

Major Lessons from Minor Prophets

Visions of Hope (Zechariah)

Lesson #11 for June 15, 2013

Scriptures: Zechariah 1-4,7; Romans 15:9-18; Ephesians 3:1-8; Exodus 25:31-40.

1. This lesson will cover the first seven chapters of Zechariah and focus on God's efforts through Zechariah and Haggai to inspire those few people who came back from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple. How do you explain Matthew 23:35; Zechariah 1:1; and 2 Chronicles 24:21?
2. When they arrived back in Jerusalem, everything was rubble. They cleared off the top of Mount Moriah and set up a small altar to offer sacrifices to God. But, every time they attempted to move on to do something more, there was opposition from the surrounding nations and discouragement among the Jewish people themselves. As we noted when studying Haggai, the events of Zechariah and Haggai are very precisely dated. Only about one percent of the Jewish people returned from Babylonian captivity to live in Palestine. They had been home from Babylon about 14 years when Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy. God reminded them of the failures of their ancestors and very strongly encouraged them not to make the same mistakes. While Haggai was focusing on rallying the people to build the temple, Zechariah received a series of eight visions. Those visions were organized in a very specific way to teach a very important lesson.

The message of Zechariah's first six chapters is quite simple: it is time to rebuild the temple. This appeal was the main communication behind a series of eight short visions that God gave to Zechariah. . . They were written in a chiasmic order (in a mirror structure), which means that the first vision corresponds with the last one, the eighth; the second with the seventh; the third with the sixth; and, finally, at the climax is the fourth, accompanied by the fifth. These pairs also deal with related subjects, which are chronologically arranged in a reverse order. To summarize the message of each vision, one can say the following: [To better understand the context and message, read these visions in the sequence: #s 8,1,7,2,6,3,5,4. See below.]

1. The first vision (*Zech. 1:7-11*), about the man among the myrtle trees and four horses with their riders, conveys the idea that these horses went through the whole earth, and their riders declared that the earth was at peace (*vs. 11*). So, it was now a ripe time to work on God's project; namely, to build His house, because no one had the power to stop it. God had established peace.

2. The second vision (*Zech. 1:18-21*), about the "four horns" (*NKJV*), describes how the craftsmen broke them. God revealed the end of political cause for the exile. These powers were torn down because they were hindrances to the building of the temple.

3. The third vision (*Zech. 2:1-5*), about the "man with a measuring line" (*NKJV*), points to God's abundant blessing: "'I myself will be a wall of fire around it [Jerusalem]' . . . 'and I will be its glory within'" (*vs. 5, NIV*). [too big to measure]

4. The fourth vision (*Zech. 3:1-10*), about God's forgiveness for Joshua, lies at the heart of these eight visions. Satan accused Joshua, the high priest, of sin. Joshua's priestly robe was dirty, thus representing the filthiness of sin. But the "Angel of the Lord," who is without doubt the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, ordered Joshua's filthy clothes to be removed and assured Joshua: "'I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you'" (*Zech. 3:4, NIV*). The Lord then recommissions Joshua to minister in the temple and announces a magnificent prophecy about the Messiah. . . [See #s 8-12 below for more detail about God's judgment.]

5. The fifth vision (*Zech. 4:1-14*), about God's empowering Zerubbabel, lies at the core of Zechariah's message, together with the fourth vision. God gives His Spirit to Zerubbabel to build the temple; thus, He strengthens him to accomplish His will. This vision about the gold lampstand and oil puts the emphasis on the work of the Spirit of the Lord who sanctifies. Only the Holy Spirit can change and stir up the work for God in an efficient way. [How does the Spirit work? By might and power? See #s 13-16 below.]

6. The sixth vision (*Zech. 5:1-4*), about the "flying scroll" (*vs. 1, NKJV*), shows that the curse was measured and God Himself punishes iniquity.

7. The seventh vision (*Zech. 5:5-11*), about the “woman sitting inside the basket” (*vs. 7, NKJV*), explains the spiritual reason for the exile. God revealed the people’s wickedness that had led them into the Babylonian captivity. [fertility cult results]

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

To fully understand the message of these visions, one needs to realize that the first four visions show the effects and that the last four visions describe the conditions that led to those results. Thus, these visions should be studied in reversed sequence. One should begin with the last vision and go to the first (from war to peace), continue with the seventh one and then examine the second one (from the religious cause for the exile to the political reason), then investigate the sixth vision and follow with the third one (moving from curses and punishment to God’s immense blessing). At the heart of these visions are visions four and five. God first enables Zerubbabel to build the temple and then cleanses the high priest Joshua to serve in this sanctuary. From the first to the last and from the last to the first, God is in action. His love, grace, and justice are revealed and vindicated. (*Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, pp. 133-135) [bold type and content in brackets supplied]

3. What is implied by “returning to the Lord”? (*Zechariah 1:3*) Do any of us need such a call?
4. Read *Zechariah 1:15-17*. Are these verses implying that while God was in the process of disciplining His children, that His agent of discipline, the Babylonians, went way beyond God’s plans for them? Did the Babylonians have any idea that they were acting on God’s behalf? Or, did they believe that their own strength and might or their “gods” had gained the victory for them?
5. When do you think all of these prophecies will be—or were—fulfilled? When Paul went forth as the apostle to the Gentiles, was that a partial fulfillment of *Zechariah’s* visions?
6. If we believe that it is God’s plan for His people to carry the gospel to the whole world, (*Matthew 24:14*) what should be our focus in life? (*Matthew 6:33*) What would happen if God’s chosen people would truly put God’s kingdom first in their lives?
7. Read *Zechariah 3:1-5*. Is there a message for us in these verses?
8. In the judgment scene depicted in *Zechariah 3:1-5*, who are the main actors in this drama? Who is accusing? (Compare *Revelation 12:9,10*) Who is defending? (*1 John 2:1; Romans 8:26,27,31-35; Job 1:6; 2:1*) What role is God the Father playing? (*John 5:27*) Who is the “Angel of the Lord”? If you could be present as your case is presented in the courts of heaven—with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present as well as your guardian angel and the Devil and his angels—and after all had been said and as your case was put to a vote, could you honestly vote for yourself?

This is one of the clearest places in Scripture where the judgment scene is portrayed. Notice that it is Satan, “the Accuser of the Brethren,” who is accusing Joshua, and “the LORD” is defending him. The angels are observing and helping. For those who do not recognize the “great controversy” or even the existence of an actual being known as “Satan,” this vision presents some problems.

There are many references in Scripture to the “judgment.” But there are very different ideas about when and where it takes place. It must take place before the “rewards” are given out and in most people’s eyes that means eternal life. If it is true that people go immediately to their eternal reward at the time of death and if it is also true that the “soul” is immortal, then the judgment, whatever that means, must happen for each individual at or before the point of that person’s death. On the other hand, if it is true that the “soul” or “person” is mortal and that a person sleeps in the grave as suggested by Jesus and Paul, (see *John 11:11-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*) then the judgment can take place anytime before the final rewards are given out at the second or third coming of Christ.

From all of the above verses, the following should be clear:

- 1) Someday, all of us will be judged by God. (*Ecclesiastes 3:17; 11:9; 12:13,14; Isaiah 66:16; Jeremiah 25:31; John 5:28,29; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10*)
- 2) God’s judgment against the wicked is carried out with “fire and sword.” (*Isaiah 66:16; Jeremiah 25:31; Hebrews 10:27*)

- 3) When the righteous are judged, they will inherit the kingdom of God. (Daniel 7:22)
- 4) All the dead will rise from their graves to be judged. (John 5:28-30; Hebrews 9:27)
- 5) When the judgment is complete, the Devil (the prince of this world) will be condemned and driven out and thrown into the lake of fire. (John 12:31; 16:11; Revelation 20:10)
- 6) In both the New Testament and Old Testament, the judgment was spoken of as still being in the future. (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Matthew 12:42; 2 Peter 2:4,9; 3:7; Jude 1:6)
- 7) Apparently, Sodom, Tyre, Sidon, the men of Nineveh, and the Queen of the South had not been judged yet at the time of Jesus. (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31)
- 8) Satan is the one who accuses us. (Zechariah 3:2; Revelation 12:10-12)
- 9) The dead are waiting to be judged. If all this is true, surely, they cannot be already in heaven or hell since being at either would suggest that they have already been judged. (1 Peter 4:17; 2 Peter 2:4,9; 3:7; John 11:11-15) Also, 2 Peter 2:9 is an interesting passage. It could mean that the wicked are being kept until the day of judgment for punishment, or kept in punishment while waiting for the day of judgment. How it is interpreted by different translators seems to be influenced by their personal views of hell!
- 10) The angels who sinned are also awaiting their judgment. (2 Peter 2:4)

It is especially important to notice that it is not the One sometimes pictured as the harsh “Judge-Father” who is accusing us!

9. Why does God seem to conduct the business of His government in the open like this, apparently before the entire universe? Who are the only ones who do not seem to be aware of what is going on? Elsewhere in the Bible, do we have descriptions of similar scenes? (See Job 1&2; Revelation 12; Daniel 7:9,10) When is this taking place? In order to accuse God as he did back in the beginning, Satan had to be a deceiver and a liar. But, in order to accuse us, does he have to be a deceiver? If we were to continually keep these matters in mind, would we live the sinful lives that we are currently living?
10. The primary purpose of the great controversy is to answer the questions and accusations that Satan has raised against God. And those answers must be given so decisively and convincingly that sin will never rise again. God did not just eliminate His opposition as He easily could have, (DA 759.1) nor does He try to solve the problem by exercising His sovereignty as an authoritarian dictator might—in secret rooms, and then demand that we accept His decision. God wants us to be convinced of the correctness of the answers. In order to accomplish this, He must make all the evidence as public as possible. The whole universe is currently involved in reviewing all of this evidence including God’s plans to bring some of us former-rebels back into His kingdom! But, as God reviews our cases, the whole universe can actually see our behavior and evaluate God’s judgment of us. The whole book of Job is focused on the question of whether God is able to correctly judge human character. God said that Job was a “perfect and upright” man (Job 1:8; 2:3) and that Job could be trusted not to let God down no matter what the Devil did to him. The Devil was sure that he could break Job down; and, at times, it seemed that he was succeeding. But, in the end, God was able to say—to the amazement of Job’s friends—“Job has said of me what is right!” (See Job 42:7,8)
11. Now look at our cases. The Bible makes it very clear that we are all sinners. (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23) We should not have any trouble believing that! But, if a criminal is in court and being tried for his life, should he slip out of the courtroom and continue publicly committing the crimes for which he is on trial? Fortunately, God does not judge us on our record! God does His judging based on our willingness to learn and change. He is looking for a “new heart and a right spirit.” (Psalms 51:10; Jeremiah 31:33,34; John 3:3-8) “The character is revealed, not [58] by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.” {Ellen White, SC 57.2} God recognizes that hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil may make change very difficult for us. But, He is able to judge by reading the true intents and secret thoughts of our minds as to whether or not we are rebels. If we are so bound to our sins that we cannot give them up or are not willing to give them up, then He must turn away from us in loving disappointment! What a sad thing to have happen! When will the events portrayed in Zechariah 3:1-5 take place?
12. What is God trying to say to us in Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)—“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty”? How does the Spirit work? Could God win the great controversy with might

and power? Does He finally win because He has more power than Satan? Doesn't Satan admit God has more power? (James 2:19) If this was all that needed to be demonstrated, what has God been waiting for? Was God's might and power able to keep the loyalty of God's number one creature—Lucifer? How many were won by God's show of might and power at the time of the flood? At Sodom and Gomorrah? At Sinai? What happened soon after the flood? (Genesis 11:1-9) What were His "friends" doing a few days after "the Sinai experience"? (Exodus 32) When Jesus was here on this earth, did He demonstrate a lot of "might and power"? Sometimes, Jesus performed miracles and fed the crowds. But, as soon as it became apparent that they were following Him for that reason, what did He do? (John 6:25-69)

13. The work of the Holy Spirit is almost always done quietly and behind the scenes. He has worked with humans since the creation of this earth: 1) To keep them alive by sustaining their very physiology; 2) To influence them for God in the great controversy (this is called "wooing"); 3) To convince them to do what is right and publically acknowledge their commitment to God; and 4) To attract others by giving His people special gifts to be used for ministry within and outside the church.
14. God is all-powerful or omnipotent, as we say. If He could accomplish what He wants to accomplish by the use of power, it is a cruel trick He is playing on us not to do so. If that were the case, then all the suffering and misery in this world could be directly attributed to God because He has not stepped in to do what He is able to do!
15. In Scripture it has been demonstrated repeatedly what happens when God uses His power to get people's attention. This is what happens: 1) No one is ever really convinced of the truth about God by those demonstrations of power; 2) The attention lasts only a very short period of time; 3) Usually, during that time, the humans that are involved are scared to death! This is not what God wants! If all God had to do was scare us into being good, He could do that almost instantly. But, one cannot scare the "hell" out of people! If God were to use that method, He would have to keep doing it repeatedly throughout eternity, and the history of events in the Bible have shown very clearly that the response is very short-lived.
16. So, God chooses to work quietly behind the scenes, trying to convince as many of us as possible that we should "do what is right because it is right." Then, God does not have to do anything to keep us in line! **The main work of the Holy Spirit down through the ages has been the inspiring of some of our fellow humans to write, copy, and translate the Bible.** The evidence is spread out before our eyes if we can read it and are willing to study it. Then, the Holy Spirit works to lead us in the direction that we should go.
17. So many groups have suggested that if they could just have a little more "power" or a "miracle" or some "supernatural manifestation," they would be able to influence many more people. One TV evangelist has claimed that he has seen a number of resurrections from the dead. He has further claimed that when He is able to show one of these on live TV, he will win the world! If God could really convince people that easily, He would have done so long ago!
18. In the local context, the two "anointed ones" of Zechariah 4:14 probably represent Joshua and Zerubbabel, the leaders of the people in reconstructing the temple. But, in the larger context, as we see that oil is pouring from two olive trees, we recognize that in the Scriptures oil often represents the work of the Holy Spirit. And what is the work of the Holy Spirit which is most important in our day? It is the two testaments of the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible is the main work that the Holy Spirit has done down through the generations. By inspiring the prophets and the apostles, He has given us the guidance we need to hold up a clear light to the world to show them the direction to go.
19. Read Zechariah 7:8-14. Is it true that if we do not obey the directions of the Holy Spirit, then God will not answer our prayers? As a 21st century Seventh-day Adventist Church, are we prepared to crucify self and practice the true fast described in Isaiah 58?
20. One of the questions that could be raised about apocalyptic literature such as the book of Zechariah is: Why does God communicate His messages to prophets through visions and dreams rather than by simply telling us directly what He wants to say? Is God trying to confuse us? Or, get us to think?

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