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Zechariah is a book of connections. For example:

- We are *connected* with promises and reminders of God’s mercy.
- We *connect* with God’s people, each other, and our need to worship across the ages.
- We see characters from throughout the Hebrew Bible and even the New Testament, across centuries and scriptures, finding a common *connection* with the prophet Zechariah.
- And we see how an exiled people begin to be *re-connected* to their homeland.

**“Not It”**

Having said that, I should share with you what this sermon is *not* about.

- It is *not* about the priest who was husband to Elizabeth, father to John the Baptist, who became mute for many months after a temple encounter with the angel Gabriel.
- It is *not* about a wee little man who climbed a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.
- And it is *not* about the more than 30 other individuals named Zechariah in the Bible.

Today’s message is about a priest who served in the Lord’s temple during a time of national rebuilding and restoration who was completely sold out for the things of God.

**Eight Dreams/Visions**

Zechariah was so consumed with the things of God that he had eight visions followed by four oracles which he shares with us. He even dreams in color! When was the last time you were so caught up with the things of God that you had a dream or a vision. Prophet Joel prophesies about having dreams and visions (*Joel 2:28*), a promise picked up by Peter and Jesus’ followers in the New Testament (*Acts 2:17*).

At first glance, Zechariah’s visions, or dreams, can appear random and disconnected. However, upon further reflection and study, we begin to see a progressive vision that stretches far beyond the prophet’s life into Messianic fulfillment expressed through apocalyptic and eschatological language about the reconciliation of all things. I would like to share with you from one of these visions from *Zechariah 4:1-14*, his fifth vision of the Lampstand and Olive Trees:

*The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. He said to me, ‘What do you see?’ And I said, ‘I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.’ I said to the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ Then the angel who talked with me answered me, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ I said, ‘No, my lord. He said to me, ‘This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of “Grace, grace to it!” ’*

*Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.*

*‘These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.’ Then I said to him, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’ And a second time I said to him, ‘What are these two branches of the olive trees, which pour out the oil\* through the two golden pipes?’ He said to me, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ I said, ‘No, my lord.’ Then he said, ‘These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.’*

What a fascinating vision, filled with rich language. Like us, Zechariah must ask questions several times as he grows in faith and understanding. What are the small things spoken of in Verse 10? We even hear of two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

This book is a reminder that God is in control - what true success is *not* about, strength or power, and what it *is* about, God’s Spirit leading us. Redemption from exile would not be accomplished by a military uprising or the might of forces marshaled together, but by God’s favor and divine grace shown through earthly powers, in a spirit of humility and good will. Compared to the restoration of all peoples, the restoration of the physical temple was a small thing. Zechariah’s dreams take his vision from earthly, temporal things into the realm of the eternal, dealing with spiritual restoration, foreshadowing God’s divine purpose and his plan of salvation for people of all time. He has singular vision for God’s redemption, both in his own context and in ours. Whereas Haggai was focused on rebuilding the temple and the future glory of the physical structure (*Haggai 2:9*), Zechariah’s vision takes us into the heavenly courts.

### **The Troubles of Zerubbabel**

One of Zechariah’s contemporaries mentioned in this passage, a significant person who stands out on the Biblical landscape, is a man by the name of Zerubbabel, governor of the returned exiles. He is mentioned many times in the Hebrew Bible. You could read about him in Ezra or Nehemiah, Kings or Chronicles, Haggai or Zechariah. Zerubbabel is important not only because he was a key leader of God’s people in a time of recovering from a national tragedy; he is also an ancestor in the line of Jesus. We can read about him in the genealogy of our Lord in *Matthew 1* as well as *Luke 3*. *Zerubbabel is a key reminder that we should align ourselves with proven leaders who have courage to face difficult situations with a spirit of godliness.* He received the counsel of great people like two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, priests Zechariah and Ezra, and Governor Nehemiah.

You may wonder whom the prophet means in the first chapter when he speaks of the former prophets: *Zechariah 1:4* reads, “*Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or heed me, says the Lord.*” Both of these sayings can be traced back to *Jeremiah (Chs. 18:11, 25:5)*, so for Zechariah, both Jeremiah and Isaiah before him would have been the former prophets who prophesied of the captivity in Babylon.

As you may have heard, in addition to being a **prophet**, Zechariah is identified as being a **priest**, a reminder that we can serve God in the family business no matter our vocation, and how sometimes that vocation is stretched beyond our expectations in order to meet the needs of people and the circumstances of our day.

Another important name in Zechariah is Joshua, the high priest. In Hebrew, the name is Yeshua, the same Hebrew name from which we get the name ‘Jesus.’ The high priest himself is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, our high priest (*Hebrews 2*).

Zechariah had big shoes to fill, concerned with both *personal and social* physical and spiritual renewal. He stands in the line of prophets proclaiming both justice and restoration, healing and renewal. Check

out *Nehemiah 12:16, 26; Ezra 5:1, 6:14-15* to learn about more connections between Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

The setting of the book, along with Haggai (before) and Malachi (after), is in the time when Jewish exiles are beginning to return home in order to fulfill their hopes of restoration. We notice how God moved the hearts of foreign **kings** like Darius the Mede and Cyrus II to send people back to the Levant, the Holy Land.

### **A Holy Mountain in the Holy Land**

I love how the book calls Israel the Holy Land (*Zechariah 2:12*) and speaks of the Holy Mountain of the Lord (*Zechariah 8:3*). The reputation of Jerusalem as being a center of worship for God's people and for the nations of the world is both a reality of the past and a hopeful invitation for the future.

God's

- promised deliverance,
- covenant relationship,
- powerful protection,
- restored kingdom and temple, even
- salvation through Messianic deliverance;

all of these things are on the line and a part of Zechariah's message.

The temple would not be maintained or rebuilt by human will, but by God's grace. Zechariah bears this promise fulfilled in the vision of another author, St. John the Divine (Revelation): Jerusalem shall be inhabited...I will be its wall and the glory within it.

Among scholars there is some confusion about the authorship of Zechariah; some say that it is the same author writing throughout a prophet's lifetime from early to late in life; others say it must be that the disciples of the author continued the work long after his earthly life had expired. What is clear is that the work of this book spans many decades. And, it is a story set up to be continued in the New Testament.

Just as Malachi leaves us on a literary cliffhanger, waiting for the return of prophet Elijah, so that Mark's Gospel, the first of the Gospels to be written, picks up with the wilderness ministry of John the Baptist hundreds of years later. Can you imagine living with a question for several hundred years?

What happened during that time, anyways? Here is where the intertestamental, or apocryphal books, were written, a bridge of history filling the space between Malachi and Mark. A dozen or so books fill in the blanks of how God's people contended with the waiting, continued to tell stories of God's faithfulness, and recorded their lived experience to show how God was making a way where there seemed to be no clear path to the future.

Between Zechariah and Mark are nearly half a millennia, but only two years elapse between the beginning of Haggai and the beginning of Zechariah (*Haggai 1:1 cf. Zechariah 1:1*).

Zechariah reminds us of the importance of the roles of priest, prophet, and king.

**Priest** – Zechariah served in a family, priestly line. From a young age, he knew the awesome power and responsibilities that came with serving God in the priesthood, and we can imagine how large his hopes were for one day returning to serve in God's temple.

**Prophet** – Zechariah, along with several other individuals whose ministries we have been following, was called by God in a special way to proclaim the truth of God’s kingdom. In the face of difficulty and occupation, he dared to proclaim and bear witness to what God could do.

**King** – Geopolitical alliances are at the heart of the resolution to send people like Zerubbabel and Zechariah back to the Holy Land. His visions remind us that the power of kings comes not simply from exercising their own authority and will, but by faithfully obeying the LORD. In Zechariah 7:9-10, we hear these words, *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: 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.”* Convicting words, aren’t they? Who knows what is in a person’s heart, but the eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth and see beyond the appearance of things.

### **Jesus as Priest, Prophet, and King**

Zechariah points ahead beyond himself toward Messiah. In the New Testament, Jesus and his followers came preaching and proclaiming the same truths about the nature of true religion. It wasn’t about being ‘called’ anything; it was about doing what God calls us to do, about having a pure heart and storing God’s words there. The book of Zechariah, which speaks of priests, prophets, and kings, reminds us of Jesus, who for us is all of these things.

Jesus is our high priest, and we believe in the priesthood of all believers through Christ. Jesus came prophetically declaring the need for repentance and living a message of God’s love. The King of Kings humbled himself in order to faithfully obey God’s teachings and bring about lasting renewal and restoration.

Today, provision happens not by the usual suspects of earthly might or political persuasion, but by God’s Spirit. A wonderful example was in the recent winter Olympics. CBS News featured this headline:

**“Team USA's Erin Jackson becomes first Black woman to win Olympic speedskating gold after teammate gave up her spot”**

It truly is an incredible story. Jackson was the fastest speed skater in the world at the 500 meters. However, during the Olympic trials, she slipped and finished third, narrowly missing a qualifying finish. Enter teammate Brittany Bowe: Bowe finished first in the same race that Jackson had slipped during. However, knowing that she would be competing in other races, wanting to give Jackson an opportunity, and believing Jackson to be the fastest in the world, Bowe gave up her spot in the 500 meter. Jackson, 29, called Brittany Bowe an amazing mentor, teammate, and friend. Speaking of Bowe, Jackson said, “This is an act I’ll never forget. You can bet I’ll be the loudest one cheering for her in the 1,000 and 1,500 meter races.” In a rare turn of fate, Bowe ended up getting back a spot in the 500 meter after the United States was given another place; she finished 16<sup>th</sup> in the race. Jackson received the gold medal. Jackson made good on Bowe’s sacrifice, and Bowe received back what she was willing to give away, a chance to compete. The lesson in this is one of humility; all of Erin Jackson’s strength, speed, and training could have come to nothing without the humble gesture of self-sacrifice by a loving teammate. We can choose to live this way, too, considering others better than ourselves (*Philippians 2:3*), knowing that it is in giving that we truly receive (Prayer of St. Francis).

- World leaders look to themselves and their alliances for answers and solutions to the world’s problems; God says, not by might nor by power, but by God’s Spirit.
- Pollsters look to the power of persuasion to enlist the masses and the media to enact change; God says, not by might or by earthly wisdom, but by God’s Spirit.

- And in our times of need, when we don't have enough to take care of daily necessities, we look to government or charity to help, and it is not by might or power that help comes, but by hearts humbly submitted, trusting in God's generous, life-giving Spirit.

Zechariah echoes the words of the Psalmist (*Psalms 27:14*): be strong, take heart, wait upon the LORD. It is amazing to see in the scripture and in the world how God longs to gather us together and how faithful prophets like Zechariah step up to proclaim God's redemptive vision.

*Loving God, grant us eyes to see and ears to hear what you are up to in the world today. Give us courage to alleviate the suffering of others, and multiply the gifts we have given, that they may continue your work in the world. We pray through Jesus' name. Amen.*

### Questions for Reflection

1. What does the name "Zechariah" mean, and how have you found this name's meaning to be true in your life?
2. About how many Zechariah's are listed in the Bible?
3. How many visions/dreams does Zechariah have? Which are easiest for you to comprehend; with which do you have the most trouble? Have you ever had a vision?
4. To whom does Zechariah refer when he mentions "the former (or 'earlier') prophets"?
5. Where in God's Word can we find encouragement, hope, or vision for our lives? In what areas of life do you need encouragement, hope, or vision?
6. When do you feel like you need restoration or renewal, and how can you offer those things to the world in word or deed?
7. Where do you feel the nudge of God's Spirit in your life today?

### ***A Word from the Prophet Zechariah; Brewster Baptist Church, MA, March 27, 2022***

Shalom shalom. Boker ohr va yom tov. Hello, good morning, and good day to you.

My name is Zechariah, a name that means, "The Lord Remembers." I come from a long line of priests, and I serve as priest like my grandfather, Iddo, before me. For generations, my ancestors worshiped at the temple of the Lord in Ye-ru-sha-layim; it is there that we worship the God of Avraham, Yeet-zak, and Yakov. Now my role as priest combines in a new way with my role as God's prophet to the peoples. Perhaps you have heard of the prophets?

I am remembered as being a prophet of vision and encouragement who brought hope for restoration in a time of rebuilding, even though at times I had difficult words to share. I have traveled a great distance to share words with you.

Since my name has to do with **remembering**, I would like you to remember a few very important things: first, that following God is not always easy, but it is *always* worth it! Sadly, still today, the people of the nations face challenges. In my day, it was conquering armies led by dictators and tyrants, driving innocent people from their homes with cruel oppression and violence. Perhaps not so much has changed in twenty-five hundred years? For the world is still filled with nations seeking to impose their will on other nations, vying for resources, and looking to their own well-being. This is not what God calls us to do.

So, part of my dream, my prophetic vision, is for the people of the nations to gather in the house of the Lord, not to be scattered and driven apart, but to worship the Lord *united*.

That is what has brought us together today, worshiping the Lord of Heaven and Earth. This is another reminder: I have heard and **remembered** your deeds, how you have led the churches in generous giving, how you shine your light like a beacon in the night, and how you serve with an undivided heart. That is a wonderful example for God's people, and so I have come to encourage you in this. For these things I return many thanks to the LORD.

As you worship together providing an example for the ages, dear friends, may you also know that the LORD **remembers** your needs and promises provision. The LORD *sees* and **remembers** your suffering and shares our pain. The LORD longs to liberate us from being *prisoners* of hope in order to be bringers of hope, to fulfill good things like freedom, joy, and peace.

May you **remember** that all good things come from the LORD's hand, just as the LORD remembers you and goes with you, wherever you may journey.

Finally, I want to share with you a musical **reminder** that has been a blessing to me: it comes from your *Psalm 108*: "Nachon libi Elohim, Ashira va'azamra af k'vodi..." (*Psalm 108:2*)

Translation: My Heart is steadfast, Oh God; I will sing and chant even with my soul.

*May the all-surpassing majesty, glory, and shalom of Adonai defend your cause and contend against all who oppose you. Shalom!*