day, the image of the seven-branched menorah of the temple. (The Hebrew word *menorah* is the word used in both cases for lampstand.) New here, however, is the picture of a bowl above it and an olive tree on each side of it.

As was noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on chapter 3, the book of Revelation also gives us lampstand imagery, wherein seven lampstands symbolize the seven churches making up the whole of God’s Church (see 1:12-16, 20). In a heavenly vision, the apostle John also saw “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God” (Revelation 4:5)—seemingly parallel to the representative angels of the seven churches (see 1:20; 3:1).

A lamp allows people to see in the dark. It is scripturally a symbol of God’s Word and law, the light of truth and understanding to illuminate the path His people must walk (see Psalm 119:105, 130; Proverbs 6:23). Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, was sent into the world as the Light (John 1:1-9, 14; 8:12; 9:5). But His light is

also to shine forth from all of God's people—not only in proclaiming God's Word but in living it. As Jesus told His followers: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works [not just knowledge and words] and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

In Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13, God's servants are portrayed as carrying lamps—the wise with sufficient oil to keep their lamps burning and the foolish lacking oil so that their lamps are going out. The oil here—probably olive oil as in the temple menorah (see Exodus 27:20-21)—is the fuel for the flame. In Christ's parable it represents the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people. To further demonstrate the symbolism, consider that oil was the consecrating agent in anointing and that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). Returning to the parable of the virgins, we should understand that to continue shining forth the witness of God and His Word in what we say and do, Christians require a constant supply of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 3:5; Philippians 1:19). And as the apostle Paul told Timothy regarding that Spirit, we must "fan into flame the gift of God" (2 Timothy 1:6, NIV). Thus, it is through God's Spirit that His people are able to shine as lights and pierce the darkness of this world.

God's Spirit is a central element in the prophetic vision of Zechariah 4. Indeed, when Zechariah asks the meaning of the symbols (verse 5), the first answer he receives, which we will further examine shortly, is that it pictures the work of God's Spirit (verse 6). Consider the elements of the scene unfamiliar to Zechariah—the bowl above the menorah and the olive trees standing to the right and left of it (verses 2-3). Interestingly, we later find that the olive trees represent anointed ones—literally "sons of fresh oil"—who "stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (verse 14, J.P. Green's Literal Translation). In the vision they stood to either side of the bowl, which would seem to identify this bowl as both a container of oil and as God Himself—or as God's presence through His Spirit. Indeed, God is a container, so to speak, of His own Spirit. The bowl here is evidently the source of the menorah's oil—just as God is the source of His Spirit, which He supplies to His people. Furthermore, we should consider that this is a temple-related scene. The menorah was a temple fixture representing the light of God as shining forth from His people—especially from His spiritual temple, the Church. As the Shekinah glory, the divine presence through the indwelling Holy Spirit, had come down upon the Mosaic tabernacle and Solomon's temple, so this bowl representing the presence of God and the supply of His Spirit sits over the menorah.

The response given to Zechariah's inquiry was no doubt intended to be of great exhortation and encouragement to the people of his day—particularly to the Judean governor, Zerubbabel. But like Zechariah's other visions of this same night, this was a prophecy for not only his own time but the last days as well. God's message to Zerubbabel is that the work he is engaged in, that of building the temple, will be accomplished not "by might nor by power"—that is, not by mere human strength or ability—but by God's Spirit (verse 6). Zerubbabel, as we know, had had a rough go of it. He had been unsuccessful in getting past the foundation stages due to the Samaritan resistance and his own people letting down—and apparently his personal lack of zeal as well. Things had ground to a standstill for years. Now the work was back in full swing. Nevertheless, if left to mere human effort, problems would set in and discouragement would win out all over again. Satan, working to thwart God's people, would prevail. There were, in fact, already signs of concern. Some "despised the day of small things" (verse 10)—either viewing the lesser second temple project as nothing compared to the former glory of Solomon's temple (see Haggai 2:3) or looking only at the present meager circumstances and not envisioning the future God had promised.

But God blazes forth the wonderful truth that His Spirit is the instrument that will accomplish His will. It is the power that works in His people to give them ultimate success—the "oil" to fuel their lamps so that they can shine forth His glory in achieving whatever He has commissioned them to do. This should serve as a great encouragement to all of God's people. In the work of participating in the building of God's spiritual temple, His Church, we would certainly never succeed if left to do it on our own. If left to our own devices, we would never remotely succeed in living the kind of life God requires of us. But we are not on our own. God is ever with us to help us. "How timely this message is for our day with its complex and manifold committees, boards, drives, plans, organizations, contests, budgets, sponsors, rallies, groups, and much more. These can never avail themselves to bring about the accomplishment of the task God has entrusted to us; since it is from first to last a

spiritual work, it must be by the omnipotent and unailing and unerring Spirit of God. The arm of flesh fails; He never does" (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 290).

Moreover, just because something starts out small does not mean it will stay that way. Great things may well lie in store. And that was certainly the case here. Indeed, Jesus would later explain that even God's great and glorious eternal Kingdom starts out like a tiny mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32). A day of small things is a beginning, not the end. We must remember this in all our endeavors. With the power of God through His Spirit added to our efforts, what starts out as seemingly small and insignificant can grow to heights unimaginable to us. Even seemingly insurmountable obstacles can be overcome. As Jesus said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

Zechariah 4 has something to say about obstacles in this regard. After explaining that Zerubbabel's efforts will bear fruit through the power of God's Spirit (verse 6), God further states: "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!" (verse 7). Jesus likewise told His disciples, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20). In both cases, the image is one of removing whatever obstacles stand in the way. In Zechariah's day, the obstacles were the Samaritan resistance, the negative spiritual influence of Satan and the human tendency to give up in the face of antagonism.

Interestingly, the particular prophecy of Zerubbabel here seems to parallel the prophecy in Isaiah 40 of one who would prepare the way before the Messiah: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth...'" (verses 3-5). The idea again is one of removing obstacles from the path. As the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 40 explained, this prophecy was fulfilled in part by John the Baptist, who prepared the way before Christ's first coming, and yet it was to be fulfilled in a greater sense prior to Christ's second coming—preparing a people to receive Him at that time. Indeed, it may well be that the reference to Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4 is to not just the governor of Zechariah's day—that Zerubbabel here could also denote an end-time counterpart, as we will see.

Verse 7, in the NKJV and other versions, says that Zerubbabel would "bring forth the capstone"—that is, of the temple he was building. The "capstone" would be the top stone that finishes the project. This interpretation would seem to fit with verse 9, which says, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this temple; his hands shall also finish it." Yet the word for capstone is literally "head stone," and others equate this with the "head stone of the corner" in Psalm 118:22 (KJV)—that is, the cornerstone of the foundation (compare Isaiah 28:16; Job 38:6). Yet that would seem to make no sense in the prophecy of Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:7 since he had already laid the foundation of the second temple—in fact he had done foundation-laying work twice and would do no more. For this reason, most interpret "head stone" here to be capstone—yet it could refer to the foundation cornerstone if a different, future Zerubbabel and a different temple were intended.

Oddly enough, there is some question as to whether Zerubbabel remained as governor much longer beyond the time that Zechariah gave this prophecy—some question as to whether he even was still directing the temple reconstruction at its completion. After the intervention of the Persian emperor Darius to promote the temple's rebuilding in Ezra 6, which we will soon read, there is no mention of Zerubbabel working on the project during the period in which it was finished (see verses 13-22)—only a mention of the "elders of the Jews" doing the building (verse 14). Some have speculated that this is because Darius or one of his subordinates removed Zerubbabel from power.

Recall that Darius, in securing his own position, had just put down a succession of revolts all over the empire—most instigated by claimants to the royal thrones of their respective areas. And Zerubbabel was of the line of David. In his book *Old Testament History*, Dr. Charles Pfeiffer writes: "The disappearance of Zerubbabel from his position as governor of Judah may be a result of the civil reorganization effected by Darius. There is no hint in the Biblical records that he was removed for sedition, as some have suggested. The fact that his name simply drops out of the Biblical record may suggest that the change of policy which Darius inaugurated resulted in his removal" (1973, p. 519).

Historian John Bright, in *A History of Israel*, points out that some of Haggai and Zechariah's prophecies could have been interpreted by the Jews of that day as pointing to Zerubbabel as the Messiah. Bright says that even if

Zerubbabel himself was not thinking in these terms, “the talk had a seditious ring, and Zerubbabel could scarcely control it. What the Persian authorities would have thought of it, had it come to their ears, one can readily guess. And apparently there were those who took pains to see that it did [referring to the Samaritans].... What happened to Zerubbabel is a mystery. It is entirely possible that the Persians ultimately got wind of the sentiment in Judah and removed him. But we do not know. There is no evidence whatever for the assertion that he was executed. Yet, since we hear no more of him, and since none of his family succeeded him, it is likely that the Persians did strip the Davidic house of its political prerogatives” (2000, pp. 371-372). Expositor’s says one commentator “suggests that Zerubbabel was probably summoned back to Persia since one of his descendants, Hattush, returned with Ezra (8:2; 1 Chronicles 3:19-22)” (note on Ezra 5:15-17).

If Zerubbabel was still in office at the temple’s completion, then Zechariah 4:9’s statement, “his hands shall also finish it,” would certainly apply to him. But they would not have to apply exclusively to him, as there could still be a later fulfillment wherein Zerubbabel serves as a type of someone else. On the other hand, if Zerubbabel was gone from office when the second temple was completed, then verse 9 most likely refers not to him at all but to a future figure fulfilling a similar office of whom Zerubbabel was a type. It should also be remembered from the example of Elijah and Elisha that a person’s special commission can be fulfilled by someone else—as Elijah’s three-fold commission at Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19:16) was only partially fulfilled by himself, the rest being completed by Elisha and someone else whom Elisha sent.

Who would the later Zerubbabel figure be? Consider again the voice of one crying in the wilderness in Isaiah 40, preparing the way before Christ. As already explained, John the Baptist fulfilled that role on one level. He even “brought forth the head stone with shouts of ‘Grace, grace’” (Zechariah 4:7). As several verses show, Jesus is the foundation stone, the head of the corner (see Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7, KJV). And John the Baptist is the one who announced Him to Judea, proclaiming His grace (John 1:14-16, 29). Furthermore, consider that John’s ministry prefigured another Elijah-like work of the end time that would accomplish a great restoration and prepare a people for the second coming of Christ (see Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 17:11-13). Of course, the people being prepared in the latter days are part of the spiritual temple. So we again see that Zerubbabel’s work of restoring the physical temple finds its parallel in an end-time spiritual counterpart. This end-time counterpart could even involve the laying of a foundation—for though, as the apostle Paul explained, Jesus Christ is the ultimate foundation of His Church (1 Corinthians 3:11), he also implied that a great apostolic-type work in an area was in essence the laying of a foundation (see Romans 15:20).

Yet we should recognize that the ultimate builder and restorer in this picture is the Messiah Himself, Jesus Christ. This is clear from what was stated at the end of this sequence of visions in Zechariah 6:12: “Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord.” The point is repeated for emphasis. Even the work that Zerubbabel the governor was doing was really the work of Jesus Christ—that is, Christ was the one accomplishing it. In the case of Zerubbabel’s end-time counterpart, again Christ is the one truly doing the work. He accomplished the building of the physical temple. And He accomplishes the building of the spiritual temple. As He said, “I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). And He will finish that work.

Jesus will also cause a new temple to be built in the Millennium. Indeed, besides what we’ve already seen, the mention of a great mountain becoming a plain before Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:7 may be related to this. For Zechariah 14:10 says that during the reign of the Lord, the mountainous area of Jerusalem and its surroundings will be turned into an elevated plain. Of course, we should also consider that the original Zerubbabel, if resurrected as one of God’s saints, could very well play a leading role in the leveling and temple-building work of the millennial age. It should also be noted that the great mountain becoming a plain is seen by some as referring to the world government of Satan being blasted away at the return of Christ.

In Zechariah 4:10, the plumb line in Zerubbabel’s hand, a device for making sure walls were vertically straight, means that he is engaged in his building work. In the spiritual parallel, Christ makes sure that all are aligned with Him. And those who will not be brought into alignment are purged (compare Amos 7:7; Isaiah 28:17). “These seven” who rejoice to see the work in progress in the same verse—referred to as the “eyes of the Lord”—have no immediate antecedent. It would have to be referring back to either the seven lamps of this vision (verse 2) or the seven eyes of the previous vision (3:9)—or both if their meanings overlap. Indeed, seven spirits do seem to stand as angelic representatives for the seven churches that constitute the whole of God’s Church. This was examined to some degree in the comments on our previous reading. While part of what is

intended here is probably God and His angels being pleased at Zerubbabel's restored work on the physical temple, the depiction is also applicable to the Church and its representative angels rejoicing at the building up of the spiritual temple and the purging of its problems. (Amos 5:7-9 describes a vision of God standing on a wall with a plumb line, setting it in the midst of Israel to show the people as crooked and to remove whatever was not aligned with Him and His way.)

Zechariah now returns to his inquiry, wondering at the meaning of the two olive trees in the vision (Zechariah 4:11). In verse 14, they are referred to as the two anointed ones or, literally, "sons of fresh oil" (Green's Literal Translation)—evidently nourished from the bowl above the scene, representing God as the reservoir of His Spirit. But the flow of God's Spirit does not stop with the olive trees. In verse 12, Zechariah describes branches of each tree—or "two olive clusters" (Green's Literal Translation)—dripping oil into the golden pipes next to them. Thus, these two sons of oil are not only anointed with the Spirit, they are also anointing—administering it to others.

In his book *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical-Theological Reading of Zechariah's Night Visions*, Dr. Meredith Kline notes on this passage: "The misunderstanding of the sons of oil as [simply] anointed ones has led to the common interpretation of the two as the royal and priestly offices, represented in Zechariah's day by Zerubbabel and Joshua. But if the trees are the (mediatorial) source of the oil that streams to the menorah, if the sons of oil are not the anointed but the anointers, we must think of prophets, not kings or priests. The prophets, outstandingly the paradigm prophet Moses, were God's chief agents for anointing. Moreover, in Rev[elation] 11:4 it is the two prophetic witnesses [verse 3] that are explicitly said to be the two olive trees. Further, the description of the sons of oil as 'standing by the Lord of all the earth,' that is, as his servants, comports with the familiar designation of the prophets as God's servants (cf. Amos 3:7; Jer. 7:25; 25:4; Rev. 10:7; 11:18). This description also points to prophetic identification in that it denotes the status of those admitted into the divine council...a special privilege of prophets" (2001, pp. 164-165).

In Zechariah's own day, he and Haggai were the two prophet witnesses whom God used in a special ministration of His Spirit to redirect the nation back to Him—to bring, through a call to repentance, Zerubbabel, Joshua and the nation back to the work to which they were called. In that sense, Zechariah was being given a vision concerning his own work. Yet the vision was not only for that time as we've seen. God has repeated this pattern in history. The final two witnesses of the end time will be given great power to accomplish their work (see Revelation 11:3-6). Yet as always, the power to do the will of God will not come from themselves—indeed, it cannot. Rather, it will be of God's Holy Spirit—as it must be. That is the lesson we must all learn.

### **The Flying Scroll and the Ephah of Wickedness (Zechariah 5)**

We insert our article on the flying scroll as this study does not come to the same conclusions.

Chapter 5 presents us with what are commonly reckoned as Zechariah's sixth and seventh visions of the night. However, it seems more likely that they constitute one vision in two parts. In his book on Zechariah's visions, Dr. Meredith Kline introduces the chapter this way: "According to the pattern of the introductory formulae (cf. 1:7-8; 1:18...2:1...3:1; 4:1-2; 5:1; 6:1) there are seven visions in Zech. 1:7-6:8, not eight [as often reckoned], for Zechariah 5 is not to be divided into two visions but regarded as a unit, the sixth vision. The introductions to the two triads of visions bracketing the central hinge vision (Zechariah 3) all include the phrase, 'I saw and behold,' but that is absent from Zech. 5:5, where many commentators would begin a separate vision. The phrase we find instead at v. 5 is like one which marks the middle, not beginning, of a vision at Zech 2:3.

"The unity of the two parts of Zechariah 5 is also indicated by certain interdependencies of grammar and terminology. Thus, the suffix in 'their appearance' (v. 6) has as its antecedent the thieves and perjurers of v. 3. And the phrase 'in all the land' (v. 6) resumes 'all the land' in v. 3. [The NKJV has 'the whole earth' in both places.] Most compelling, however, are the clear thematic interrelationships of the two parts of the chapter and the remarkable intermeshing of their symbolism. The sixth vision portrays the judgment curse of exile, distinguishing its two distinct stages: destruction of the victims' holdings in their homeland (vv. 1-4) and deportation with relocation in a foreign land (vv. 5-11)" (*Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical-Theological Reading of Zechariah's Night Visions*, p. 177).

A major theme through Zechariah's visions is spiritual renewal. That includes restoring the repentant as well as disciplining those who are yet unrepentant—both elements of which were signified by the plumb line of the previous chapter (see 4:10). Now, in chapter 5, we see the disciplinary action actually taken.

The chapter opens with a flying scroll bearing a curse. The imagery of flying here is variously interpreted. Some say it represents the swiftness of coming punishment (see Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 293). Others suggest that the flying shows the impossibility of escaping the judgment the scroll brings (*Bible Reader's Companion*, chaps. 5-6 summary). Still others maintain that the flying simply shows the scroll as unrolled—unfurled—for all to read (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on 5:1-2). While it could signify all of these things, there is probably a more specific meaning, as we will see. Note that the scroll pursues violators of God's law (verse 4).

The size of the scroll is 10 by 20 cubits (verse 2). Using the smallest cubit of 18 inches, that would be 15 by 30 feet—yet it could be a little larger if a larger cubit is intended. In any case, this would be like a large billboard, and some maintain that this is the point—that it was very large for all to see. However others point out, as Feinberg does, “that the holy place in the tabernacle of Moses [based on the measurements in Exodus] and the porch of Solomon's Temple (where the Law was usually read) were of the same dimensions (1 Ki 6:3). The vision would teach us that the holiness of the sanctuary of the Lord is the measure of sin and that judgment must begin at the house of God. (See 1 Pe 4:17-18)” (p. 293). Notice also the possible parallel with Ezekiel 9:5-6, where Israel's punishment was to begin at God's sanctuary. The curse in Zechariah 5:3 then goes out over “all the land.” “The whole earth” could also be correct if this is denoting the Israelites of the end time scattered all around the globe—as the people of Israel and Judah do seem to be the recipients of punishment in this prophecy.

Kline states: “By identifying the scroll Zechariah saw as a ‘curse’ (Zech 5:3), the angel tells us it is a covenant document, the Lord's treaty given through Moses.... A standard section of [ancient Lord-vassal] treaties was the sanctions, which...included blessings but were heavily weighted on the curse side [for disloyalty] (see Deut 8:1-68; 29:16-28; cf. 27:11-26; Lev 26:3-39). It is the execution of this curse sanction of...[God's covenant relationship with Israel] that is portrayed in Zechariah 5. The expression in Zech 5:3, ‘on this side...on the other side’ [referring to writing on both sides of the scroll], is possibly a specific allusion to the covenant tablets of Sinai [that is, the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments], since it is used in Exod 32:15 to describe those stone tablets as inscribed on both sides. But the idea might also be [to signify] that the curse strikes here and there, that is, everywhere throughout ‘the whole land’ (cf. Deut 28:16-19)” (p. 178).

If the reference is meant to parallel the writing on the Ten Commandments, it is interesting to consider the two sins that are mentioned in verses 3-4—stealing and swearing falsely by God's name. The first is a violation of the Eighth Commandment, which would probably have appeared on the back of the commandments tablets. As for the second sin, while some see it as simply bearing false witness (breaking the Ninth Commandment), the more serious aspect of perjury here is breaking an oath made in God's name and thus taking God's name in vain—thereby violating the Third Commandment, which would have appeared on the front of the commandments tablets. The first four commandments summarize man's duty toward God and the last six summarize man's duty toward fellow man. Some see the violations of the Third and Eighth Commandments as representing the violations of both aspects of the law in general, though more specific violations could be intended.

Notice that the penalty for the covenant breakers is expulsion (verse 3) along with destruction of dwelling places (verse 4). While expulsion could signify death, it seems to tie in with the later part of Zechariah 5, where wickedness is bound away and carried off to another land (verses 5-11).

Consider that Zechariah sees something “going forth” from the land (verses 5-6). It is said in the New King James Version to be a “basket,” yet the actual Hebrew, as it is rendered in the King James Version, is ephah, the largest ancient Hebrew unit of dry measure, about a half a bushel. Of course, there evidently is some kind of basket, barrel or other container since it has a heavy lid on it (see verses 7-8). Inside the basket sits a woman referred to as “Wickedness”—a personification of the sin and spiritual harlotry of the people and likely a representation of the wicked people themselves. They have been gathered up, as it were, in full measure—that

is, all of them—and then forced down and confined. We then see the imagery of winged women coming to carry them away to Shinar—that is, to the land of Babylon (verses 9-11).

Kline explains the vision this way, tying both parts together: “When calling upon Israel to swear their covenant loyalty Moses forewarned: ‘It shall come to pass, if you do not obey Yahweh your God,...that all these curses will come upon you...They [the curses] will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed’ (Deut 28:15, 45)” (p. 178). This seems the most likely meaning of the flying scroll. Kline continues: “Ultimate among the threatened curses would be the siege and destruction of their dwellings in the holy land and banishment to an alien land. ‘Yahweh will bring a nation against you from afar...swooping down like an eagle’ (Deut 28:49). ‘They will besiege you in all your cities until your high and fortified walls come down throughout all your land’ (Deut 28:52). ‘You will be plucked off the land...and Yahweh will scatter you among all peoples’ (Deut 28:63-4). By Zechariah’s day such an exile judgment had befallen Israel and Judah alike [Israel at the hands of the Assyrians and Judah at the hands of the Babylonians], and now those recently restored from that Babylonian captivity are warned by Zechariah that again in the future such a curse would descend on the covenant community. The houses of the covenant breakers in the promised land would be consumed (Zech 5:1-4) and they would themselves be removed to the land of Shinar (Zech 5:5-11)” (p. 178). Notice that the “house” in the homeland is destroyed (verse 4) and a new “house” awaits them in the land of Babylon (verse 11).

The Jews of Judea experienced such devastation and deportation nearly six centuries later at the hands of the Roman Empire, a successor to the Babylonian Empire and essentially a continuation of the Babylonian system. In anticipation of this disaster, Jesus had even warned them: “See! Your house is left to you desolate” (Matthew 23:38)—paralleling Zechariah 5:4. Yet this was only a forerunner of destruction that will befall both Israel and Judah in the last days at the hands of a revived Roman Empire designated in Scripture as end-time Babylon.

The two winged women represent the forces carrying the Israelites away (see verse 9). They are pictured with wings like those of a stork. “The stork is a migratory bird frequently seen traveling north along the Jordan valley in the spring of the year” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 9). “Those acquainted with the habits of this bird inform us that in its annual migration, the stork actually traverses a longer distance than that from Judea to Shinar” (Feinberg, p. 296). “Specification of the wings as those of a stork might be due simply to the suitability of the strong wings of the stork for this assignment, but...the stork’s unclean status must be relevant (cf. Lev 11:19; Deut. 14:18). Unclean agents are used by the Judge of Israel to remove the defilement from his holy land to unclean Babylon, habitation of demons and a hold of every unclean spirit and unclean bird (Rev 18:2)” (Kline, p. 186).

While it seems that the two winged women carry the ephah together, it could be that one takes it and then the other—perhaps signifying the Roman deportation of the Jews in apostolic times and then the end-time Babylonian captivity. If the women are carrying the basket together, they could represent Israel and Judah’s ancient captors, Assyria and Babylon, combined in the end-time in the same power bloc. Alternatively, they could represent the two aspects of end-time Babylon, as both a religious power (Revelation 17) and a commercial empire (Revelation 18).

God’s main point in Zechariah 5 seems to be that wickedness has no place in His covenant community. Rather, it will be purged and sent to where it belongs, to Babylon—the focal point of all opposition to God—which, as the next chapter shows, will meet with His judgment. Yet as we will also see, hope remains for future repentance.

## **2 Timothy 1**

2 Timothy opens with much uplifting to Timothy from Sha’ul. Words of encouragement and remembrance from all they have seen, heard, and experienced concerning Messiah and the Holy Spirit.

## **2 Timothy 2**

Further encouragement to be strong, remain in truth and in a good witness always. Make sure to choose trustworthy men to teach others who have a solid foundation in belief of Messiah; His death, burial, and resurrection. Don’t get entangled in worldly affairs, for that is not the fight of the soldier of Elohim. Stay away



from verbal battles. They are a waste of time and unprofitable. Always be gentle and patient in teaching with all meekness.