

**GOD REMEMBERS
ZECHARIAH**

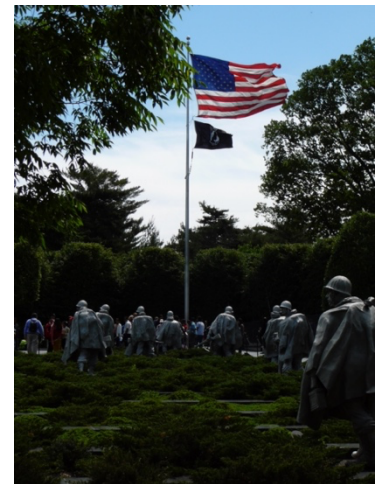
Several years ago, when the girls were in high school, I attended a conference in Washington D.C. Raye Jeanne and I thought it would be a great opportunity for a family trip, especially since we are a little bit nerdy and like things like historical sites and museums. So we arrived one afternoon and I immediately went to my conference and they immediately went to Union Station and bought bus passes for the week and began touring the landmarks of interest to them.

I had a break from my conference on Saturday afternoon, so in about 6-8 hours, they packed all the highlights from their week into one quick tour for me. It was a whirlwind. I'm the guy that likes to read every plaque in every museum. That day was a succession of children grabbing my arm and saying, "Come on, dad, let's go... we don't have time to waste...keep moving..."

We did pause at a few spots, including the **Lincoln Memorial**. The size of the monument surprised me, and it was gratifying to contemplate how God used this one man to provide freedom for so many in our country. The memorials that were particularly impactful, though, were the war memorials — the **Viet Nam Memorial** and the **Korean War memorial**. The soberness was



overwhelming. Name after name and row after row of soldiers who gave their lives to protect freedom. Many other sites in the city were noisy and bustling. There were many people at these memorials — and it was quiet. There was a heaviness there.



Memorials are designed to provoke a variety of emotions, but one of those is to burn in our minds, "I can't forget. I must remember. This event is too significant to let it slip from our minds." But those things often do diminish don't they? The busyness of days and years push those memories from our minds and they fade.

Because of the frailty and fallibility of our minds, we are prone to think that God also has the same limitations of memory. Certainly Israel seemed to think so. In one particular circumstance, after the nation had been in captivity in Babylon/Medo-Persia for 70 years, the nation began returning to the land of Israel. Quickly the foundation for a reconstructed Temple was poured, and then opposition arose.

And forgetting the promises of God (and essentially assuming that God had also forgotten), the nation became fearful and did no work on the Temple for nearly 20 years. The foundation lay as a testimony to Israel's fear and unbelief.

Into that forgetfulness, God brought a series of men, including two prophets, to exhort and encourage the Israelites of God's promise and care for His people. One of those prophets, Zechariah, is going to be our focus for the rest of this year and into the new year. Our goal is to cultivate a mindset of confidence not just in God's power, but in His remembrance of His promises to care and act for His people.

The book of Zechariah encourages and exhorts us to be hopeful because,

IN HIS SOVEREIGNTY, GOD REMEMBERS AND WILL FULFILL HIS PROMISES TO HIS PEOPLE.

This morning, we want to consider **four keys** to understanding the book of Zechariah:

1. The **HISTORICAL** Context of Zechariah

- How Israel Got in its Predicament
- The Man for the Predicament, Zechariah
- Lessons from Israel's Predicament

2. The **PURPOSE** of Zechariah

3. The **THEME** of Zechariah

4. The **MESSAGE** of Zechariah

- Zechariah is **ESCHATOLOGICAL**
- Zechariah is **SOTERIOLOGICAL**
- Zechariah is **MESSIANIC**

1. The HISTORICAL Context of Zechariah

• How Israel Got in its Predicament

- ✓ The prophet Zechariah began writing in 520 B.C. But this story began long before that.
 - ✓ You may remember that while there was one nation of Israel with 12 tribes, the nation divided into two kingdoms after Solomon — the northern (10) tribes, which became known as “Israel,” and the southern two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) that became known as “Judah.”
 - ✓ While the southern tribes had a mixture of godly and ungodly kings, the northern tribes only had evil and ungodly kings, which was a natural expression of the rebelliousness of those 10 tribes.
 - ✓ So late in the eight century BC, the Assyrian army was sent by God to attack Israel and those 10 tribes were defeated and taken into captivity in 722 B.C.
 - ✓ That’s where this story starts — with the captivity of Israel, the northern tribes.
- While Judah had some godly and ungodly kings, following the good reign of Hezekiah there were a series of evil kings and God warned that Judah would also be taken into captivity (**2 Kings 20:16ff**).
 - ✓ Despite repeated warnings of captivity, the leaders of Judah mocked the prophets who spoke:

The era immediately prior to the fall of Judah reflected an equally fragile peace and prosperity. Into the mix was added a cacophony of voices predicting a glorious future, in addition to the harbingers of doom. One major theological problem with social implications in the preexilic era was the doctrine of the inviolability of Zion. This was a false and pernicious doctrine, the “prosperity theology” of that day. This false teaching affirmed that Jerusalem could never fall as long as the Lord’s temple remained in the city. Jeremiah mocked this false teaching, admonishing, “Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD’ (Jer 7:4). [Klein, 34]

- ✓ God was not inhibited by the obstinate rebels, so the deportation of Judah began in 605 B.C. with the removal of some of the finest men from Israel to Babylon (like Daniel & friends); then culminated in two further deportations in 597 and 586 B.C. While not every citizen of Judah was taken (50,000 came back in the first return), all the key leaders and most influential people were taken.
- ✓ The Babylonian captivity was because of Judah’s overt rebellion against God (e.g., **2 Kings 24:2-4**).
- ✓ Yet even though the nation was being disciplined, God made a promise of restoration (**Jer. 25:9-12; 29:10f**). This is God’s grace and faithfulness to His Abrahamic promise even though Judah rebelled.
- ✓ It was that promise that Daniel remembered and after 70 years of captivity he prayed for God’s grace to restore Israel (Dan. 9:2-3). Using an ungodly king, Cyrus, the people began to return in the year 536 B.C., 70 years after the first deportation of Judah to Babylon, just as God promised thru Jeremiah.
- ✓ [Aside: Cyrus was Medo-Persian and had defeated Babylon in 539; he had been prophesied to be the agent of the release of Israel 150 years earlier by Isaiah (**Is. 44:28-45:1ff**).]

- ✓ Once they got back to Israel, you might think all would be well. But it wasn't.
 - Under the ministry of Ezra, they immediately restored the sacrificial system (Ez. 3:1-6) and laid the foundation of the Temple (Ez. 3:11-13) — both of which were good and godly things.
 - But they faced strong resistance, were discouraged, and abandoned the project (Ez. 4:5).
 - For 15 years, the Temple remained unbuilt. The people were in the land, but the focus of their worship remained destroyed and the walls of the city were still in ruins (Neh. 2:17).
 - In order to encourage the people to build the Temple, God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah to motivate them to finish the task. Chapters 1-7 (perhaps 8) were written around 520 B.C. as an exhortation to build the temple; the remaining chapters were written much later.
 - By the time Haggai and Zechariah prophesy, Cyrus is dead and replaced by Darius (1:1) who ruled over an area that included Persia, Mesopotamia, Israel, Egypt, and Asia Minor. He is powerful ruler over a significant kingdom and ruled authoritatively so there was peace (1:11).



- **The Man for the Predicament, Zechariah** — who is Zechariah?

- ✓ Zechariah was born in Babylon to the tribe of Levi and in the first wave of returnees to Israel.
 - ✓ Specifically, Zechariah is the son of Berechiah, and the grandson of Iddo (1:1, 7).
 - ✓ Ezra identifies him as the son of Iddo, omitting Berechiah (Ez. 5:1; 6:14). The term “son” in Hebrew can easily be used for other relationships, especially grandson/genealogical relationships. Some have said that Ezra made an error in genealogy; probably Berechiah’s life was so short that Zechariah took the family role at a particularly early age.
 - ✓ Nehemiah also mentions both Iddo and Zechariah (Neh. 12:6) identifying them as priests; so Zechariah was one of the unique individuals to serve as both prophet and priest in Israel.
 - ✓ He is also identified as a “young man” in Zech. 2:4 and is a contemporary of Haggai (Hag. 1:1), starting his ministry two months after Haggai. It is probably his youth that leads him to be listed after Haggai whenever they are mentioned together.
- Perhaps what is most significant about Zechariah is his name — it means “God Remembers.”
 - ✓ Both the name and the message of the prophet were the same: God has not forgotten you; God has not forgotten His promise to Abraham; God will fulfill all His covenant promises.
 - ✓ Specifically, God will remember to install His King, the Messiah, on His throne in Israel (ch. 14) out of His faithfulness to Himself and out of the loyalty of His love to His people.
 - ✓ Every time the people saw Zechariah, they were reminded that God keeps His promises; and every time they heard Zechariah speak, they heard the message that God keeps His promises.
 - ✓ Spurgeon has said about God’s recollection, “He who counts the stars and calls them by their names, is in no danger of forgetting His own children.”

- So as we think about lessons from Israel's predicament...

- ✓ *Rebellion against God always brings consequences.* There is no good (natural) outcome from sin. Sin always leads to bondage and enslavement and ultimately discipline from God (**Gal. 6:7-8**).
- ✓ *But God is also glorified when He redeems sin and sinners* — so there is always a pathway out of sin through repentance and confession.
- ✓ *God always has His faithful men to lead His people* — Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah (Heb. 11), Paul, John, Luther, Calvin... He is never without men who are equipped to accomplish His purposes, no matter how desperate the times seem (true today too).

2. The **PURPOSE** of Zechariah

- The purpose of Zechariah is intertwined with Haggai — they are both speaking and writing to urge the people to complete the construction of the Temple (**4:8-10**; **Haggai 1:2-4**).
- He will compel them to do that through calling them to repentance (**1:3-4**).
- He also accomplishes this through a reminder of God's promise of future provision and comfort and the promise of the destruction of the nations opposed to Israel (**1:16-17**; 2:12; 3:2; 4:9; 6:14-15; **8:3ff**; 9:4-5, 8; **10:1, 7-8**; **12:2-4, 9-12**; 13:8-9; **14:6-9**).
- The purpose (reason) Zechariah writes is to bring the people to repent for their fear and apathy about rebuilding the Temple, and to give them hope that God will accomplish *all* His plans as King of Israel.

3. The **THEME** of Zechariah

- The theme is similar to Romans 11 — God has not forgotten Israel or His promises to her (**Rom. 11:25-27**). The book is all about the faithfulness of God and the confident hope His people have.
- As one writer said that message of hope was “at a time when the situation in Judah could hardly have appeared worse.” [Harrison] The situation was bleak, but for God it was bright — conducive to accomplishing exactly what He desired.
 - ✓ He will sovereignly remove Israel's oppressors (9:1-10).
 - ✓ He will sovereignly build and rule in His Temple in Jerusalem (**6:12-13**; **14:9**).
 - ✓ It has an immediate encouragement to the Israelites of Zechariah's day (chs. 1-8), and it has an ultimate fulfillment that is still coming which is also an encouragement to us (chs. 9-14).
 - ✓ One writer calls Zechariah “the prophet of hope and encouragement in troublous times.” (Laetsch)
- Theme: *In His sovereignty, God remembers and will fulfill His promises to His people.*

4. The MESSAGE of Zechariah

- Zechariah is Eschatological

- ✓ A common phrase the OT uses to speak about Israel's future is "the day of the Lord." It is a term that can refer to both God's judgment of the ungodly and His Kingdom for Israel (wrath and blessing). While the exact term "day of the Lord" isn't used in this book, similar terms like **that day** and **day of Yahweh** are used 18x. The theme of God's future provision for Israel dominates:
 - 2:11 — the salvation of Gentiles
 - 3:10 — the blessing of the Millennial Kingdom under the Messiah
 - 9:16 — final salvation of Israel and Judah (beyond restoration from Babylonian captivity)
 - 12:3ff — the destruction of the nations when they attack Jerusalem in battle of Armageddon
 - 14:3ff — the victory of God and His Messiah ("God wins!")
- ✓ As with all eschatological literature, the people of Israel (and we) are designed to gain hope (confidence) and encouragement (2 Pt. 3:11-13).

- Zechariah is Soteriological

- ✓ The first verses offer restoration to God through repentance and salvation (1:3).
- ✓ We see God's removal of sin in the vision of 5:5-11.
- ✓ Christ is anticipated in 9:9 as coming with salvation (though the readers wouldn't have understood the prophecy fully).
- ✓ God will ultimately save and restore all Israel (10:6).
- ✓ By emphasizing the provision of ultimate salvation, the prophet is also encouraging the readers that there is something worse than suffering now. It is better to suffer now if we have final salvation. And if we are believing and trusting in the Messiah, then we are safe, no matter how hard life is.
- ✓ That takes us to the final important aspect of Zechariah's message...

- Zechariah is Messianic

- ✓ One commentator calls this book, "the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological, of all the writings of the OT." [Robinson, quoted by Barker, 595.]
- ✓ One NT Greek text recognizes 41 quotations or allusions from the book of Zechariah in the NT.
- ✓ Zechariah 9-14 is the most quoted section from the prophets in the Passion account (of Christ).
- ✓ Because of the importance of the book as a revelation of the Messiah, one commentator has said, "One of the great ironies concerning the book of Zechariah is its relative obscurity to the modern church contrasted with its profound significance to the early church. Unfortunately, students of the Bible rarely study Zechariah today." [Klein]

- ✓ What does the book reveal about the Messiah?
 - the Servant's deity (3:4; 13:7)
 - the Lord's Servant, the Branch (3:8)
 - the Man, the Branch (6:12), His first advent in lowliness
 - His priesthood (6:13)
 - His kingship (6:13; 9:9; 14:9, 16)
 - the True Shepherd (11:4-11)
 - the Shepherd's rejection and betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (11:12-13)
 - the True shepherd vs. the false shepherd — the Antichrist (13:7)
 - the betrayal of the Good Shepherd (11:12-13)
 - His crucifixion (12:10)
 - His sufferings, being struck by the Lord's sword (13:7)
 - His second advent in glory (14:4)
 - His building of the Lord's Temple (6:12-13)
 - His reign (9:10, 14)
 - His establishment of eternal peace and prosperity (3:10; 9:9-10) [*Unger's Bible Handbook*, 435; Barker, 599; cf. also Laney, 20-1.]

- We come to this book anticipating the future, trusting the provision of God, looking to the Savior.

CONCLUSION: Our memorials make us look to the past, which can be helpful so that we don't forget.

But sometimes our memorials also provoke us to regret — "If only..."

Zechariah is a reminder that as we look to the past we are also stimulated to look to the future in faith and trust that God has not forgotten and God has not become incapable.

God remembers and God will fulfill His promises to His people.

BENEDICTION: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24