

Heaven's Best Gift (Zechariah)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Zechariah 8, Zech. 9:9, Matt. 21:9, Zech. 12:1–10, John 19:37, Zech. 13:7–9, Zechariah 14.*

Memory Text: “The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown” (*Zechariah 9:16, NIV*).

Key Thought: Zechariah has some wonderful Messianic prophecies that point to Jesus and affirm our faith in Him.

At the heart of the biblical message lies the most beautiful story ever told, that of the Creator God, who, in the person of His Son, left the glory of heaven to save humanity from sin and death. In the second half of Zechariah there are several Messianic prophecies—Old Testament prophetic promises about Jesus—the One who did all this for us.

These specific promises first were given to God's people who lived in Zechariah's perilous times in order to keep them focused on the promise of redemption. Although the original context of these prophecies never should be ignored, their importance never should be confined to the past fulfillments either. Instead, we will look at the ways in which they were fulfilled in Jesus, fulfillments that are universal, not local, because they affect the ultimate destiny of the world and not just ancient Israel and Judah.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 22.*

“The Robe of a Jew”

Beginning with chapter 8, the book of Zechariah takes a radical turn. A series of messages sent from the Lord tells the future of the world and the role of God’s people in it. Some of the passages from these chapters are not easy to understand, but the ultimate future is clearly positive.

Read Zechariah 8. What principles can you learn from there that have relevance for us, as Seventh-day Adventists, and for the calling from God that we have been given?

God’s plan was that Jerusalem would again be a safe place in which old people would sit in streets filled with playful boys and girls (*Zech. 8:4, 5*). To those who inhabited a city overrun by conquerors, the promise of streets that were safe for young and old sounded like a dream.

Instead of remaining forever a small subordinate nation, God’s people were to be a magnet to which nations would be drawn in order to worship the Lord, King of the whole earth (*Zech. 14:9*). The use of the expression “all languages” (*NIV*) in Zechariah 8:23 indicates that the prophecy envisioned a universal movement.

Like Isaiah (*Isaiah 2*) and Isaiah’s contemporary Micah (*Micah 4*), Zechariah was shown by God that the day would come when a multitude of people from many cities and nations would go up to Jerusalem to pray and seek the Lord. God’s presence in Zion generally will be recognized, as will His blessings on those who worship Him.

The gospel accounts tell that these Messianic promises began to be fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus Christ. On one occasion, for example, Jesus said that when He is lifted up from the earth, He “will draw all peoples” to Himself (*John 12:32, NKJV*).

The church of Christ, also called the “Israel of God” (*Gal. 6:16*), is privileged in our time to have a part in this mission. We are to carry the light of salvation to the ends of the earth. In this way the people of God can be a great blessing to the world.

Read especially Zechariah 8:16, 17. At a time when our church is seeking revival and reformation, how can we learn to avoid these things, which God says He hates?

The King of Peace

Read Zechariah 9:9. How does the New Testament apply this to Jesus? See Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9, 10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13–15.

Jesus' triumphal entry consisted of the future King riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. In the Bible, rejoicing and shouting for joy especially is associated with the celebration of God as King (*Psalms* 47, 96, 98). This gentle Ruler will bring righteousness, salvation, and lasting peace, and His dominion will stretch to the ends of the earth.

When Jesus triumphantly rode a donkey into Jerusalem only days before His death, a great number of people cheered His coming. Some rejoiced, hoping that Christ would overthrow Rome's power and establish God's kingdom in Jerusalem. But instead of allowing Himself to be Israel's king, Jesus died on the cross and then rose from His grave. There is no question that He disappointed many of His followers, those who sought a more militaristic leader. Little did they know, however, that what they wanted was nothing in comparison to what they were going to get through the death of Jesus instead.

"Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the homage which He had never before permitted, and the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to be realized by seeing Him established on the throne. The multitude were convinced that the hour of their emancipation was at hand."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 570.

Much has been written about how, when things looked good, the crowd was enthusiastic about Jesus; when things did not go right, however, many in that same crowd turned away from Him (some even openly against Him). What can we learn from this event about the danger of false expectations? You claim a promise for healing, for instance, or for victory over a sin, and you do not see it as you expected. How can we develop a faith that will not fail, even when things do not go as hoped, expected, or even prayed for?

The One Pierced

Zechariah 12–14 reveal several things that could have happened had Israel been faithful to God. First, the Lord would have brought total victory over the powers of evil and the hostile nations that had tried to oppose His plan of salvation (*Zech. 12:1–9*). Although Jerusalem was to be God’s instrument toward this triumph, the victory itself would have come from the Lord’s intervention. In the end, the enemy utterly would have been defeated and destroyed.

Zechariah 12:10 marks the transition of the movement from physical deliverance, from what would have happened had Israel been faithful, to spiritual deliverance of God’s faithful people. Following the victory, God’s people would embrace their Lord. God’s Spirit of grace and supplication would be poured on the leaders and the people. This convicting work of the Spirit would result in far-reaching repentance and spiritual revival, something that our church itself is seeking.

As God pours out His Spirit, His people look upon the One whom they have pierced and mourn for Him as one mourns the death of an only son. The original Hebrew word for “pierced” always describes some type of physical violence, usually resulting in death (*Num. 25:8, 1 Sam. 31:4*). The poignancy of the people’s grief is heightened by the realization that their own sins caused Jesus Christ’s death.

Read Zechariah 12:10. How did the apostle John connect this passage with Christ’s crucifixion and His second coming? See John 19:37, Rev. 1:7.

Interestingly enough, one traditional Jewish interpretation holds that this verse points to the experience of the Messiah. It is, of course, right: it is talking about Jesus and His death on the cross (*compare with Isaiah 53*).

“The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our thoughts and imaginations can never fully comprehend.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 213. How can you grow in your appreciation of what His death means to you and what it offers you?

The Good Shepherd

For centuries both Jewish and Christian readers of the Bible have found in Zechariah's book numerous references to the Messiah and messianic times. Christians, of course, have understood that these passages apply to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: the triumphant yet peaceful King (*Zech. 9:9*), the One who was pierced (*Zech. 12:10*), the Shepherd who was struck down (*Zech. 13:7*).

In Zechariah 13:7–9 the prophet is shown a scene in which the sword of the Lord's judgment goes out against the Good Shepherd. On a previous occasion the prophet saw the sword being raised against a "worthless shepherd" (*Zech. 11:17, NIV*). But here in this passage the Good Shepherd is struck, and the flock becomes scattered. His death results in a great trial and testing of God's people, during which some perish; yet, all of the faithful are refined.

Read Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27. How did Jesus apply this prophecy to that which was going to happen that night? More important, what should that whole incident, that of the disciples fleeing in the face of adversity (see *Matt. 26:56* and *Mark 14:50*), teach us about the faithfulness of God in contrast to human unfaithfulness?

The image of God as a shepherd is found in many places in the Bible. It begins with the book of Genesis (*Gen. 48:15, NIV*) and ends with Revelation (*Rev. 7:17*). Through Ezekiel, God rebuked the irresponsible shepherds of His people and promised to search for the lost sheep and take care of them. Applying these words to Himself, Jesus declared that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (*John 10:11*).

Think of times in which you have been unfaithful to the Lord. Despite that, how does He continue to show you mercy and grace? What must your response be to that mercy and grace?

King of the Whole World

Read Zechariah 14. How are we to understand that which is being said there?

In the last chapter of his book, Zechariah describes a day when all unrepentant nations will gather themselves against Jerusalem. At the last moment, the Lord will intervene by liberating His people and establishing His eternal kingdom on earth. After all who oppose Him are destroyed, all nations will worship the one true God. The Lord will be king over the whole world. He will be one Lord, and His name will be exalted above all names. The great “I AM” expresses all God is and always will be. Though these things were to have happened had Israel remained faithful, they still will be fulfilled but on a grander scale, during the final redemption of God’s people everywhere.

When Zechariah announced the coming of the Messiah, he did not draw a line of separation between His first and second comings. As was the case with other prophets, he saw the coming kingdom of the Messiah as one glorious future. Only in the light of Christ’s first coming can we now distinguish between the two comings. We also can feel gratitude for everything He accomplished for our salvation on Calvary. We can look forward with joy in anticipation of God’s eternal kingdom (*see Dan. 7:14*).

The closing section of this prophetic book describes Jerusalem in its glory, exalted, filled with people, and secure. The saved from all nations will participate in the worship of the eternal King. The entire city of Jerusalem will be filled with the holiness of the temple.

When these glorious promises are studied together with the overall teaching of the Bible, we come to the conclusion that the ultimate fulfillment of these predictions will take place in the New Jerusalem, where God’s people will come together from everywhere and worship Him forever. This all will happen only after the second coming of Jesus. The themes of the people’s perpetual praises will be God’s salvation as well as His goodness and power, just as the famous Song of the Sea concludes: “‘The Lord shall reign forever and ever’” (*Exod. 15:18, NKJV*). Ancient prophets and faithful people from the past all looked with eager anticipation toward this climactic event.

Dwell on the ultimate redemption that is promised to us—a new heaven and a new earth with no sin, death, suffering, or loss. What are all the reasons you have for this hope, and how can you keep them before you daily, especially in times of trouble, fear, and pain?

Further Study: “In the darkest days of her long conflict with evil, the church of God has been given revelations of the eternal purpose of Jehovah. His people have been permitted to look beyond the trials of the present to the triumphs of the future, when, the warfare having been accomplished, the redeemed will enter into possession of the promised land. These visions of future glory, scenes pictured by the hand of God, should be dear to His church today, when the controversy of the ages is rapidly closing and the promised blessings are soon to be realized in all their fullness. . . .

“The nations of the saved will know no other law than the law of heaven. All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, ‘There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 722, 732, 733.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ However much humans have strived to make things better in our world, the world continues to get worse. According to the Bible, only when Christ returns and remakes this world will it be the paradise that we so long for. Though we know this truth, why are we still called to bring as much comfort, healing, and solace to this world as we possibly can?
- ❷ Thursday’s study pointed out the important fact that many Old Testament prophecies about the coming of Jesus talk about it in ways that seem to refer to one event, not two. What does that tell us about how closely related the First and Second Comings are, in terms of the plan of salvation? Why is that so? Why is it that without the First Coming there could be no Second, and why—without the Second Coming—would the First be of no avail?
- ❸ As we seek for revival and reformation among us, what can we learn from the study of Zechariah that can help us, both individually and as a church, to be prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which is vital to the revival and reformation we so earnestly need?

Facing the Challenge

Sandy and Yolande love working as Global Mission pioneers in the western highlands of Madagascar.

The couple learned their new dialect while working in the fields with the villagers among whom they live. Sandy helped the people plant and harvest their crops, and Yolande braided the women's hair. Then the couple invited their new friends to learn about Christ.

They started a literacy center to teach the villagers to read and write better. Yolande now teaches the younger children and youth while Sandy teaches the adults. They hope that soon the people will be able to read the Bible for themselves. They include worship as part of their literacy program, and the villagers found great interest in getting to know Jesus.

Recently Sandy and Yolande held evangelistic meetings in a village known for its rough gangs. One night they were startled to see a group of gang members who were carrying guns enter the meeting. Sandy knew that the gang would make trouble if they felt that he was imposing on their territory.

Haja, the gang leader, was tough, and it was obvious that the other gang members respected him. But Sandy and Yolande weren't afraid. "I talked to Haja and asked him to make sure his gang members were there every night," Sandy said.

And Haja and his 20 gang members did come to the meetings every night. In fact, Haja was one of the 31 people who was baptized at the end of the meetings. He's no longer the gang leader. Instead, he's preparing to become a Sabbath School leader. He's still influential among his gang friends and encourages them to come to church.

Sandy and Yolande face many challenges in their work. Dirty water often makes the people sick. Many of the villagers want nothing to do with Christianity. Some believe in witchcraft and fear a woman who is the local witch doctor. Alcohol use is prevalent.

But this Global Mission couple isn't discouraged. "We love the people God has sent us to minister to," says Sandy. "We praise Him for the 60 people who have joined God's family and the two churches we've been able to start here. But there's much more to be done. Please pray that we can overcome these difficulties to bring God's Word to the people here."

Your mission offerings help support the work of Global Mission in Madagascar and around the world.

SANDY and YOLANDE Andriatahina share their faith in Madagascar, an island nation off the eastern coast of Africa.