

I. *Introducing Zechariah*

02-Dec-07 Ezra 1-6; Zechariah 1:1

Theme: Behold the Branch!

Key Verse: Zechariah 1:1 ¹In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying...

Introduction

Welcome to the latest installment of the “Minor Prophets.” In the spring of 2003, I was in a bit of a pinch because I suddenly had an opening to teach a Sunday school class only about one month before the class started. Palmer Robertson had recently visited the church for our Theology Conference, and he and his family stayed at our house. Perhaps receiving some inspiration from his visit, I decided to teach a class based on his commentary on Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. I so enjoyed my study of these little books that I decided to do some more classes in the so-called “Minor Prophets.”

This is the sixth quarter of study in the Minor Prophets. Up to this point, we have studied eleven out of the twelve – all except Zechariah. I thought I would finally finish the Twelve, but as I began to study the book of Zechariah, I realized I could not do it justice in only one quarter, so I decided to split the book in half. This quarter, we will study only the first six chapters of the book of Zechariah – the so-called “Night Visions.” God willing, in some later quarter we will complete our study of the second half of Zechariah and thus finally finish the exposition of the Book of the Twelve.

Zechariah is one of three post-exilic prophets in the Old Testament: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The post-exilic period of Jewish history was very different than the era of kings which preceded it. The Jews had lost their independence forever. From now on, they would be a people subjected to foreign overlords, whether Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Syrian, or Roman. They had also lost the besetting sin which plagued them throughout their history and ultimately resulted in their exile: idolatry.

The exile had cured God’s people once and for all of the sin of idolatry. Before the exile, Israel was always tempted to worship other gods, to commit spiritual adultery with the idols of the nations. The pre-exilic prophets are constantly warning Israel to forsake idolatry and return to the living God. That tendency toward idolatry is wiped out by the exile. God’s disciplinary action had at least one positive effect: it removed idolatry from the list of the nation’s sins.

Later on, other sins crept in to replace idolatry. Self-righteousness and hypocrisy, which were already present in Malachi’s day (about 100 years after Haggai and Zechariah), were clearly manifested in the religious establishment of the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. The Jews began to expect God’s blessings to flow to them because they were the covenant people. God owed them and was expected to deliver. They believed that it didn’t matter how they responded or behaved in return.

But even in the early years of the restoration, complacency had begun to seep into the national consciousness, so that they were satisfied with the status quo even when God was clearly not. Thus, when opposition came during the project to rebuild the temple, they stopped working. For sixteen years, they accepted this delay, even though it certainly was not acceptable. And as they

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began to grow comfortable in their state of spiritual laziness, God sent them a wake-up call: the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. This pair of spiritual spokesmen sent from God provided the encouragement, the exhortation, and the energy to proceed with their calling to rebuild God's temple for His glory.

Exposition

A. Exile (Ezra 1)

To put the prophet Zechariah into his historical context, let's back up just a bit and briefly review the events that led to the exile. After the death of King Solomon in 931 BC, the kingdom of Israel was split into two: the nation of Judah to the south, ruled by the Davidic line in Jerusalem, and the nation of Israel to the north, ruled by a series of corrupt, short-lived dynasties from their capital of Samaria. God's judgment was upon the northern kingdom, and they were destroyed by the Assyrian empire just over 200 years later in 722 BC. Many of the citizens of Israel were deported throughout the near East. Other peoples were brought in to repopulate Samaria. In time, these new people intermingled with the remaining Jews and became the Samaritans.

Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah ruled by the line of David survived the Assyrian threat of Sennacherib in 701 BC. In the 7th Century BC, the power of Assyria waned, as the power of the Babylonians grew. The city of Nineveh fell to the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC. By 605 BC, Assyria was part of the Babylonian empire under the young Nebuchadnezzar. About the same time (609 BC), the last righteous king of Judah, King Josiah, died in battle. After his death, it was a swift descent into oblivion for the southern kingdom. Judah suffered a series of deportations to Babylon. Finally, in 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and completed the deportation of Jewish citizens to Babylon. The seventy years of exile predicted by the prophet Jeremiah were well and truly underway.

⁸Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, ⁹behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. ... ¹¹And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall *serve the king of Babylon seventy years*' (Jer. 25:8-9, 11).

Seventy is not only a product of two symbolic numbers (7 – perfection of quality; 10 – perfection of quantity), but it is also a literal number. The first deportation of Jerusalem to Babylon (including Daniel) occurred in 605 BC. The second deportation (including Ezekiel) occurred in 597 BC. The third deportation occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. The first return to Jerusalem occurred in 538 BC. The work on the temple began and stopped in 536 BC. The construction of the temple was restarted in 520 BC and completed in 516 BC. From first deportation to the beginning of reconstruction of the temple was 70 years (605 to 536 BC). From the destruction of the temple to completion of the temple was also 70 years (586 to 516 BC).

The power of Babylon did not last long. Under the leadership of Cyrus, the Medes and Persians destroyed the city of Babylon in October, 539 BC and took over their empire, again as Jeremiah said:

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¹²“Then it will come to pass, *when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,*’ says the LORD; ‘and I will make it a perpetual desolation’ (Jer. 25:12).

King Cyrus of Persia was raised up by God for two purposes: 1) to punish the Babylonians per Jeremiah; and 2) to restore the remnant of Israel back in Jerusalem, as Isaiah had prophesied:

²⁸[I am the LORD] who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” and to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid”’ (Is. 44:28).

In 538 BC, King Cyrus issued a proclamation, allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. This proclamation is described in Ezra chapter 1:

²Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. ³Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. ⁴And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4).

The purpose of this return was to rebuild the temple of God. Cyrus provided gold and silver articles out of the treasury of Nebuchadnezzar which had been taken from the original temple. The people of God also received articles of silver, gold, and precious articles to use in the temple reconstruction. The Babylonian captivity was over; the Restoration period had begun!

Cyrus was killed in battle in 530 BC. His son and successor Cambyses, a very different sort of man, was a tyrant who feared assassination. Hearing of a plot to usurp the throne, Cambyses evidently killed himself in 522 BC, leaving a power vacuum which was soon filled by Darius, the son of the governor of Susa and an officer of Cambyses. This is the King Darius of Zechariah 1:1. Darius reigned 37 years and brought back stability to the Persian Empire. It was in the second year of King Darius (520 BC) that the word of God first came to Zechariah.

B. Return (Ezra 2)

¹Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city.

²Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua ... (Ezra 2:1-2).

Following the proclamation of King Cyrus permitting the return of the Jews from exile (Ezra 1:2-4), the Jews began to return to Judah in 538 BC. Only a small remnant of exiles, about 50,000, returned from Babylon to Judah. They were led by Zerubbabel, the Davidic prince of his people. He was the grandson of Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah), the last legitimate king of Judah. Zerubbabel was a righteous man and a good leader of his people. Although heir to the throne of David, he was content with being a governor of a small province in the Persian Empire.

Zerubbabel is also called Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1:8 and 5:14. Evidently, Sheshbazzar was his Babylonian name and Zerubbabel was his Hebrew name. The two names are used interchangeably in the book of Ezra. Zerubbabel’s name means “born in Babylon,” a reminder that God’s grace in carrying forward the Davidic line continued even through the chastisement of

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the Babylonian captivity. He is called a “prince of Judah” in Ezra 1:8 and his name appears in the New Testament genealogies of Jesus Christ (*cp.* Mt. 1:12-13; Lk. 3:27).

Assisting the governor Zerubbabel in the return from exile was “Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest” (Hag. 1:1). Joshua the high priest is referred to as “Jeshua” in Ezra (Ezra 2:2, 3:2, etc.). He was a descendent of Zadok the high priest of David’s time. His father, Jehozadak (Jozadak in Ezra 3:2, 8) went into captivity when Jerusalem was destroyed (1 Chr. 6:12-15). Joshua’s name means “Yah[weh] is Salvation” and is equivalent to the name of our Savior, Jesus. As high priest, Joshua was the spiritual leader of the remnant community.

These two men – Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest – are key personages in the restoration of God’s people. The book of Haggai is addressed to them as the civil and religious leaders of the nation. They are responsible for the material and spiritual health of God’s people. But even more than that, they are a sign or symbol of the Messiah to come. For in their offices of governor (king) and high priest, they preview the work of Jesus Christ. This is made abundantly clear in the Night Visions of Zechariah, where both Zerubbabel and Joshua play prominent roles in portraying the Branch who was to come – the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Worship (Ezra 3)

¹And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. ²Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God (Ezra 3:1-2).

Of primary importance after getting everyone resettled into their homes (*cp.* Ezra 2:70), was to restore the worship of God in Jerusalem. In fact, you could argue that this was the primary calling of those who returned from exile – to rebuild God’s temple in Jerusalem for His glory, to re-establish His worship on earth. Ezra chapter 3 records the efforts of Zerubbabel and Joshua.

The first order of business was rebuilding the altar of sacrifice amid the ruins of the temple (Ezra 3:1-6). This work was started in 537 BC in the seventh month, the holiest month of the Jewish calendar (Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles). Zerubbabel and Joshua were very careful to follow the “Law of Moses the man of God” (Ezra 3:2). That means they reinstated the morning and evening sacrifices, the Feast of Tabernacles, the new moon feasts, and all of the other sacrifices and services appointed in the Law. They also began preparations for rebuilding the temple, hiring skilled workers and purchasing construction materials.

Early the next year (536 BC), work began on the temple itself (Ezra 3:8-13). Once again, Zerubbabel and Joshua, the civil and religious leaders of the people, joined together in this work of building God house. When the foundation of the temple was laid, the people of God celebrated using Psalm 136 as their response. However, amidst the joy of seeing the work on the temple begin, there was also much sadness, as the oldest members of the remnant wept, realizing that the glory of this second temple would not approach the glory of Solomon’s temple.

D. Delay (Ezra 4)

So far, so good – the work was off to a good start. But then resistance to the work of God’s people arose. This is described in Ezra chapter 4. Samaritans came to Zerubbabel and Joshua and asked to be included in the building project. But Zerubbabel refused! Why? Because he was not willing to compromise the purity of God’s people with these outsiders. They were

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syncretistic; they had a mixed up religious practice, borrowing bits from various pagan religions. Zerubbabel rightly feared (looking back upon the history of Israel), that allowing syncretism into the purity of God's worship would be disastrous for the spiritual health of God's people.

Because they were not permitted to infiltrate the work, these unclean outsiders began to frustrate it. Ezra writes, "The people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:4b-5). By their actions they demonstrated that they were unworthy of the work. Ultimately, these enemies of God were successful. They were able to frustrate the work and bring it to a halt.

²⁴Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia (Ezra 4:24).

Thus, for sixteen years, (536-520 BC), the work of rebuilding the temple was halted. A faithful remnant of God's Old Testament Church had been called back out of exile to Jerusalem precisely to do this work – to reestablish the worship of God in His temple at Jerusalem, to build for His glory. They had started out on that mission enthusiastically. They had real zeal to see God's kingdom built up and expanded. But along the way, opposition came. The work became harder. Success seemed more difficult. It was taking too long, and the cost was high. They got tired and discouraged. Things weren't going well. Other responsibilities crept in: family, home, work – all legitimate, but all crowding out their highest calling. They became too busy with other things.

And so slowly but surely, the work ground to a halt. If you asked anyone in Jerusalem, they probably would have replied that they fully intended for the work to continue. It just wasn't the exact moment. They were waiting for the right circumstance to pick up the effort again. "Meanwhile, they became fat and comfortable and middle-aged, while old ideals died" (Bentley).

E. Temple (Ezra 5-6)

¹Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. ²So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them (Ezra 5:1-2).

This brings us up to the "present" in the second year of the reign of king Darius (520 BC), when God stirs up His people from their inactivity by sending two prophets – Haggai and Zechariah. Notice how God sends both Haggai and Zechariah to assist Zerubbabel and Joshua in the work of rebuilding the temple. Haggai was sent first, and then Zechariah was sent a few months later. Bentley points out that once Haggai and Zechariah join Zerubbabel and Joshua, things start to happen. It is by the confirmation of these two witnesses of God's word that the situation begins to change for the better. Interestingly, in these individuals we have the confluence of the three Old Testament offices: Prophet, Priest, and King (governor). Given the nature of Zechariah's prophecy, this is surely no coincidence, for in the Night Visions of Zechariah we have a preview of the work and ministry of Jesus Christ, our greater Prophet, Priest, and King.

Haggai's prophecy is short and focused primarily on exhorting the people to restart the temple building project. His book contains four oracles, all dated in the second year of Darius (520

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BC): one in the sixth month, one in the seventh month, and two on the same date in the ninth month. After these four oracles, Haggai disappears from history, having completed his mission to stir up the church to complete God's work.

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai and the prophecies of chapters 1-6 are closely linked in time with those of Haggai. Haggai's first two messages occur in the sixth and seventh months of the second year of Darius. Then the word of the Lord comes to Zechariah in the eighth month of the same year (1:1). Haggai's final two messages are in the ninth month. Then in the eleventh month (1:7), God gives Zechariah the Night Visions, which continue through chapter 6 of Zechariah.

The immediate context of the Night Visions is the same as that of the book of Haggai. The Night Visions are given by God to encourage and exhort the people of God to complete their work, to finish building the temple of God. But the Night Visions go much further, because they prefigure for us a greater temple Builder who is Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Savior of His people.

Although the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah were successful, they did not come to remove opposition to the building project. That continued in the form of another Persian governor Tattenai (Ezra 5:3ff). There certainly is a lesson in this for us: worldly opposition will always continue, but God's people are always called to God's work.

The rest of Ezra chapter 5 and first half of Ezra chapter 6 describe letters that go back and forth in an effort to stop the building process. Ultimately, King Darius issued the decree that the building should go forward. And the last part of Ezra chapter 6 describes the completion and dedication of the temple four years later, in the year 516 BC:

¹⁴So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. ¹⁵Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. ¹⁶Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy (Ezra 6:14-16).

F. Zechariah (1:1)

1. *Prophet*

¹In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying... (Zechariah 1:1).

Who were these prophets that God raised up to exhort His people to complete the temple? We know very little about Haggai, not even his father's name. Many believe Haggai was an old man, perhaps one of those who had witnessed the glory of Solomon's temple in his youth before its destruction, and thus was one of those who mourned the seeming lesser glory of this second temple (*cp.* Hag. 2:3).

On the other hand, we know a bit more about Zechariah, who seems to be a young man or "youth" (*cp.* Zech. 2:3). His name, which means "the LORD has remembered", is a very common one in Scripture: at least 27 different men in the Bible are named Zechariah. But this

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Zechariah is very appropriately named, because God remembers His people in captivity, He restores them, and He calls them to work for His glory.

Zechariah calls himself “the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo” (1:1). However, Ezra just calls him the “son of Iddo” (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Since “son of” can also mean “descendant of,” there is no contradiction here. Ezra the priest chooses to focus on Zechariah’s relationship to Iddo, who was an important priest during the return from exile. Zechariah was from a priestly background, and was also a priest himself.

It is significant that a son of a priestly family is writing to encourage the reconstruction of the temple. Zechariah’s calling as a priest was intimately connected with temple service. While only the high priests were allowed into the Holy of Holies, all the ordinary priests were allowed to serve God inside the Holy Place. Among the duties of the priests in the Holy Place were to change out the showbread, offer incense, and trim the oil in the lampstand.

However, the number of priests became so large, that they all couldn’t perform their priestly duties at the same time. Thus, David organized the worship of God by dividing the priests into twenty-four houses (1 Chr. 24:3-19). The priests had to share, or take turns in performing their priestly duties according to a schedule. This is the background for Luke chapter 1, where Zacharias is serving in the temple: “So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord” (Luke 1:8-10). This might have been the only opportunity in Zacharias’ life to perform this priestly service and was thus a highlight of his career. Significantly, it is while Zacharias is in the temple performing his duties that he is visited by an angel of the Lord to announce the birth of John the Baptist.

In Nehemiah chapter 12, we have a list of the heads of these priestly families who returned with Zerubbabel the governor and served under Joshua, the high priest. Although the list falls a few short of 24, it seems that this roll is comparable to the priestly divisions or houses established by David. In Nehemiah 12:4, Iddo is listed as one of the heads of these priestly families. Thus, he is one of the chief priests at the time of the return from exile.

Interestingly, Nehemiah goes on to list the heads of these priestly families in the next generation, the priests who served under Joiakim the high priest, the son of Joshua. In Nehemiah 12:16, our prophet Zechariah is the chief priest from the family of Iddo. Apparently Berechiah, Zechariah’s father, died young, and so Zechariah succeeded his grandfather as one of the chief priests.

So, at the time of the return from exile (538 BC), Zechariah’s grandfather Iddo was one of the chief priests, one of the religious leaders of the nation. Zechariah may have only been a young child at the time of the return. By 520 BC when the word of the Lord came to him, he was still a young man or “youth” (2:3), a term which may be appropriately applied to a man up to the age of thirty. Thus, in his early years, Zechariah had the privilege of serving God as a prophet, while in his later years he served God as one of the chief priests.

Jesus Himself goes on to speak of the end of Zechariah’s life:

³⁴Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, ³⁵that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Matthew 23:34-35).

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According to Jesus, Zechariah the son of Berechiah was murdered while performing his duties between the altar and the temple. We do know of another Zechariah, the son of Jehoida the high priest, who was stoned in the courtyard of the temple (2 Chr. 24:20-22) and died about 300 years before our Zechariah. Therefore, some liberal scholars believe Jesus either confused these two different Zechariahs, or the text is in error. However, neither of these explanations is acceptable. We must believe that Jesus knew what He was talking about, and thus our Zechariah was also apparently martyred in the service of his priestly duties just as that earlier Zechariah was. So, the first martyr was Abel, the son of Adam, while the last martyr from the Old Testament era was Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the author of the prophecy that bears his name.

2. *Prophecy*

The book of Haggai has a concrete message that can be summed up as “building for God’s glory.” Haggai was called by God to stir up the people of God to finish rebuilding the physical temple. The book of Zechariah is complementary to Haggai. Zechariah also was used by God to help the people in their building task, but his focus is more spiritual in nature. While Haggai focused on restoring the physical temple of God, Zechariah’s mission was to restore the spiritual temple of God – to revive the people’s faith and spiritual condition. Moore puts it this way: “The scope of the prophecy is to produce a genuine revival of religion among the people, and thus encourages them in the right way to engage in the rebuilding of the temple.”

The book of Zechariah falls more or less into two halves: chapters 1-8, and chapters 9-14. The first eight chapters are clearly dated. Following the introductory message and the Night Visions of chapters 1-6 (all in 520 BC) is an oracle dated about two years later, in the fourth year of Darius (518 BC). Chapters 9-14 consist of two undated “burdens” and contain many specific prophecies of the coming Messiah.

In fact, the whole of the book of Zechariah is overwhelmingly Messianic. Only the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament has more prophecies and references to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that I have summarized the theme of the book of Zechariah simply as: “Behold the Branch” – a reference to the Messianic content of this prophecy.

In this quarter, our focus will be only on the first 6 chapters of the book of Zechariah. Lord willing, we will take up the latter part of the book in a later quarter. Zechariah’s introductory message (1:1-6) is a call for spiritual renewal, to return to God in repentance in faith. Then, in the following chapters (1-6), Zechariah describes a series of Night Visions, intended to encourage and exhort the Jews to complete their physical work of temple building and to revive their faith in the Branch – the greater temple Builder to come.

⁸Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH (Zechariah 3:8).

¹²Then speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: “Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the LORD; ¹³yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both”’ (Zechariah 6:12-13).

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Conclusion

Our study of the Night Visions of Zechariah is rooted in the historical context in which they were given. Thus, it is important to understand the situation in 520 BC. A small group of Jews had returned back to Judah after seventy years of captivity in Babylon. When they returned to Jerusalem, the city was desolate and in ruins. Although they started well in rebuilding their houses and re-establishing the worship of the Lord, their enthusiasm flagged and waned in the face of fierce opposition from outside. Thus, for sixteen years, they allowed the temple of the Lord – the center of their spiritual worship – to remain abandoned.

Physically, they were poor and few in number. They were surrounded by enemies who wanted them to fail. They had little strength and fewer material advantages. However, their strength was in the Lord of hosts, because spiritually they were called by God to be a part of His true church. Nonetheless, they were less than successful in establishing true worship. They felt beat down and discouraged. They lost their spiritual focus and drifted away from their holy calling. And then, God provided them Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them, to exhort them, to lift them up and restore them to their spiritual work.

Thus, on one level, as we study the Night Visions of Zechariah, we should certainly see them as applying directly to the people of Zechariah's day. What encouragement and hope do they give the Jews of 520 BC? Because Zechariah is a priest, he has a keen sense of the priestly duties associated with the temple service, even though the temple has not yet been completed. Thus, it should not surprise us as we study the Night Visions in depth, that many of the details of the visions are related to the temple and its service, consistent with the historical context

However, we must expand our understanding of the Night Visions beyond their immediate context, because the scope of the prophecy does not end at Zechariah's day. Rather, Zechariah looks forward in time, to the advent of the Messiah, the Branch. What does Zechariah teach about the person and work of the Messiah? How are these prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ?

Finally, we should also look to apply the meaning of the Night Visions to our own time and beyond. Zechariah was speaking to the church of every age as he wrote down his Night Visions. How do these visions apply to the people of God of our day? How do they encourage us to continue the spiritual work of building up the temple of the Lord? How do they point to our ultimate hope and fulfillment as the true Jerusalem, the city of our God?

As we study the Night Visions of Zechariah, keep these different perspectives in your head: historical, messianic, and eschatological. The wealth of the imagery of these Night Visions cannot be exhausted in simply a historical reading. Rather, we should always be asking, how do these visions apply to Jesus Christ? How do they apply to me? My goal in this study of Zechariah 1-6 is to continually focus our attention on the hope of our calling – Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah promised in Zechariah's Night Visions. As we study Zechariah, my exhortation to you is simply this: "Behold the Branch!"

Next week: Lesson 2 – "Return to Me" – Zechariah 1:2-7

Close in Prayer.