

ZECHARIAH

The Prophet of Encouragement



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PART 2

What is the Message of Zechariah 1 to 6?

The reason the Spirit of Prophecy gives for the visions of Zechariah 1 to 6 is that they were messages to encourage Zerubabel and his helpers to go forward in restoring the temple.¹ But, we might logically ask, how do those parables and visions of the first six chapters present such messages of encouragement for these builders?

Let us first have a clear view of the historical situation. There was a little band of 50,000 who had returned from Babylon in 536 B. C. in response to the decree of Cyrus. They were a pitifully weak nation, especially compared to the great exodus under the leadership of Moses or to the power of the kingdom in the time of David and Solomon. The people were not only few in number, but they were exceedingly poor in material resources. Their enemies were strong, the Samaritans were a great hindrance, and it even looked as if the Persian kingdom would withdraw support from the project of restoring the temple at Jerusalem. They had already labored for sixteen years; and before Haggai appeared on the scene in 520 B. C., they had become so discouraged with what seemed to be insurmountable diffi-

¹See *Present Truth*, April, 1970, article, "Zechariah—The Prophet of Encouragement" (Part 1).

culties, that they stopped work on the temple entirely.

Then Haggai had just stirred them up to commence work again. At this critical point the God of heaven saw that His people, above everything else, needed to be cheered, encouraged and comforted. They needed a revelation of God's love and care for them. They needed to look above their lack of numbers, their poverty and their weakness, to the agencies that heaven was employing for the completion of the task. In this context Zechariah is a mighty book. The parables and visions show that God had provided three things for the glorious success of the work:

1. The ministration of Christ—the Angel of the Lord—on Israel's behalf.
2. The ministration of the Holy Spirit to make their work a success.
3. The ministration of angels to co-operate with Israel's efforts.

This is surely a theme worthy of contemplation. It is not a side issue, but the central truth of the ages. Let us then briefly see how Zechariah 1 to 6 presents this glorious subject:

1. *The Ministration of Christ.* Zechariah 1 opens with the nations at ease, Jerusalem still desolate, God's work at a



standstill. That is exactly as things stood at about 520 B.C. But what does Zechariah see? He sees and hears Christ interceding before the Father for His people. "O Lord of hosts," says Christ, the Angel of the Lord, "how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?" Zechariah 1:12. God Himself answers in

words that must have been a thrilling comfort to Zechariah and his people:

"I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. . . . I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: My house shall be built in it . . . My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem." Zechariah 1:14-17.

Surely this is a revelation of God's infinite compassion and love for His people! Surely this would cheer and comfort the men who were wondering whether they could ever finish the temple! Why should they be discouraged if God was in the work? Surely they could say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Yet Israel had been a disobedient people. Their past sins rose before them to discourage them. Satan presented their case before them in its most discouraging light, and the people were ready to doubt if their sins would not eclipse the divine favor. So in Zechariah 3 the prophet sees Joshua the high priest, who represents Israel, clothed in filthy garments. Satan stands by to accuse him of Israel's sins and to show reason why God's people have forfeited divine favor and protection. Joshua is silent. He stands before Christ, the Angel of the Lord, with nothing to answer the accuser. "And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem

rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Zechariah 3:2. Yes, Israel is a little brand of 50,000 plucked from the fire, but exceedingly precious to the Lord. Christ commands that the filthy garments be removed and that Israel be given a change of raiment. The people are pardoned and restored to divine favor. Satan is vanquished. This is the meaning of Zechariah 3 in the historical context (see *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 582-585).

Zechariah 3 is the high point of the series of visions. How it must have encouraged the weary builders to press on with their task in the consciousness of divine favor! The Angel of the Lord was mighty in intercession for them; and fixing their faith in Him, they could neither fail nor be discouraged.

2. *The Ministration of the Holy Spirit.* In Zechariah 4 the prophet sees a great mountain, which *Prophets and Kings* says represents "great mountains of difficulty."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 594.² Think how few, how poor and how weak the little nation was! Even the temple they were working to build seemed as nothing compared with the magnificence of Solomon's temple. But the word of the Lord through Zechariah 4 declares, "Not

²Mountains therefore do not always mean kingdoms, any more than water always symbolizes people, or earth always symbolizes unoccupied territory, or angels always symbolize God's people.

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by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, said the Lord of hosts." It makes no difference to the Lord, as Jonathan said to his armor bearer, to save by few or by many. The success of the work depends not upon how many men are in the work nor upon how many resources are available to prosecute the task. Success depends upon how much of the Holy Spirit is in the work. And in vision Zechariah sees the gift of the Spirit, as holy oil, made available in plenteous abundance to his people.

Nothing is too hard for the Spirit of God. Before the efficacious power of His grace, the great mountain of difficulties would "become a plain." Zechariah 4:7. The enemies of God's people mocked them, saying, "What do these feeble Jews?" But, says the word of the Lord to Zechariah, "who hath despised the day of small things?" The work of the Spirit always starts as a grain of mustard seed, but it will grow to become a mighty tree. What cheer, comfort and encouragement for the builders of the temple are found in Zechariah 4!

3. *The Ministration of Angels.* Zechariah is one of the most wonderful books of the Bible in which to study about the ministration of angels in behalf of God's work on earth. In Revelation 4 the cherubim are represented as four beasts. So we should not be surprised that in Zechariah the angels of God are likened to horses. The servant of Elisha saw the angels of God as horses and chariots of fire upon Dothan's surrounding hills. Horses and a chariot of fire took Elijah to heaven. We all recognize that it was in reality the angels who escorted the great prophet to the city of God. The psalmist says, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." Psalm 68:17.

When Zechariah saw each vision, he usually asked his accompanying angel,

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"What are these, my lord?" And to each question he was given an answer so that he would know what the symbol meant. This writer submits that we ought to confine our interpretation to the answer given by the angel rather than to invent our own interpretation. When Zechariah saw the horses in Zechariah 1, he was told that they represented "they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth." Zechariah 1:10. Furthermore, they are shown returning from walking through the earth, reporting their mission to Christ.

Throughout the book of Zechariah, angels are shown to take a keen interest in the restoration of the temple and the city. The angel that talked with Zechariah was so distressed over the state of Jerusalem that Christ found it necessary to comfort him "with good words and comfortable words." Zechariah 1:13. In Zechariah 2 an angel, called a young man, is shown to be measuring Jerusalem. In Zechariah 3 angels assist Christ in His intercession, and at His command they take the filthy garments from Joshua and place the fair mitre on his head. Christ tells Joshua that if faithful, He will give him "places to walk among these that stand by"—even the angels of God (Zechariah 3:7; see *Prophets and Kings*, p. 585).

Finally the prophet sees the four chari-



ots hasten out between two mountains. He asks what they are and is told, "These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth." Zechariah 6:5. They are the angels, who stand before the Lord of the earth. Compare Zechariah 4:14: "These are the two anointed ones, *that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*" The angels are the "spirits of the heavens," for Paul in Hebrews 1:14 calls them

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"ministering spirits." Again, the psalmist says, "The chariots of God are . . . thousands of angels." Psalm 68:17. Zechariah sees them hastening to different parts of the earth to prepare the way for God's work to go forward at Jerusalem.

Why should Zerubbabel and his helpers be discouraged any longer? They were few in visible numbers, but the church on earth and the church in heaven constitute one church. The angels of God were active in cooperating in the work the builders were doing. All heaven was astir, for all heaven was interested in restoring the temple to its rightful state. No need for Israel to measure their strength in numbers, money or worldly influence any longer. Let them look up to see Christ their Intercessor, the Holy Spirit their Comforter, and the angels their helpers; and let them see in all this God's infinite compassion and love for them. So let them rise above discouragement and cheerfully press on in a work that could never fail. This is a brief outline of the message of Zechariah 1 to 6 in the setting of historical events around 520 B.C.

The Application of Zechariah for Today

Of course these visions of Zechariah 1 to 6 are full of truth for our day. Anyone acquainted with the Awakening message

knows that from its very beginning Zechariah 3 has been a key passage in its presentation.

Let us consider the principles upon which we must apply the prophecies of Zechariah to our day. The historical meaning of the book, which some have ignored, is very important; for the primary, historical application of those prophecies is a type of the secondary, eschatological application. If one does not understand the type, how can he correctly apply the anti-type? For instance, some people read about the drying up of the Euphrates and the kings of the east in Revelation 16, but they do not realize that the historic drying up of the Euphrates and the historic kings of the east brought to view in Isaiah and Jeremiah serve as a type of the Apocalyptic drama. Ignoring the historic fulfillment, they give their imagination free rein and arrive at all sorts of speculative and farfetched theories. This is what some have done with the visions of Zechariah.

Zechariah was written in reference to events connected with restoring the sanctuary after the Babylonish captivity. This post-exilic period finds its remarkable counterpart in the great work of restoring the sanctuary which began in 1844. The end of the seventy years is a clear type of the end of the 2300 years (see *Prophets and Kings*, p. 714). In 1844, after the long reign of the Papacy, God's people were

called out of Babylon, even as the Jews were called out of Babylon at the end of the seventy years. As the Jews began restoring the sanctuary, so did the Advent Movement in 1844. As the Jews were greatly limited by numbers, resources and influence in the world, so has been the little Advent Movement. As there was a delay in finishing the temple back there, so there has been a delay in cleansing the sanctuary in our day.

Zechariah saw Christ pleading the cause of His people, the Holy Spirit removing the mountain of difficulties and the angels hastening on heaven's mission to help restore the sanctuary at the end of seventy years' captivity. So too, the carpenters were the agencies employed by God in restoring the temple according to the decree of Cyrus and his successors and God Himself.

Once we see this typical, historical fulfillment, we may see where these things apply in the antitypical fulfillment. The church today is restoring the temple. This work began in 1844—not in the thirteenth century. Even as the carpenters were the agencies to restore the temple after the seventy years of Babylonish captivity, to today the carpenters must apply to the agencies to restore the temple after the period of captivity which ended in 1844 (see *Prophets and Kings*, p. 714). Let us consider the parable of Joshua and

the Angel. As is well known, it applies to Christ pleading for His people this side of 1844. To apply the carpenters and the chariots as beginning their work in the thirteenth century, as one recent exposition has done, is to completely miss the mark. Besides, this same exposition has the carpenters following each other in consecutive order, spaced out over a period of about 700 years. This is pure speculation. There is nothing to indicate that the four carpenters do not all work together. A better suggestion would be to say they represent the four angels' messages (Revelation 14 and 18)—but we would have to be honest and say this was only a suggestion.

The Message in Zechariah 1 to 6 for Today

The church today, which is restoring the sanctuary according to Daniel 8:14, may be weak, defective and enfeebled, as were the company of Jews back in the post-exilic period. But what is needed above everything else is the same revelation of the infinite compassion and love of God which cheered and comforted Zerubbabel and his men. Above everything else, Zechariah presents a message of *comfort* to the church. That is the key thought of the prophet's message. "The Lord answered . . . with good words and

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comfortable words. . . . the Lord shall yet comfort Zion." Zechariah wonderfully portrays God's infinite love for His church. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy . . . he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His [the Lord's] eye." Zechariah 1:13-17; 2:8.

The enemies of Adventism may mock God's people today, saying, "What do these feeble Jews?" They have "despised the day of small things." Compared with the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Advent Movement seems a feeble effort in the world. The Protestant Reformation was a world-shaking event. Kingdoms were moved, and the whole international scene was stirred by that work. But here is the Advent Movement, attempting a work that is to far outshine the power and glory of the Reformation. As yet the world has deemed the movement as unworthy of notice. The important events of 1844 have not won any notable place in the history of the church in general. And after struggling along for some 120 years, we seem further away from finishing the work than ever.

Recently there has been a revival of interest in the truth of restoring the sanctuary. The Awakening has been a "Haggai" in modern Israel. Under the inspiration and enlightenment of the Awakening, God's people have turned again to

the great truth of working to restore the sanctuary according to the decree of Daniel 8:14. But look how few we are in number! What feeble resources we have! There is place for reproof. We deserve to be scolded. But the message of Zechariah is comfort—something to cheer and encourage us.

What is the specific encouragement in Zechariah 1 to 6? In these chapters we are given a wonderful view of the agencies heaven has employed for the glorious consummation of the task of the church.

Firstly, Zechariah presents us with a view of the intercession of Christ before the Father. What inspiration Zechariah 3 has been to the Advent Movement in the Awakening message! For years people have wondered how the work of grace could ever be brought to completion in their lives in readiness for the great day of God. Many have sunk down in discouragement as the way to perfection seemed so impossible. How could they ever get rid of "original sin" so that they could live without a mediator? Then came the message of Joshua and the Angel, illuminated by the comments of the Spirit of Prophecy in *Testimonies*, volume 5, pages 472 to 475. Jesus stands for His people in judgment. He pleads their cause and breaks in pieces the oppressor. He blots out sin, removes the filthy garment and seals His people in His glorious work of final

atonement. And in the knowledge of this precious truth, we are bidden to call God's people to the sanctuary with repentance and brokenness of heart before our great High Priest. Yes, Zechariah is a message of hope, great hope. It presents the light of the final atonement, the light which has been the guiding star of the Awakening. In this respect Zechariah has stood in his lot and place for our day, borne his powerful testimony and brought mighty results.

Secondly, Zechariah presents the efficacy of the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4). The church has yet to fully learn that her success does not depend upon the might and power of human resources. All flesh is grass. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." The Spirit's work in the Advent Movement may have been despised as a day of small things, but it will yet lighten the earth with the glory of God in an event that will far outshine even the Protestant Reformation. What precious instruction there is in Zechariah 4 on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which empties Itself as golden oil through golden pipes into the golden bowl which feeds the golden lamps. That is a study all by itself; but we cannot speak about that now in particular.

Thirdly, we today need to look up, like the servant of Elisha, and see the chariots and horsemen of the Lord. Zechariah 6 presents the picture of strong angels clothed in divine authority and power, impatient to be off, like strong horses, on their mission to help the work of God on earth. Today, as Ellen White once said, they are hastening to and fro, preparing for the fulfillment of some important event. The church of God on earth and the church of God in heaven constitute one church. United to the heavenly agencies, God's people who are working to restore the sanctuary are not

few, but many; are not poor, but rich; are not weak, but strong.

Yes, the church on earth—weak, defective and enfeebled—may be comforted to know that it has on its side the ministry of our High Priest in the sanctuary above, the ministration of the Holy Spirit and the ministration of angels. The message of Zechariah is a most central message for our time. It is a gospel message, big with hope and full of glory. The contemplation of these things is well adapted to lift the church into the very atmosphere of heaven to walk by faith with our heavenly companions—Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the angels.

But some have not inhaled the book's atmosphere of holy cheer. Their dismal commentary assumes that Zechariah is a message devoted to warn us that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is doomed, that it is not fit to receive any type of moral or financial support. These are only indulging their souls in a narrow-minded bigotry that will only appeal to those of like mind. Such material has neither part nor lot in the Awakening message.

Cheer! Comfort! Encouragement! Divine compassion and love! God's love for His church! All the agencies of heaven working with God's people! Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the angels with us! Zechariah presents this theme with freshness and power.

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