

# Zechariah: A Passion for Prophecy

## by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

### Prayer of Illumination

God, source of all light, by your Word you give light to the soul. Pour out on us the spirit of wisdom and understanding that our hearts and our minds may be opened and transformed. Amen.

### Background

Have you ever struggled with an inner-critic in your mind—that voice in your head that tells you:

You can't do this  
Nothing is ever going to change  
You're nothing  
or, it's all over?

Or maybe you have a big project ahead of you that feels daunting and you don't even know where to start?

If this is a struggle for you, Zechariah is the prophet for you to silence and retrain that voice. To find the inspiration to do what you need to do.

Zechariah is the eleventh of the 12 Minor Prophets. He is also one of the most quoted prophets in all the New Testament. I like to think of Zechariah as the "hope whisperer." Throughout his book he speaks the voice of God's encouragement to God's people. Right when you're tempted to throw up your hands or throw in the towel, Zechariah's right there to remind us, "God's got this!"

For the Jewish people returning from exile in Babylon, their challenge was to not only rebuild their city Jerusalem, but to rebuild their temple and their very own identity from the ashes.

For us it might be rebuilding a relationship, getting out of debt, rekindling your childhood faith, getting your grades up at school, or creating a "new normal" after a health crisis or loss of a loved one.

It's in these moments Zechariah encourages us to look up:

"Even though it seems impossible ..., should it seem impossible to me, says the Lord?"  
[Zechariah 8:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

When God's people were doubting themselves and dreading the days ahead, Zechariah painted a picture of a different future—one filled with hope and possibility. He challenged them with the eyes of faith to look beyond the rubble, and see a new Jerusalem overflowing with prosperity, with old and young alike living side by side, and God protecting his people.

When we're feeling discouraged and defeated, Zechariah whispers in our ear, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord."

When we feel accused, washed up, or good for nothing, Zechariah's right there to jog our spiritual memories that God washes us in his fountain of living water and takes our ragged and rank clothes and gives us a fresh and new wardrobe.

He refreshes our spirits, reminding us it's going to get better:

"Whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, ..." [Zechariah 4:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

When we're doubting ourselves, Zechariah reminds us, "You're the apple of God's eye" and he recalls God's promise that "they shall be my people and I will be their God."

But the book of Zechariah is so much more than just a best-selling self-help book or a hyped-up keynote address at a self-esteem seminar.

Rather, Zechariah expects a lot from us. He challenges us to make some tough changes—to repent and return to God. And he lays it out clearly what that looks like:

"Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor, and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another." [Zechariah 7:9-10 \(NRSV\)](#)

"If we return to God," Zechariah says, "God will return to us." He'll give us the gift of forgiveness and spiritual courage to conquer our fears, face our challenges, and be a blessing to others.

All this will happen, says Zechariah, if you just keep faith and "diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God." [Zechariah 6:15](#)

The name **Zechariah** means "**the Lord remembers.**"

Zechariah lives up to his name. He helps us to never forget what's true and important.

- He reminds us that God forgives and forgets our failures.
- He nudges us to forgive ourselves and start anew.

Zechariah is not only the longest of the Minor Prophets, but he's the most eclectic of all of them.

There's a little bit of everything in Zechariah:

- There are pithy quotes, plagues, judgment oracles, & Armageddon-like wars.
- There are apocalyptic visions—eight of them in fact, including:
  - o Flying scrolls
  - o Red horses
  - o And a woman in a basket named Wickedness who is flown away by two women who have the wings of a stork.

Zechariah rivals Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation for winning "The Most Trippy" book in the Bible award. But there's a purpose to these visions: They are there to remind us that God's got our back. And because of this, we're freed to be faithful to God.

And then there are prophecies in Zechariah that we'll be looking at momentarily. The prophet Zechariah is involved in not only forth-telling (revealing what's happening now), but also fore-telling (revealing events yet to come).

Whether forth-telling or fore-telling, Zechariah is always forward-looking, pointing us to the horizon, helping us to see in new ways, and inspiring us to hold out hope for a new day, when God's anointed shepherd will arrive on earth to right all wrongs and rule and reign in justice and righteousness.

The New Testament writers, as well as Jesus, were thoroughly immersed and versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, which was their only Bible at the time. So when you read Zechariah, you hear echoes of the Gospels and Revelation reverberate throughout.

In the Gospel according to Luke, after his resurrection, Jesus appears to two men along the road to Emmaus—but the men's eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus. The two shared with their mysterious guest how confused they were as to what was going on—Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in word and deed, had been condemned to death and was crucified.

But some women from their group were saying that Jesus' body was missing from the tomb and he had in fact appeared to them. They were baffled as to what was going on.

Then Jesus led the two men in the greatest Bible study in the history of the world. Beginning with the books of Moses and all the prophets—Jesus interpreted to them the things about the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament or the First Testament.

After Jesus broke bread with them, the two said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while Jesus was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?"

This morning, I'm speculating that several of the Scriptures Jesus recited on the road to Emmaus were from Zechariah, so let's hear some of the passion prophecies from Zechariah, written hundreds of years before Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection:

**Scripture:** [Zechariah 9:9-10 \(NRSV\)](#)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Do you know when we often read this passage? On **Palm Sunday**—the first day of Holy Week. Both Matthew and John in the gospels quoted Zechariah in their account of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on a donkey.

The king's choice to ride upon a donkey, and not a war steed, was a clear message—he was a Prince of Peace. His rule and reign would be characterized by peace and humility. He was a very different kind of leader.

Early followers of the Messiah knew that the victorious King Jesus brought about the death of death through his suffering and resurrection—not violence or aggression.

**Scripture:** [Zechariah 11:12-13 \(NRSV\)](#)

I then said to them, “If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. Then the LORD said to me, “Throw it into the treasury”—this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the LORD.

Matthew quotes this passage because this was also the amount of money that Judas was paid for betraying Christ—thirty shekels.

To pay someone thirty shekels for their services at that time was an insult—it was a pittance. Thirty shekels was also the amount of money paid to a master if their slave was gored by an ox.

The priceless Messiah who was pierced by nails was sold for the price of a slave who was gored by an ox.

**Scripture:** [Zechariah 12:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

“And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”

John quotes Zechariah in his gospel when the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side after he died on the cross and blood and water came from his side. The early Christians saw Zechariah’s words as a clear foreshadowing of the suffering of the cross the Messiah would endure.

**Scripture:** [Zechariah 13:7b \(NRSV\)](#)

“Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered ...”

Jesus himself quoted these words of Zechariah before his arrest, saying that he was the shepherd who was struck, and his sheep—the disciples, scattered and deserted him upon his arrest. Judas betrayed him and Peter denied him and the others fled. This was all part of God’s plan.

...

And finally,

**Scripture:** [Zechariah 14:8-9 \(NRSV\)](#)

“<sup>8</sup> On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one.”

This reading influenced the imagery of Revelation 21 and 22 at the end of the last book of the New Testament, where there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Christ will come again, righting wrongs, ushering in peace, and ruling and reigning in justice and righteousness, where he says upon the throne, “Behold, I am making all things new!”

The book of Zechariah reminds us that with God, all things are possible, no matter how bleak things are now. We can persevere, because God has a plan for our redemption, giving us a sneak peak in Zechariah, before it even happened. This gives us a sense of peace and assurance, that love will prevail—even in the midst of our hardship and discouragement.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.***

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