

## INTRODUCTION

In a cafeteria line in a Catholic school, there was a pile of apples with a sign that said, "Take only one apple. God is watching." Further down the line, there was a pile of cookies and someone had scribbled, "Take all the cookies you want, God is watching the apples." Well, this probably isn't a news flash, but God doesn't have any trouble watching the apples and the cookies at the same time. He sees all and He knows all. That makes me smile because the more I read the Bible, the less I worry about the world because I realize that God has a master plan for this planet. And we discover the details of the Master's master plan in the pages of the Bible.

This series is called "The Major Message of the Minor Prophets." But over the past ten weeks we've seen there is nothing minor about the impact of these men of God. Their message from God spoke to ancient generations of disobedient Jews, and that same message still speaks loudly to us today. These great prophets have been called "minor" because most of their books are relatively short. But today we come to the prophet Zechariah, whose prophecy contains fourteen chapters, which is longer than Daniel's prophecy.

I mentioned in the last message that Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are different from the other prophets because they preached *after* Jerusalem had been destroyed and the people were sent off into exile. After spending many years in exile they came back to start rebuilding their lives. Haggai's challenge was to rebuild the temple. Zechariah challenged the people to rebuild their lives spiritually because the Messiah was coming, not just once but twice! Most of Israel was not ready for the first coming of Jesus, but we're going to see how God will prepare the Jews for the second coming of Jesus.

It's a good time for us to consider this question as well: Is America Ready for Jesus to Return? Let me make it more personal: Are YOU ready for Jesus to return? Here's a quick survey: How many of you expect Jesus to return within the next hour? Raise your hand. Hmm, not many. Well this would be the perfect time because Jesus said, "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (Luke 12:40)

Zechariah 1:1-6. "In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo: 'The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty. Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? Then they repented and said, 'The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'"

Zechariah received eight visions from God and all of them are worth studying. But for our overview today I want to examine four foundational truths Zechariah declares. They apply to nations and to individuals.

## **I. GOD REWARDS THOSE WHO RETURN TO HIM**

Zechariah's first message from God provides the theme of his prophecy. God said, "'Return to me,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you.'" (Zechariah 1:3)

Remember these were people who had been born and raised in a foreign culture. The first Jews carried into exile were immersed into the Babylonian culture, and the next generation grew up in the Persian culture. There was no longer a Temple in Jerusalem, so they had to figure out a way to draw close to God without a Holy Sanctuary where God dwelt. Actually, there was a revival of devotion to God among those in exile. For instance, this is when Daniel started the custom of opening his windows kneeling in prayer three times a day while facing Jerusalem—and he got thrown to the lions for his devotion to God. But God was there in the lions' den to make them lose their appetite. And to this day, Orthodox Jews still stand and orient their bodies toward Jerusalem when they read their prayers from the siddur. By the way, this gets interesting on some of our flights to and from Tel Aviv. It's not unusual to see ten to fifteen men with their black suits and hats and long forelocks congregating together and all facing the way they think Jerusalem is, bowing and praying several times on the long flight.

In Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to a foreign idol, and they were thrown in a fiery furnace. But God was there with them to deliver them for their devotion.

The exile was the time when Esther and Mordecai faced terrible persecution as Haman planned to kill all the Jews in Persia. They worked hard to maintain their Jewish heritage in a foreign culture where Esther was a queen.

As America becomes less and less a Christian nation, it's like we are living in a foreign culture. This world is not our home. We really do march to the beat of a different drum. Paul writes that we live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, and it seems to be getting more crooked and more perverse.

God's promise through Zechariah was repeated in the New Testament. The Bible says, "Come near to God and he will come near to you." (James 4:8) Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt closer to God than you do now? He did not leave you; there must have been some time in your past where you moved away from Him.

The old farmer, Ned, and his wife, Mabel, had been married for fifty years. They were driving along one day and Mabel was complaining about how they didn't seem to be as affectionate as they once were. She said, "Why, Ned, when we first got married we would sit right next to each other in your truck. But now, look at us, we don't even touch." Old Ned just looked at her and said, "Well, Mabel, I ain't moved an inch!" He was right. He hadn't moved from under the steering wheel, Mabel had moved. And if you sense that you aren't as close to God as you once were, guess who moved? But you can always draw close to God, and He will draw close to you.

## **II. GOD REBUKES THOSE WHO IGNORE HIM**

There's a flip side to that great promise. Zechariah challenged the Jews to remember the sins of their forefathers so they would not make the same mistakes and turn from God. Because of their continual rebellion and disobedience, God sent judgment upon the Jews.

Here's how God described the spiritual condition of those who lived before the destruction of Jerusalem. "'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the Lord Almighty. 'I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.'" (Zechariah 7:13-14)

Our nation isn't geographically desolate, but it is becoming morally and spiritually desolate. Zechariah warned the Jews to avoid the mistakes of their forefathers. Our situation is reversed. We should be embracing the faith of our founding fathers. Instead this generation is forsaking our great spiritual heritage, and the results are disastrous.

One of my favorite writers is Joel C. Rosenberg, who founded The Joshua Fund. He has written a number of Christian novels about the end time as well as a best-selling non-fiction book about the American economy entitled *Implosion*.

On December 16, two days after the Sandy Hook shooting, Fox News interviewed Joel. He said: "So far in 2012, we've seen 18 mass murder events in the U.S. and the year isn't over. Why is all this happening? In large part it is because America is engaged in moral and spiritual disarmament. Some Americans are actively trying to drive the God of the Bible out of our schools, our courts, our media, and out of America all together. Many Americans are simply ignoring the Lord—they don't care to read or follow the Bible, or obey God, or listen to Him. And then there are many Americans who say they are Christians but don't take their faith seriously, they just do what they want. The God of the Bible is a gentleman. Jesus Christ loves us, but He won't force us to follow Him. If an individual or nation continually tells Him to leave and not come back, He will eventually honor that request and let that person or nation's heart become hardened."

Throughout this series I've said that unless there is a spiritual awakening, America will face the judgment of God. In some ways, we are already experiencing His judgment in these very days. He doesn't have to send some supernatural visitation from heaven to judge us. We are simply reaping the bitter fruit of six decades of pushing God off the public square in America. The Bible says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." (Galatians 6:7)

But what happens in our nation is only a small hiccup in history compared to God's grand plan. From the beginning of Creation, God has been following His loving plan to redeem a sinful, fallen humanity. And His plan has a name: Jesus. Zechariah predicts both the first and second comings of our Lord.

### **III. THE FIRST COMING OF JESUS WAS AS A GENTLE SHEPHERD**

Zechariah lived about 500 years before Jesus was born and the Jews were anxiously anticipating

the coming of the promised Messiah. Isaiah and the other prophets had predicted that a great king would come to Israel who would be in the line of King David.

When Jesus was born, the Jews were expecting the Messiah to be a great military king like David who would overthrow the wicked Roman government. This Messiah King would restore them to the same position of power as when King David ruled in Israel.

But they neglected to study the prophets who predicted that when the Messiah came the first time He would be a suffering servant, not a conquering King. Instead, Jesus came as a gentle shepherd. Zechariah saw this, because this he made these predictions about the Messiah. "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord"... "Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 2:10; 9:9)

In Matthew 21, this same verse from Zechariah is quoted to as Matthew described Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Sometimes people ask me to help them reason with a friend or family member who doesn't believe in Jesus and they are looking for some kind of "proof." Ultimately, believing in God is a matter of faith that can't be proved in a test tube.

However, there have been many skeptics who have to come to faith in Jesus by honestly comparing the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus with His actual life. For instance, Micah predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. In addition to predicting that the Messiah would ride a donkey into Jerusalem Zechariah predicted a friend would betray Him for 30 pieces of silver. He also prophesied that the money would be thrown onto the Temple floor and then used to buy a potter's field. Isaiah predicted he would be silent before His accusers and would be wounded and bruised for our sins. Isaiah also foretold that the Messiah would be executed with criminals and that He would pray for His executioners. Psalms 22 predicted that hands and feet would be pierced, and that his garments would be divided and won by casting lots.

There are 61 different prophecies about the first coming of Jesus that He fulfilled. Professor Peter Stoner, a mathematician, stated the statistical odds of any one man in history randomly fulfilling just eight prophecies are 1 in 10 to the 17<sup>th</sup> power. That's a one followed by eighteen zeroes. As a point of comparison, if you bought a lottery ticket for the recent Powerball lottery, your odds of winning \$600 million were only 1 in 175 million. In other words, statistically speaking, you have a greater chance of winning 25 Powerball lotteries in a row than for one man in history to randomly fulfill eight predictions about His life. And Jesus fulfilled over sixty prophecies! So it still boils down to faith, but it isn't simply an emotional faith. Ours is a faith that is intellectually driven as well.

But not only were there dozens of prophecies about the first coming of Jesus, there are many scriptures in the Old and the New Testament that predict the second coming of Jesus.

#### **IV. THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS WILL BE AS A CONQUERING KING**

At this point I've got to admit my personal bias and love for the nation of Israel. From reading Romans 11, I believe that God isn't finished with the Jewish people. They are still part of His master plan. Paul, who was a Jew himself writing to Gentiles summarized it this way: "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29)

There are several important prophecies about the second coming of Jesus Zechariah left us.

### **A. The Jews will return to their land**

Of course, the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, and some commentators believe these prophecies of Israel returning apply to that time in history. However, I disagree, because Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Zechariah predicted a time when the Jews will return to Israel and they will never again be uprooted. They did return 500 years before Jesus was born, but they were uprooted again in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. In fact, for the next 1,800 years, the Jews were dispersed to countries all around the world. This period of time is known as the Jewish diaspora. But the Bible predicted they would return again and this time, they would remain in the land.

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.'" (Zechariah 8:7-8)

In the late 1880s and early 1900s Jews started immigrating back to the Holy Land. They were met with hostility and set up armed camps known as kibbutzim. Gradually more and more Jews began to trickle back into Israel. After World War I, when the British took over control of Palestine, the trickle became a flood. Isaiah predicted that a country would be born in a single day, and on May 14, 1948 the U.N. chartered Israel as a nation. From 70 A.D. until 1948, Israel didn't exist, then it was reborn in a single day. But Israel was confined to a narrow stretch of land near the Mediterranean Sea. But in 1967 Israel regained control of Jerusalem again for the first time in almost 1,900 years. And the Jews have continued to return. In 2010, for the first time, there were more Jews living in Israel than in America.

### **B. The Jews will recognize their Messiah**

When Jesus came the first time, He came unto His own (the Jews), but they did not receive Him. Instead they rejected Him and turned Him over to the Romans to crucify Him.

In my book on Revelation, I state that the next event to happen on God's prophetic calendar is the rapture of the church. Jesus will appear suddenly in the clouds and in a twinkling of an eye, according to 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, we who are alive will be "caught up" (The Latin word is *raptio*) to be with the Lord. Then there will be seven years of terrible tribulation on earth. During this time, many of the Jews are going to put their faith in Jesus. And at the end of the seven years Jesus will return and then all the Jewish people will recognize Him.

The week before Jesus was crucified He stood on the Mount of Olives and looked at Jerusalem and He burst into tears. He wept for the blindness of the Jews. He said, "You did not recognize

the time of God's coming to you." He meant that He was God in the flesh and the Jews didn't recognize Him. He said, "If you only knew what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes." The Prince of Peace came and their eyes were blinded.

In Romans 11:25 Paul writes that the Jews have experienced a "hardening in part." The word means that it's like the Jewish people have scales or cataracts on their eyes until the "full number of the Gentiles have come in." So when the final Gentile accepts Jesus, then these scales will fall off the eyes of the Jews and they will suddenly recognize their Messiah.

Zechariah describes this time: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son...If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body [hands]?' He will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'" (Zechariah 12:10; 13:6)

That prophecy is verified in Revelation 1:7 which says, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" (Revelation 1:7-8)

I have stood outside the Eastern gate of the Temple Mount many times and read this scripture. The Talmud says when the Messiah comes He will walk through the Eastern Gate. Centuries ago, the Muslims closed the gate, and they even placed a Muslim cemetery around it in the belief that a Jewish rabbi would never walk over the dead. So, it was like they locked the door and planted dead bodies there to prevent Jesus' return. Those stones and those graves won't stop Jesus when He returns!

And when you look across the Mount of Olives today you see thousands of white bone boxes of Jews who have been buried facing the Eastern Gate. The Orthodox Jews believe that when the Messiah comes, the dry bones Ezekiel spoke about will come to life, so they want to be near the action!

Even the Jews who don't yet believe in Jesus have a wry sense of humor about the identity of the Messiah. Our guide, Reuven, always jokes that the first thing the rabbis will ask the Messiah when He comes is, "Have you been here before?" Meaning, "Are you Jesus?" Zechariah answers that question without a doubt. The Messiah WILL be recognized by the wounds in His body—He will be Jesus!

### **C. Jesus will be King over the earth**

When Jesus returns to planet earth, He won't be on a little donkey. According to Revelation 19, He'll be riding a white war stallion leading the armies of heaven for the earth's final battle. This battle has been called the "Battle of Armageddon." But the Bible never uses that phrase. The word "Armageddon," which means "Hill of Megiddo" only appears once in the Bible. Revelation 16:16 says the enemies of Israel will gather at a place called Armageddon. This area

is the huge valley of Jezreel, which is about forty miles north of Jerusalem. The final battle will be at Jerusalem and according to Revelation 19 it will be the world's shortest battle, because Jesus will slay His enemies with the sword of His Word. Then He will set up His Kingdom on earth and He will reign from Jerusalem for 1,000 years.

Here's how Zechariah describes this event. "I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured...Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west...The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name...It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure." (Zechariah 14:2, 3-4, 9, 11)

A few years ago, the Sheraton Corporation was considering building a new hotel on the top of the Mount of Olives, but geologists determined there is a fault line running underneath the mountain. They could have saved the money they paid the geologists if they had only read Zechariah 14!

## CONCLUSION

Most of you have seen or heard of all six of the Rocky movies, which was at least three too many! People like to cheer for an underdog who wins. In the movies, Rocky is getting the tar beaten out of him by an opponent who is larger, stronger, and faster. But somehow Rocky manages to win, right? Not exactly. In the original Rocky movie, he didn't win. Apollo Creed wins by a split decision. The whole point was that Rocky hung in there for all fifteen rounds. His eyes were so swollen, he could hardly see, so he wanders around the ring shouting, "Adrian, Adrian!"

Some Christians have a Rocky complex. They think we're getting slammed, and beaten up by the world, but if we can just hang on until the end, everything will be okay. We may end up bloodied, and bruised, but, in the end, we're unbowed.

We don't need a Rocky complex because we have the Rock of Ages. Jesus has already won the battle on the cross. Then when He returns, He'll show Himself for who He really is—the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. My friend, we aren't just barely hanging in there, we're already *more* than conquerors through Him that loved us.

When Jesus came the first time, it was as the gentle Lamb of God, when He comes again it will be as the mighty lion of the tribe of Judah. And that's the time when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!

Until then let us be singing, "When He shall come with trumpet sound; Oh may I then, in Him, be found; Dress in his righteousness alone; Faultless to stand before the throne. On Christ the Solid Rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand!"

## OUTLINE

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"Return to me,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you.'" *Zechariah 1:3*

### II. GOD REBUKES THOSE WHO IGNORE HIM

"When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the Lord Almighty. 'I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.'" *Zechariah 7:13-14*

### III. THE FIRST COMING OF JESUS WAS AS A GENTLE SHEPHERD

"Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord"...  
"Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." *Zechariah 2:10; 9:9*

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#### B. The Jews will recognize their Messiah

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son...If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body [hands]?' He will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'" *Zechariah 12:10; 13:6*

#### C. Jesus will be King over the earth

"I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured...Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west...The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name...It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure." *Zechariah 14:2, 3-4, 9, 11*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes