

**Shalom Church
Read-The-Bible-Together (RTBT)**

Some Minor Prophets of the Old Testament:

**ZECHARIAH
MALACHI**



1st – 30th November 2020

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1st November 2020

Zechariah's Call for Judah's Return

"The word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah . . . saying . . .
'Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out,
 'Thus says the LORD of hosts,
Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.'
But they did not hear or pay attention to me"
(Verses 1–4)

Read: Zechariah 1:1-6

Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, was sent to the people of Judah after the return from Babylon to encourage the people to rebuild God's temple and to give them a vision of things that were still to come.

Zechariah was Haggai's contemporary (Ezra 5:1–2), but whereas Haggai originally delivered his prophecies over several months, Zechariah's ministry lasted for years, beginning in about 520 BC. Because we do not know anything about the prophet except his immediate ancestry and the meaning of his name — "Yahweh remembers" — the duration of his career is not certain. Commentators agree, however, that it lasted until at least 516 BC, when the rebuilt temple was completed, and many of his visions foresee events to come after that year. This has New Testament confirmation. The Gospels' passion accounts quote from Zechariah 9–14 more often than they do any other portion of Scripture. Without at least a basic grasp of Zechariah's prophecy, our understanding of Christ's atonement will be impoverished.

As a contemporary of Haggai, Zechariah was instrumental in awakening the Jews from their slumber in 520 BC to rebuild the temple. As long as God's house remained unfinished, the people were being disobedient to the Lord's commands regarding old covenant worship. And since heartfelt obedience to the Almighty's commands is the fruit of true love for Him (John 14:15), leaving the temple unfinished in and of itself was not the real problem. Instead, an unfinished temple with no evident concern to complete the work indicated that the essential problem was a problem of the heart. Such is the case with all sin.

Due to the problem being one of the heart, we are not surprised to find Zechariah open his book with a call to repentance. Included in this call is a reference to the forefathers of the restored community who were kicked out of the Promised Land for their impenitence (Zech. 1:1–5b). Zechariah asks some rhetorical questions: Where were their fathers? Where were their (false) prophets? Had they not been destroyed? No answers are given because the small, struggling post-exilic community knew the answers — the impenitent forefathers and false prophets were gone, brought to an end in exile for their rejection of God's Word. The implicit warning is that the same judgment was possible for Zechariah's generation should they ignore the Lord's true prophets just as their forefathers did.

Coram Deo

The opening verses of Zechariah's book contain warnings to the people for breaking the law, warnings that prompted the people to show repentance. When God warns His people of their sin, that is always His goal, namely, their repentance. Matthew Henry comments on this passage that the warnings of God's law are the necessary prerequisite of the gospel. Let us not be afraid to hear the warnings of Scripture, but let us look to them that we might be pointed again and again to Christ.

2nd November 2020 **Zechariah's First Vision**

"The angel who talked with me said to me, 'Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster'"
(vv. 14–15)

Read: Zechariah 1:7-17

Upon hearing the warning that God would judge the post-exilic community for impenitence if it were to persist in not rebuilding the temple, the Jews to whom Zechariah first spoke repented (Zech. 1:1–6). This initial warning, however, was not all that the prophet had for the people. As we see in today's passage, the Lord had more to say to the old covenant community by way of night visions given to Zechariah.

Zechariah's vision of a horseman and his vision of horns and craftsmen occurred five months after the people had begun the temple rebuilding effort anew under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest (v. 7; see Hag. 1:12–15). The prophet saw four horses and four riders, probably angels, who had been sent out by God to patrol the whole earth. Zechariah was standing with the "angel of the Lord" in this vision, and the report of these horsemen was that all the earth was at rest, that is, there was not any political upheaval going on (Zech. 1:7–11). This reflects the history of the Persian Empire in 520 BC. Other ancient historical sources report that Persia had just become calm again under the reign of Darius after a period of infighting and other problems. Humanly speaking, one of the reasons the people could rebuild the temple was that the kingdoms that had been causing trouble for the post-exilic community were no longer opposing the temple rebuilding effort (Ezra 4–5).

Under normal circumstances, this message of peace and rest would have been heard as good news. Yet that was not how the angel of the Lord received the report. He asked the horsemen why God was still showing no mercy to the people (Zech. 1:12). The angel received the message as bad news because it indicated that the Lord was not bringing about the end just yet. Remember that Haggai had told the people that there would be a shaking of the heavens and the earth before the arrival of the Messiah to bring about salvation (Hag. 2:20–23). If the earth was at peace and not being shaken, that meant that

the end could not come yet, that the conditions of exile persisted, conditions under which the descendants of Abraham were not yet exalted above all the nations.

This is confirmed by the angel's remark that God had been angry for seventy years at Judah (Zech. 1:12). When the angel spoke those words in 520 BC, seventy years of exile had come and gone, but by bringing the current situation of the covenant community under that umbrella, we see yet again that even though the people were formally back from exile, the exilic conditions remained.

Coram Deo

Zechariah's first vision concludes with a word from the Lord that the people were not to take their continuing subjection to a foreign empire as proof that God had forgotten them. God reiterated His promises that He would bless His people and destroy His enemies (vv. 13–17). This is a good word for us when the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. No matter how successful the wicked look now, the Lord's people will certainly win in the end.

3rd November 2020

Jerusalem without Boundaries

“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold . . .

I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD.

And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people.

And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me”

(vv. 10–11)

Read: Zechariah 2

Despite the fact that the Lord had not yet shaken the heavens and earth in Haggai's and Zechariah's day to depose the kingdoms of this world and exalt the house of Zerubbabel — the Messiah — the continuing suffering of the Jews under foreign domination was not unfaithfulness on God's part (Hag. 2:20–23; Zech. 1:1–17). Instead, the restoration had only been delayed (from a human perspective and because Judah's repentance was not extensive enough; see Dan. 9). The Lord would still consummate His plan, and He spoke through Zechariah to the post-exilic Jewish community to confirm this.

John Calvin's comments on today's passage support this interpretation. Calvin notes that the community was depressed by its circumstances and needed encouragement that “God was performing by degrees, and step by step, what he had testified.” Zechariah 2 and its vision of Jerusalem as a city whose length and width cannot be measured and as a city without walls demonstrates that the Lord had not forgotten His promises to His people once they had come back to their land in 538 BC. Jerusalem symbolizes the consummated kingdom of God, and it has no walls because its population will be so vast that it would be impossible to contain it within the physical walls of the city (vv. 1–4). The only wall that will exist is nothing other than the “wall of fire all around”—God Himself (v. 5). When the

Lord consummates His plan, His people will have nothing to fear because they will enjoy His personal protection. Calvin writes, “Though walls may be high and thick, they may be scaled by enemies; but who will dare to throw himself into the fire?”

But why will the company of God’s people be so large? It is because the community will include not only the ethnic descendants of Abraham but also “many nations” who will join themselves to Yahweh, the covenant Lord of Israel, and become His people as well (vv. 6–12). Zechariah repeats the common prophetic theme that Yahweh is Lord not only over the Jews but also over the Gentiles, that His salvation will be universal in scope, not in that every person will be saved but that all nations, tribes, and tongues will be represented in His kingdom. Isaiah prophesied that all the nations would flow to God’s mountain to learn His ways (Isa. 2:1–4). Zephaniah foresaw that the Lord would change the speech of the nations so that they could call on Him (Zeph. 3:9). Zechariah likewise was given a vision of God fulfilling His promise to Abraham to bless all the nations through him.

Coram Deo

Part of the assurance given to God’s people in today’s passage is that we are “the apple of his eye” (Zech. 2:8). The Lord loves us so deeply and thoroughly that He will not let those who impenitently rise up against us finally get away with it. God never forgets His children, so even when we are suffering the worst kind of harassment, He sees it and will set it right in the end. Let us be confident in the Lord’s love for us even in the midst of our trouble.

4th November 2020

The Devil

“The Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, O Satan!
The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!
Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?’”
(v. 2)

Read: Zechariah 3:1–5

In the Spirit’s power, according to God’s Word, and with God’s armor, we must fight against two deadly enemies, the world and the flesh, in order to help advance the kingdom (Rom. 12:2; Gal. 5:16–26; Eph. 6:10–20). Ultimately, however, these two foes exist only because the Devil introduced sin into creation, tempting Adam to plunge humanity into evil. Satan is the third — and chief — enemy of God’s people.

Sometimes it is hard to recall the threat the Devil poses. Popular culture, after all, trivializes him as one who sits on shoulders of cartoon characters and comically whispers into their ears, twirling his pointed tail. Such depictions suggest that Satan is easily overcome, but God’s Word paints a far different picture. He is a lion on the prowl who seeks people to devour, indicating his strength (1 Peter 5:8). We realize that he is

intimidating indeed when we see that he commands a demonic army (Eph. 6:11–12) and appears as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

In ourselves, we are no match for Satan. God Almighty, however, reigns supreme and is powerful enough to defeat the Devil, who is merely a creature. Christianity does not affirm a dualism that says the Lord and the Devil are equal in power; rather, the Devil ultimately serves the will of the Creator (Job 1–2).

Regarding Satan's specific threat to us, one of his chief works is to tempt us to sin (Gen. 3:1–7). But the Devil is also "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10), and accusation is his favorite weapon against believers. Each time we sin, Satan and his minions tell us that we are so awful that the Lord could never forgive us.

Today's passage illustrates the Devil's role as the accuser and what can be done to beat him back when he goes for our throats. Satan comes to accuse the high priest Joshua of his sin and filthiness. But the Lord rebukes Satan, reminding the Enemy that He has snatched Joshua from the fires of judgment. The Lord then clothes Joshua with a clean robe (vv. 1–5), giving the Adversary no further ground upon which he can stand and legitimately accuse the high priest of sin.

Of course, this text alludes to the righteousness of Jesus, the garment with which God clothes the repentant. If we are in Christ by repentance and faith alone, we can rightly remind Satan that none of his accusations can stand against us.

Coram Deo

Do you struggle to find peace with God after you have sinned? If you are in Christ by faith, which is evident in your desire to repent of all your sin and turn continually to Him, then you can be confident that you are in the kingdom. Consequently, you can remind Satan that Jesus has taken care of everything that estranges you from the Lord and that God is eager and quick to show mercy and pardon you.

5th November 2020

The Priest with Filthy Garments

"Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.

And the angel said . . . 'Remove the filthy garments from him.'

And to [Joshua] he said, 'Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you,
and I will clothe you with pure vestments'"

(vv. 3–4)

Read: Zechariah 3:1-5

Prior to their exile, many ancient Jews failed to take all of the Old Testament into account in their theology. They loved the promises of the Lord to give His people an everlasting inheritance (Gen. 12:1–3; 15) but not God's pledge that only Israelites who demonstrated

true faith by obedience to His commands were the heirs of those promises (Gen. 17; Deut. 28). Thus, they could not believe that He would exile the impenitent nation (Jer. 7:1–15). After the exile, many Jews continued to miss the fullness of God’s Word, specifically the Lord’s grace. Since even many of the Jews in Babylon before the restoration thought that their expulsion from Canaan meant that our Creator takes pleasure in sinners’ deaths (Ezek. 18:23), it was hard for the post-exilic community to believe the Lord had not utterly abandoned them, especially since the glorious post-exilic restoration did not immediately occur (see Deut. 30:1–10; Isa. 65:17–25). This depressing view, no doubt, contributed to the delay in rebuilding the temple that Haggai and Zechariah addressed.

On the one hand, the post-exilic community rightly believed that all they deserved was their troubled situation, that the only thing they merited from God was His final rejection. However, they wrongly forgot that our gracious Lord does not deal with repentant people according to what they deserve. We see this in Zechariah 3. The prophet sees Joshua the high priest standing before the heavenly Judge, with Satan accusing him of sin and pointing out his unworthiness (v. 1). Joshua here represents the post-exilic community. He is likened to a “brand” or stick plucked from the fire before it could be consumed (v. 2). This depicts the Jewish nation, which was barely rescued from full destruction in exile. Moreover, Ezekiel refers to the old covenant people as a stick in God’s hand (Ezek. 37:15–28), and the high priest represented them before God (Lev. 16). Thus, Joshua stands in for the people.

The Lord does not dispute the people’s sin, but He rebukes Satan for bringing a charge against those whom He alone had rescued from the fire. What is more, God assures His people that He had not only rescued them from destruction but had also taken their filthy garments and replaced them with clean clothes (Zech. 3:3–5). Only the Lord performs this work here, and so we must see this as an image ultimately of justification, that act whereby God and God alone removes the guilt of sin and clothes His people with pure garments, a righteousness not our own, making peace with us in Christ (Rom. 4:4–5; 5:1).

Coram Deo

Matthew Henry comments: “Christ loathed the filthiness of Joshua’s garments, yet did not put him away, but put them away. Thus God by his grace does with those whom he chooses to be priests to himself; he parts between them and their sins, and so prevents their sins parting between them and their God; he reconciles himself to the sinner, but not to the sin.” God accepts us not because we are deserving but because Christ is. This is our only hope in this world and the next.

6th November 2020

God’s Servant, the Branch

“Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch”

(v. 8)

Joshua, the first high priest of the post-exilic community, represents the entire nation in Zechariah 3:1–5, where God shows His intention to remove the filth of sin from the nation and replace it with cleansing, a garment of purity that means no charge can ever be brought against the Lord’s people. Ultimately, this is a picture of Christ Jesus our Lord and our justification by faith alone in Him whereby we receive the gift of His perfect righteousness imputed to our record (Gal. 2:15–16; 2 Cor. 5:21). The Apostle Paul would later pick up on these same themes in Romans 8:33–34: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

In Zechariah’s day, the precise manner by which the Lord would accomplish the justification of His people was not understood with the same detail with which we know it today. What the faithful ancient Jew did know, however, was that this work would be accomplished through one whom the prophets sometimes referred to as the “Branch.” Today’s passage moves from the nation’s cleansing by grace to the agent of that cleansing. Our first clue to this is the switch in Zechariah 3:6–8 from the tribal to the individual. Joshua and his successors are promised the priesthood and service in the temple if they remain faithful to the covenant. This is not a contradiction of justification by faith alone because it is clear that Joshua will not finally transgress the covenant and lose his justification. After all, God says that Joshua and the faithful priests of his day will be a sign of the greater salvation and restoration to come (v. 8). Their work will be in keeping with the work of the final Saviour — they will be faithful to the covenant and point forward to the One who will not only be generally faithful to the Lord but perfect in obedience to Him. God never justifies a person and leaves it finally up to them to persevere to the end. All whom the Lord justifies, He also glorifies; He keeps all of His true children in faith until the end of their lives (Rom. 8:29–30).

Zechariah 3:8 introduces the Branch, the reality to whom Joshua pointed as a sign. This Branch is also God’s servant and can be none other than the final Davidic king, the Messiah promised to the nation of Israel (Isa. 53; Jer. 23:5; 33:15). Although the nation was rebuilding the temple in Zechariah’s day, it would be this King who would set the final capstone of God’s true temple and bring the divine plan to consummation (Zech. 3:9–10).

Coram Deo

Just as Solomon and Zerubbabel, sons of David, built God’s temple during the old covenant period, so does Jesus Christ, the final Son of David, build God’s temple today during the new covenant period. Unlike the temple of old, however, Christ does not build merely with human hands. As the God-man, He is the divine temple builder who is building His church into a holy temple, a clean sanctuary that will endure forever. Are you a part of this temple by faith alone?

7th November 2020

Zechariah Sees a New Lampstand

“Behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it”
(v. 2)

Read: Zechariah 4

Despite its importance as the first structure wherein God made His presence manifest among the people of Israel, the tabernacle was only a temporary dwelling that King Solomon later replaced with the temple (2 Chron. 7:1–3). Solomon’s temple, however, stood only about four hundred years, being destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. At that point, the vessels used in the temple, including the golden lampstand, were also carried off to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10–17).

We could by no means overestimate the importance of the exile to redemptive history, nor could we overestimate the joy the people felt when, in 538 BC, God appointed King Cyrus of Persia to return His people to their land (2 Chron. 36:22–23). Once in the land, the nation began rebuilding the temple and its furniture, including the lampstand first mentioned in Exodus 25:31–40.

Zechariah the prophet was commissioned during this restoration period to encourage the returned exiles to complete the rebuilding of the temple, which had run into difficulties because of Israel’s lack of faithfulness (Hag. 1:1–6) and opposition from neighbouring peoples (Neh. 4:1–14). The immensity of the task and the paltry resources of the Israelites did not help, and the people despaired over the inglorious nature of the kingdom.

Yet the Lord’s determination to build His temple was not thwarted, which is one of the main points of today’s passage. Zechariah’s vision of a new lampstand (Zech. 4:1–3) meant that God would certainly build His house, for the lampstand would be useless without the temple. Though the restoration was troubled and it was a day of meager beginnings, Israel would one day rejoice in fullness (vv. 8–10a).

The restoration, in fact, would be so great that the light of the lampstand would never go out. Zechariah also saw two olive trees, one on either side of the lampstand, which continually dispensed oil to the stand via golden pipes (vv. 10b–14). With a continual supply of oil, the wicks would always burn and the light would continually shine. Ultimately, this points to the true Light who came into the world to shine forth God’s grace and build a living temple to honor our Father (John 1:1–18; 1 Peter 2:1–5). By His Spirit, this Light would restore glory to His covenant people (Zech. 4:4–7).

Coram Deo

At first, Zechariah had trouble understanding his vision, so he asked for divine guidance. From this we should learn, writes John Calvin, that “there is therefore no doubt but that the Lord will supply us also with understanding, when we confess that his mysteries are

hid from us, and when conscious of our want of knowledge, we flee to him, and implore him not to speak in vain to us, but to grant to us the knowledge of his truth.”

8th November 2020

Purging Iniquity

“He said to me, “This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land. For everyone who steals shall be cleaned out according to what is on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side”
(v. 3)

Read: Zechariah 5

Visions came frequently to the prophet Zechariah as he encouraged Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem after the exile (Zech. 3–4). Today’s passage records two more visions of the prophet—the vision of the flying scroll and the vision of the woman in the basket.

Since the Hebrew term translated with the English word *curse* is the same one used of the curses in the Mosaic law upon all those who impenitently break the covenant (Deut. 28:15–68), we are to see the flying scroll in Zechariah 5:1–4 as the curses of the Torah revealed to Moses after the exodus. In destroying the houses of sinners, this image is one of destruction — but not of the people themselves, for the vision of the woman in the basket in the same context shows the Lord banishing iniquity from the covenant community (vv. 5–11). After all, if our Creator takes sin away from the people, how then could He justly condemn them? What the curses of the law destroy in Zechariah’s vision of the flying scroll is sin itself. Ultimately, we must see this vision as foreseeing the work of Christ, who exhausts the curse of the law on sinners and also curses and destroys the power of sin itself by taking it into the grave and leaving it there when He dies and rises again, being vindicated by His Father as the perfectly righteous Son of God (Rom. 6:1–14; Gal. 3:10–14).

Expiation — the removal of sin and its guilt from a people — is depicted in the vision of the woman in the basket in Zechariah 5:5–11. As noted, the appearance of this basket in the same context as the appearance of the scroll of curses communicates the final purification and not annihilation of God’s people. The woman in the basket, who is a symbol of wickedness and evil in this text, is carried off to Shinar by two other winged women, namely, angels. In Scripture, Shinar is another name for Babylon (Dan. 1:2), but given the symbolic nature of Zechariah’s vision, the woman in the basket is not taken to a mere geographical area but to that place where wickedness abides. The angels carry evil outside the camp, placing it upon the enemies of God.

Therefore, Zechariah depicts the final destination of sin. Other passages tell us that in the new heavens and the new earth, sin and wickedness will be outside of the gates of God’s

Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Isa. 66:24; Rev. 22:14–15). In that place, those who love sin and not the Lord will receive what they wanted, an unending bondage to their evil.

Coram Deo

Ultimately, the impenitent are confirmed in sin forever — they continue to experience its degrading and destructive effects in hell and feel the fury of God’s wrath. We should not think that the sinners in hell want to be anywhere else. They love their sin and continue to sin in that place, and given the choice between wrath and life in the presence of the Lord’s holiness, they make the perverse choice to experience God’s wrath rather than His love, so deep is their hatred of Him.

9th November 2020

To the Four Winds of Heaven

“I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ And the angel answered and said to me, ‘These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth’”
(vv. 4–5)

Read: Zechariah 6:1-8

The visions of Zechariah 1–6 alternate between prophecies of events that would occur after the first post-exilic generation of Jews passed away and prophecies that had an immediate fulfillment at or near the time they were first given. Visions of future events include the vision of the borderless Jerusalem (Zech. 2), the vision of God justifying His priestly nation (3:1–5), and the vision of the Lord’s destruction of sin and removal of wickedness from the land (chap. 5). Visions of realities then current for the post-exilic community include the vision of a world wherein the Lord had not yet shaken the nations to exalt His people over all (1:7–17) and the vision of the four horses found in today’s passage.

Like the vision recorded in Zechariah 1:7–17, the vision of the four horses conveys a sense of peace in the world for the post-exilic community. The prophet describes four chariots that go “out to the four winds of heaven” (6:5). These “four winds of heaven” likely symbolize creation in its entirety (consider, for example, the “four corners of the globe”). Basically, the vision depicts our Creator’s thorough knowledge of all that takes place on earth. He sends His angelic servants forth around the globe so that they can report on what is happening in every place. God is not ignorant of the true state of world affairs; He is sovereign over all. What He declares about happenings in the world is not merely wishful thinking.

Zechariah’s vision makes special mention of the horses going both to the north and to the south. Traditionally, the areas located to the north and to the south of ancient Israel were nothing but trouble for the ancient Jews. In the south, of course, was Egypt, the great world power that had enslaved the Israelites and also intervened in the people’s domestic

affairs (Ex. 1; 2 Kings 23:31–35). Danger was also associated with the north for the ancient Jews (Jer. 1:13–15). After all, both Assyria and Babylon invaded the ancient states of Israel and Judah from that direction. If one was an ancient Jew, the only thing that could be rightly expected from either north or south was strife and assault. However, when the horses go forth to these regions, only rest is found (Zech. 6:8). In other words, all is quiet.

Given that enemy opposition prompted the post-exilic community to take a break from rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3:8–4:24), this vision is one of assurance. The Lord had quieted the opposition, so the people in Zechariah's day should not fear any more trouble if they were to faithfully complete the temple. Their enemies would be kept at bay.

Coram Deo

God held back the opposition in Zechariah's day in order that the work of temple rebuilding could be completed. Ultimately, this vision is also being fulfilled in the new covenant era. The Lord is restraining His enemies so that He can build His church. Though our foes may at times seem to gain the upper hand in some places, their efforts will ultimately prove to be unsuccessful. Christ will build His temple, and He will finish the job no matter the opposition.

10th November 2020

The Priestly Branch on the Throne

“Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he who ... shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne”
(vv. 12–13)

Read: Zechariah 6:9-15

The Old Testament is filled with messianic prophecies that Christ has fulfilled. Zechariah 6:9–15 is one of the most important of these prophecies, as it confirms the union of the priestly and kingly offices in the person of our Saviour.

We read in today's passage of a series of actions that the Lord commanded Zechariah to perform. The prophet was to take Heldi, Tobijah, and Jedaiah to the house of Joshua the high priest and place on his head a royal crown (vv. 9–11). Not much information is given about these three men; the most we can say is that they were probably recent arrivals from Babylon who returned to the covenant community in Judah after the initial group of exiles came back to the Promised Land. The key thing to note about them is that these Jews were not residents of Judah, as Zechariah will have some things to say about foreigners in verse 15.

After Zechariah put the crown on Joshua's head, God told him to announce the Branch who would sit as a priest on David's throne (vv. 12–13). At first glance, we might want to see the Lord identifying Joshua himself as the Branch, but this cannot be the case. The Hebrew word translated as “man” in verse 12 lacks the definite article, so the phrase is

better translated as “a man whose name is the Branch” and not “Joshua, *the* man who is the Branch.” Furthermore, the Lord said that the man in question would “build the temple of the LORD.” This points to the future, which in the immediate context means that the temple in question could not be the second temple built by the exiles. Whoever the Branch was, he would have to build a temple not yet standing in Zechariah’s day. Finally, the crown did not remain on Joshua’s head but was placed in the temple to await its rightful wearer (v. 14).

The title *Branch* is used elsewhere in the prophetic literature for the Messiah (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5). Thus, Zechariah’s actions showed the people that the Savior who was yet to come in his day would, unlike any ruler before Him, be a priest who is also fit to be the king.

As Hebrews 7 indicates, this priest-king Messiah is none other than Christ Jesus our Lord, who now lives to make intercession for the people whom He leads against His foes (see also Rom. 8:34). This Jesus builds His temple — His church — on the Apostles, who serve as the church’s foundation even as Christ is its cornerstone (Matt. 16:18). Moreover, our Lord enlists the help of foreigners to build His temple (Zech. 6:15), namely, Gentiles who like Zechariah’s three friends will come to the kingdom from far off and work for its glory.

Coram Deo

John Calvin writes that today’s passage must refer to “the building of the spiritual temple, when Gentiles, formerly remote from God’s people, joined them as friends, and brought their labour to the work of building the temple, not with stones or wood, or with other corruptible materials, but with the doctrine and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” We are fulfilments of prophecy, the foreigners honoured to build Christ’s church in Him. Let us not forget this great blessing.

11th November 2020

A Call for Kindness and Mercy

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart”
(vv. 9–10)

Read: Zechariah 7

As we continue our study of Zechariah, who foresaw many things that were to happen beyond his lifetime, we must also remember that his message had an original audience — the returned Jewish exiles — and an original purpose — to encourage the returnees in rebuilding the temple. Today’s passage addresses a specific situation during Zechariah’s lifetime, and the prophet’s response reveals the returned exiles’ commitment to God’s work.

Zechariah tells us that in the “fourth year of King Darius” a contingent from Bethel came to him to inquire about fasting. This was two years after the returned exiles had restarted the work of rebuilding the temple after the foundation had been left alone for some time (Zech. 7:1–3; see Ezra 3:8–6:12; Hag. 1:1–6; Zech. 1:1). Since we know that the rebuilt temple was completed in the “sixth year of the reign of Darius” (Ezra 6:13–15), the visit described in Zechariah 7 occurred about halfway through the temple’s reconstruction. Apparently, the people were getting weary from the work of rebuilding and even from their displays of piety, for they wanted to know if they could stop fasting during the fifth month, which was a fast to commemorate Babylon’s destruction of the temple (Zech. 7:3; see 2 Kings 25:8–9).

The prophet’s response tells us much about the true spiritual condition of the people. He essentially rebuked them for fasting not unto the Lord during the fifth and seventh months but for fasting to assuage their own consciences and to convince themselves of their devotion (Zech. 7:4–6). (The fast of the seventh month commemorated the murder of Gedaliah, the first Judean governor that Babylon appointed after the conquest of Jerusalem. See 2 Kings 25:22–26.) Clearly, the hearts of the people were not in the work and devotion that they were showing, which confirms the Lord’s word to Daniel that most of His people had not learned the lesson of exile and so the exilic conditions would continue (Dan. 9).

After this rebuke, Zechariah reminded the returned exiles of what the pre-exilic prophets had told them, namely, that one could not rest in mere religious formalism but had to have true faith that expresses itself in a heartfelt desire to keep God’s commandments. In particular, this means taking care of the defenseless and not devising evil against one’s neighbor (Zech. 7:7–14). These were some of the basic stipulations of the Mosaic law, and if the returnees could not obey them, they could be sent away from the Promised Land just as their ancestors were (Lev. 19:18; 26:27–33; Deut. 24:20–21).

Coram Deo

If we learn anything from the post-exilic community, it is the peril of not learning from God’s discipline. If we do not learn from His chastisement, we may suffer repeatedly. Thus, when we feel God’s disciplinary hand upon us, we should ask Him to teach us plainly the lessons that we must learn from our difficulties. Then we must put that learning into practice, even sharing with others what we have learned in order to help both them and us serve our Father better.

12th November 2020

God’s Jealousy for Zion

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘As I purposed to bring disaster to you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, so again have I purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not’”
(vv. 14–15)

Read: Zechariah 8:1-15

In the midst of rebuilding the temple during the late sixth century BC, it was somewhat natural for the people of Jerusalem to become discouraged. Though the exiles were back in their homeland, the conditions of exile continued and the great restoration foreseen by the prophets was not yet evident. Of course, we know that this was not due to any unfaithfulness on the Lord's part but rather the failure of the old covenant community as a whole to fulfil the conditions for restoration — true faith and repentance (Deut. 30:1–10; Dan. 9).

The prophet Zechariah was sent to this discouraged people with a message of warning and comfort. As we saw in Zechariah 7, the prophet warned Judah that it had not yet learned the lesson of exile and that hypocritical piety could lead to their destruction just as it had for the pre-exilic Judahites. Today's passage records Zechariah's words of comfort.

Despite His people's unfaithfulness, the Lord did not abandon Judah but remained jealous for Zion and for Jerusalem. He had, in fact, come back there with His people and would make it a faithful city on a "holy mountain" (Zech. 8:1–3). These words foresee the complete purification of God's people and their land. He will not fail to sanctify His true children fully, and He will give His people a final dwelling place that is clean and fit for habitation. John Calvin writes, "God is never idle while he dwells in his people; for he cleanses away every kind of impurity, every kind of deceit, that where he dwells may ever be a holy place."

Verses 4–15 of Zechariah 8 feature imagery that confirms and develops this promise. People will live to a great age because they will be at peace and have nothing to fear. The full remnant of Israel will return. Great agricultural productivity will follow and there will never again be the crushing poverty wherein people and animals are unable to earn anything for their labor. Moreover, the nation will be a blessing to the rest of the world.

Note that this prophecy is both unconditional and conditional. It is unconditional in that the Lord will surely accomplish His promise. The final restoration is as sure as His promise to destroy Jerusalem for its unfaithfulness in 586 BC (vv. 14–15). However, the prophecy is conditional in that having Jewish blood is not enough to secure participation in the restoration blessings. Verses 7–8 echo the promise to Abraham in Genesis 17 that Yahweh would be God to His faithful children. We will experience the glories of restoration only if we trust in our Creator's promises alone and show forth that true faith in obedience (James 2:14–26).

Coram Deo

God has promised to bring full restoration in the new heavens and earth. This is an unconditional promise—it is certain to happen no matter what individual men and women do. Yet this does not mean that all men and women will enjoy this restoration. Our participation in these blessings is conditioned upon faith and repentance. Only those who

trust in Christ alone will inherit the earth. Do you place your hope in life and in death in the person and work of Christ alone?

13th November 2020

The Nations Cling to the Jews

“Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem . . .
In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a
Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’”
(Verses. 22–23)

Read: Zechariah 8:16-23

God certainly delights in surprising people, in doing great things through unexpected means. Should we ever forget this, we will lose our ability to stand before the Lord in wonder, to have even the barest glimpse of His awesome wisdom. He saves the world through the weak and despised, the powerless whom everyone else has passed by.

Of course, this is seen most clearly in Jesus Christ, the humble Son of God who came not on a white horse to set up a worldly kingdom but who rode on a donkey into Jerusalem, establishing His Father’s kingdom by dying for His enemies (Phil. 2:5–11). In so doing, our Saviour acted in keeping with much divine precedent. For who would have thought that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), a people who never commanded a world empire, were often overrun by their enemies, but whose Scriptures insist that their God is not just the deity for their tribe but for the whole world?

When Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that salvation is from the Jews (John 4:1–45), He was not revealing some new doctrine. In fact, He assumed that she would have known the identity of the people who would bless the world. After all, the prophets are filled with promises that the nations will at the last day join with the Jews in worship of Yahweh their Lord (Isa. 2:2–4). Zechariah 8:16–23 is one of these key passages, informing us that the Gentiles will be so convinced of the marvellous things God has done in and through Israel that they will cling to the robes of faithful Jews. They will beg, as it were, to go with the Jews to the temple to hear about Yahweh and what He has done for His children (vv. 20–23).

As indicated in today’s passage, the fulfilment of this prophecy is tied to the Jewish nation living according to God’s covenant. Verses 16–17 list several things the returned exiles could do to show forth their true faith and commitment to the covenant stipulations. Rendering true judgments in the gates is a demand for justice, as justice was determined and judgments were made by the elders at the city gates (Ruth 4:1–2; Ps. 127:5). Additionally, keeping one’s word is emphasized in Zechariah 8:16–17, a demand in keeping with the Bible’s frequently repeated warnings against breaking oaths and vows (Num. 30:2).

Faithfulness was the prerequisite to blessing, to the Gentiles joining God's people. Now that Messiah has come, faithfulness to His covenant will bring about the same ends. As our light shines before others, the nations will glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:14–16).

Coram Deo

Only Christ can keep God's covenant perfectly, which is why His righteousness is the only thing that avails for our justification, for being declared righteous in God's sight. Having justified us, the Lord expects obedience out of gratitude for His grace, and as our lives reflect a pattern of holiness and obedience, more and more people see our witness and are attracted to the Christian faith. Are you being a good witness to your unbelieving neighbours by what you say and do?

14th November 2020

The King Comes on a Donkey

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”
(v. 9)

Read: Zechariah 9:9-17

Judah went into exile in Babylon after centuries of suffering at the hands of Assyria, Egypt, and other foreign enemies. One of the great blessings of Judah's return from exile was supposed to be safety from all of the nation's foes (Deut. 30:1–10). However, this did not happen at once in the sixth century BC when the Judahites returned to their land. Many of the surrounding powers opposed the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3). When Nehemiah arrived in the land, Samaria and other foreign powers attempted to thwart the efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's wall (Neh. 4:1–14). Such problems demonstrated that Daniel was correct when he foresaw the extension of the conditions of exile past 538 BC (Dan. 9).

Although the Judahites had certainly merited the continuation of the exile, the Lord in His grace did not intend for this to last forever. Thus, during the ministry of Zechariah, God gave the prophet visions of the end of the exile. Zechariah 9:1–8 describes this in terms of the defeat of Judah's enemies. Verses 9–17 view the end of exile in terms of the return of the Davidic king to Zion. We read that this king would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The Davidic king's riding on a humble beast of burden has precedent, for Solomon was presented as David's rightful successor by being placed on David's mule (1 Kings 1:33). In any case, the image is one of humility. Final salvation would not come to the people of God through the traditional route of a conquering king on a noble horse. Instead, it would be achieved in an unexpected way through what men typically regard as weak and despised.

In the day of salvation, Ephraim and Jerusalem would no longer trust the war horse and chariot (Zech. 9:10). The prophet is speaking of the reunited kingdom of Israel and pointing out that the salvation achieved by the humble Davidic king would convince the

people of God to rest in Him alone and not in the idols of human might that the old covenant community often relied upon (Isa. 31:1; Jer. 42:19).

These promises would be fulfilled because of the blood of the covenant (Zech. 9:11). Once more we see the unconditional nature of salvation—God has committed Himself to redeeming His people despite their unfaithfulness. The “blood of the covenant” likely refers to the covenant of salvation the Lord made with Abraham in which God made a promise to save the patriarch’s children and ratified it with the shedding of blood (Gen. 15). Because of this oath, the Lord would not fail to save His own.

Coram Deo

Note again that God’s covenant of salvation is unconditional in the sense that the Lord Himself guarantees that He will enact it — He will certainly save a people for Himself. That does not mean, however, that this covenant of salvation has no conditions. The Lord will save a people, but one cannot be a part of this people apart from repentance and faith in Christ. These conditions are not met only at conversion, but we must grow in faith and repentance throughout our lives.

15th November 2020

Faithless Shepherds Condemned

“My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders;
for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah,
and will make them like his majestic steed in battle”
(v. 3)

Read: Zechariah 10

Post-exilic Judah continued to have problems maintaining its faithfulness to the Lord at the end of the sixth century BC. Although history tells us that the Jews, by and large, did not practice the same rank paganism that characterized the nations of Israel and Judah before their exiles, the Judahites after the exile still fell prey to superstition. We see in today’s passage, for example, that the prophet Zechariah had to tell the people to ask the Lord for rain and to stop trusting the fortune-tellers and household idols for guidance (Zech. 10:1–2).

Actually, it seems that the leaders of the people were those most guilty of this sin, for Zechariah refers in the same context to shepherds for God’s people, who in truth were no shepherds at all (vv. 2–3). The initial leadership of post-exilic Judah was relatively competent, if not perfect, as both Haggai and Zechariah have some things to say about Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest (Hag. 1–2; Zech. 3). However, this would not last. We do not know whether Zerubbabel and Joshua fell into the sins Zechariah describes in today’s passage. Yet even if those two leaders maintained their righteousness and Zechariah refers only to other authority figures in the community, the people’s leadership in general was clearly not living up to its high calling, explaining why

the sufferings of exile, if not banishment from the land itself, continued. As the New Testament tells us, this suffering would continue right up until the first century, although the leaders of the Jews in Jesus' day treated their non-biblical traditions as idols, not other deities (Matt. 2:16–18; 15:1–9).

Consequently, Zechariah indicates that the return from exile in the sixth century BC was not the return and restoration promised by the earlier prophets (Isa. 25; Jer. 31:31–40). At best it was a meager beginning—almost a false start—to what God had in store for His own. We see this in Zechariah's reference to a return that was yet to come in his day. The full ingathering was yet future, for though many Jews had come back to the Promised Land from Babylon, the prophet foresaw a still greater return. Using Egypt and Assyria as metaphors for subjugation and captivity, Zechariah 10:10 says the house of Judah and the house of Joseph will be strengthened and brought back to Gilead and Lebanon, which are metaphors for fertility and blessing (Song 4:1; Ezek. 31:16). By including Judah and Joseph (the father of Ephraim, the chief tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel), Zechariah shows that the entire company of God's chosen nation—Judah and Israel—would experience this salvation.

Coram Deo

Daniel 9 had said the conditions of exile would be extended, and Zechariah's prophecy in today's passage confirms this. We should also see in Zechariah 10 that when God's people do not respond in faith and obedience, their rescue may be—from our perspective—delayed. Of course, the Lord always knows exactly when His people will fulfil the conditions He has given to us. However, let us know that if we want blessing, we must obey today.

16th November 2020

Mourning Over the Pierced Lord

“I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child . . . as one weeps over a firstborn”
(v. 10).

Read: Zechariah 12

We come today to one of the most difficult chapters in Zechariah. Chapter 12 relates an oracle from the prophet that reveals a series of events that are hard to place in time. Did Zechariah reveal what was going to happen to Jerusalem during or shortly after his lifetime? The phrase “I am about to make” in verse 2 seems to answer this question in the affirmative. Or, did Zechariah reveal what lay far in the future, namely, the full and final destruction of all of the enemies of His people? Verse 9 apparently refers to this last battle.

Answering these questions is difficult. On the one hand, because the Bible can use the term *Jerusalem* to refer to God's people, His bride the church (Rev. 21:1–2), it could be

that the text should not be taken as referring to history at all and that Zechariah is referring to the victory that the redeemed covenant community enjoys over its foes. Certainly, such victory is guaranteed; however, it does not seem that the language points in that direction. Although the text uses some metaphors (Zech. 12:2, 6), the overall impression one gets from reading the passage is one of a literal, physical battle. Furthermore, because John 19:37 tells us that Jesus' crucifixion — an actual visible and historical event — fulfils the prophet's words about God being pierced (Zech. 12:10), it seems that we should view the rest of Zechariah 12 as describing visible, historical events.

The main difficulty with seeing the chapter as a reference to the far future is the "I am about to make" of verse 2. Yet, the Hebrew can also be translated "I am making," which would make the time at which the events are to occur indeterminate. We can therefore easily apply this text to a future time, the time of the final battle between God and His enemies. On that day, the Lord will show Himself so powerfully that the weakest Judahite will be like the mighty king David and the mighty Davidic king will be like God Himself (vv. 1–9).

Such strength will come only when the "house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" mourn for the pierced one (vv. 10–14). This pierced one is none other than the Lord Himself, particularly the incarnate Son of God, as John teaches. The mourning is to come when our Creator pours out a "spirit of grace and pleas for mercy" (v. 10). What we likely have is a prophecy of the restoration of the Jews to their God. Just before the final day and last battle with God, there will be a large number of Jews who turn to Christ, mourn over their sin, and beg for mercy on account of having rejected Him at His first advent.

Coram Deo

Today's passage says that the full restoration of all things cannot happen until the Jews recognize their Messiah. John Calvin seems to have held this view, and many others have taught it as well. In any case, Zechariah is teaching that physical renewal cannot occur without true spiritual renewal of all of God's covenant people. That is why missions and evangelism are so important. As people turn to Christ, we get closer to the time when the restoration of all things will occur.

17th November 2020

The Cleansing of God's People

"On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness"
(v. 1)

Read: Zechariah 13

In our study of Zechariah 12 yesterday, we concluded that the prophet seems to teach that before the final defeat of God's enemies, a large number of ethnic Jews will turn to the Messiah whom they have long rejected. The heartfelt mourning of repentance over the

God-man pierced for their sins, however, is not where the Lord's work will end (vv. 10–14). As we see in today's passage, many other benefits will follow.

First, there will be a grand cleansing of sin and corruption. Zechariah 13:1 describes a fountain that will open for “the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” The Lord is lavishly merciful when He forgives His people. He does not provide a trickle of water but a river that restores life to all those whom it cleanses (see Ezek. 47:1–12). God holds nothing back when He shows mercy to sinners and redeems them from guilt and shame. This is true no matter whom the Lord forgives. As Matthew Henry comments, “There is mercy enough in God, and merit enough in Christ, for the forgiving of the greatest sins and sinners.” We who trust in Jesus today already experience this life-giving water, the Holy Spirit Himself who cleanses us from all transgression (John 7:37–39). But we will enjoy it even more fully when the full company of God's elect, Jew and Gentile, finally receive His grace.

The fountain of cleansing removes from creation even the slightest hint of sin. Zechariah refers to the land being cleansed of idols and false prophets on that final day (Zech. 13:2–6). Although the prophet spoke of future events, his message had great significance for his original audience. As we have noted, the type of rank idolatry and false prophecy that led to the exile was not a problem for Zechariah's contemporaries. But as idolatry is the worst of all sins, the reference to it showed the first hearers of Zechariah's message that God's cleansing of His people would know no boundaries. Even the worst sins and sinners would enjoy it.

Verses 7–9 of Zechariah 13 point to the striking of “the shepherd” that is somehow tied to these other events. Since there is no time reference such as “on that day” given, it seems that Zechariah does not see this striking happening alongside the final restoration. It will be necessary to the restoration, but it will not happen at the time of the full renewal of all things. A true shepherd associated with God Himself will suffer, and His sheep will scatter, but the Lord will use that event to purify His remnant, the third of His flock that is left alive when its leader endures pain and agony.

Coram Deo

In light of the incarnation and the cross, we know that the true shepherd to whom Zechariah refers is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Struck for the sins of His people, Jesus is tied inseparably to the final restoration, for without His ministry there can be no renewal of creation. In Him there is preserved a remnant that is being tested and purified. We are a part of that remnant by faith alone, and we look forward to our full and final refinement.

18th November 2020

The LORD Will Be King

“The LORD will be king over all the earth.
On that day the LORD will be one and his name one”
(v. 9)

Read: Zechariah 14:1–9

Having said much about the future cleansing of God's people and the turning of a large number of Jews to their Messiah just before the last day, Zechariah describes this last day in more detail in chapter 14 of his book. This is perhaps the most symbolic chapter of the prophet's entire work. Using vivid imagery, Zechariah gives us an apocalyptic vision that points us to the end of days while also alluding to realities that occur throughout the history of God's people.

Clues to the symbolic nature of Zechariah 14 are found in the references to the Lord placing "his feet" on the Mount of Olives (v. 4) and the rivers of living water that flow to the east and to the west from Jerusalem (v. 8). Since God is spirit (John 4:24), we know that He does not literally possess a physical body with physical feet. Furthermore, we have also seen that in the prophetic books, including Zechariah, rivers of living water depict new spiritual life and the final restoration of all creation metaphorically (Ezek. 47:1–12; Zech. 13:1).

If the text is largely symbolic, then what is it telling us about the last day? First, it points us to a cataclysmic final battle between the enemies of God's people and the Lord and His saints. Through this war, a remnant will survive (Zech. 14:1–2) and there will be geographic upheaval. The Mount of Olives will be split in half (v. 4). Moreover, just when the people of God seem to be on the verge of losing the war, the Lord and His heavenly army will intervene to save the day (v. 5). One cannot help but think of the upheaval at the consummation that will result in the final redemption of the people whom our Creator has reserved for Himself and the transformation of all creation into the new heavens and earth. The Apostle Peter tells us that this will occur through heavenly fire (2 Peter 3:11–13).

On that day, living waters will flow to the east to the Dead Sea and west to the Mediterranean Sea (Zech. 14:8). The prophet is saying that God will bring renewal to all of His people's inheritance. Since this will "continue in summer as in winter," we see that this life is eternal. Unlike the seasonal rivers that only flow at certain times of the year in the Promised Land, these living waters will never fail to issue forth and do their work.

Finally, "the LORD will be king over all the earth" (v. 9). All people will recognize His full sovereignty and there will never be rebellion against Him again.

Coram Deo

John Calvin writes, "Nothing indeed can be more blessed than to live under the reign of God; and this highest happiness is ever promised to the faithful." Because human beings rebel against God, however, His reign is not always acknowledged, and the church suffers attack. But God preserves His inheritance—the elect remnant—both now and in the future. We taste the "highest happiness" today in Christ, and will enjoy it fully at His return. Our enemies will lose the war.

19th November 2020

Worship in Jerusalem

“If the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves,
then on them there shall be no rain;
there shall be the plague with which the Lord afflicts the nations
that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths”
(v. 18)

Read: Zechariah 14:10–21

Today’s study brings us to the end of our study of Zechariah, the prophet of the late sixth century BC whom God sent to encourage the rebuilding of the temple and a return to faithfulness. To a community suffering the conditions of exile even though they were back in the Promised Land, Zechariah brought a message of hope that the Lord had not abandoned His people and that they should show their commitment to Him by completing the work on God’s house (chap. 1–2). Though exilic conditions continued, Zechariah told the people that the Lord had not abandoned His promise to send the Messiah—the Davidic priest-king—and cleanse the land of unrighteousness (chap. 3–6). Receiving this blessing, however, depended on the people trusting the Lord and believing His promise to defeat their enemies and restore all things. The community of post-exilic Judah, however, would largely reject its Lord, which would not invalidate the Creator’s work of salvation but rather guarantee that only a remnant of Judah would enjoy it at first. In time, however, a great number of Jews who rejected the one true Shepherd to follow false shepherds would see the error of their ways and mourn over the Lord whom they had pierced (7:1–14:9).

Zechariah 14:10–21 concludes the prophet’s vision about the final battle between God and His enemies. As we saw yesterday, he employs vivid symbols to depict the spiritual realities of what the Lord will achieve. We see this in verses 10–11, where Zechariah speaks of upheaval that fully refashions the land of Judea, flattening the summits of mountains. Just as Ezekiel’s vision of an enormous temple that transforms the land should not be taken in a woodenly literal fashion (Ezek. 40–48), neither should we take Zechariah to mean a change that makes the land wholly unrecognizable. His image is one of stability and security. Resting on flat land, on a plain high in the air, on the high ground that gives military advantage, Jerusalem will be fully secure and no enemy will be able to invade it.

The prophet also reveals that the nations who survive the final battle going up to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Zech. 14:12–21). During the Feast of Booths, the Jews remembered the wilderness wanderings when they lived a nomadic existence, moving from place to place and setting up booths or tents (Lev. 23:33–42). While in the desert, the people had to rely on the Lord alone for provision. Zechariah is saying that on that final day, the Jews will rely on Yahweh alone, having cast away all other deities and self-trust.

Coram Deo

When Christ returns to consummate history, there will be no one left who tries to rely on his own efforts or foreign gods for redemption. Even those who are finally cast into hell

will be forced to acknowledge that He alone is Lord and that He alone can save. Today, as we trust in Jesus alone for salvation, we join this group that will worship the Lord for eternity, content in His provision. Let us seek Him alone to meet all of our needs now and forever.

20th November 2020

The Sukkot to Come

“Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths” (v. 16)

Read: Zechariah 14:16–19

Following the restoration of the Israelites to their homeland after the exile, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people in renewing their covenant with God, and part of this covenant renewal included celebrating the Feast of Booths, or Sukkot (Neh. 8:13–18). Since the feast celebrated the Lord’s guidance during the wilderness wanderings after Israel’s redemption from Egypt, it was appropriate to commemorate this deliverance once again after the nation was rescued from exile in Babylon.

On account of the people’s impenitence, the glorious restoration promised to Israel did not materialize after their return to their land (Mal. 1–4), so God sent the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi to urge the people to repent and purify their worship so that the restoration could come. Speaking to His people through Zechariah, the Lord promised that restoration was, from a human perspective, delayed but not cancelled. Instead, the Creator would establish His people in glory once more after that day when He destroyed His enemies. This is the point of Zechariah 14.

Israel’s final restoration includes the celebration of Sukkot, as seen in today’s passage. All the survivors of the nations will go up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Booths, and any who refuse will not receive the blessing of rain (vv. 16–19). Many believers expect this to be fulfilled explicitly as written — one day people from all over the world will make pilgrimages to a newly built temple in Jerusalem each fall to celebrate Sukkot. Yet this interpretation misses the point, for God is only describing the salvation the earth will enjoy in a manner understandable to old covenant Israelites.

Sukkot was a celebration of God’s salvation, so to promise that non-Israelites would join in this feast is to say that non-Israelites will be incorporated into Israel, the people the Lord has saved. This makes sense only if God saves Gentiles as well. In other words, the covenant Lord of Israel will redeem a large number of people who are not ethnic Israelites. Sukkot was also the time when Israel looked to the Almighty to bless them with winter and spring rains that would meet their needs for irrigation and thus provide them with the food they needed to survive. To say that the nations who do not celebrate Sukkot will not receive rain is simply another way of saying that those who will not follow Israel’s Lord will not receive His blessing.

Coram Deo

John Calvin comments on Zechariah 14: God subdues “all the enemies of his Church, and in two ways, for some he would destroy, and he would humble others, so as to make them willing servants and ready of themselves to obey his authority.” We should be grateful to God for every material blessing we have, but we should especially express gratitude and humility for His work of salvation in joining us to His covenant people (see Rom. 11:11–24).

21st November 2020

Catch-Up Day

Take this day to catch up with whatever outstanding devotionals (above)

22nd November 2020

Malachi Preaches God’s Love for Israel

“The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. ‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have you loved us?’ ‘Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares the LORD. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated’”
(Verses 1–3a)

Read: Malachi 1:1-5

By the time we finish the Old Testament, we find that all was not well for the people of God during the final period of history recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. The exile of both Israel and Judah to foreign lands had come and gone, but the people who had returned to the Promised Land continued to suffer. The great restoration foreseen by Moses and the other prophets had not occurred (Deut. 30:1–10; Isa. 2:1–5; 65:17–25). Moreover, there was little indication, humanly speaking, that it would ever come to pass. Although the rebuilding of the temple had been completed in 518 BC (Ezra 6:13–18), the Jews were not in control of their own destiny but remained servants of the Persian Empire (Neh. 1). Those who were in their own homeland faced opposition from their neighbours who did not want the post-exilic community to be able to provide for its own protection through the reconstruction of Jerusalem’s wall (chap. 4). High Persian taxes sapped the economic productivity of the people, who worked hard and had little to show for it (9:32–37).

In this environment, it is easy to see why the old covenant people could become discouraged and could come to believe that the Lord did not truly love them. It is easy to

see why so many Jews doubted that God would fulfil His Word. The last prophetic book both chronologically and in canonical order reveals our Creator's response to this situation. In the middle of the fifth century BC, God sent Malachi to remind His people of His love for them and His faithfulness to His covenant as well as to call them to repentance and faith, for it was their lack of repentance that was causing the conditions of exile to continue, as Daniel 9 teaches us.

Malachi, whose name means "my [Yahweh's] messenger," is the author of the last prophetic book and the final book we are studying in our yearlong overview of the prophets. With Malachi we again have a man who appears nowhere else in the Old Testament. Most scholars believe he ministered sometime around 460 BC, at roughly the same point that Ezra and Nehemiah were attempting to re-implement the law of God as the covenant community's standard for worship and behaviour. Malachi came to reveal the Lord's support for this effort, and to remind the people of Judah of God's enduring love for them.

Today's passage reveals this love. When the people ask for proof of God's love, He reminds them of their election. Out of all the nations of the world, the Lord chose the descendants of Jacob, not Esau, to be His covenant people and treasured possession (Mal. 1:1-5).

Coram Deo

In Romans 9, Paul applies the election of the people of Israel to individual believers, telling us that those who are saved have been chosen from the foundation of the world. Divine election assures us of God's love and that we belong to Him now and always if we trust in Him alone. If you believe in Christ, you are elect. And if you are elect, you have been elected and loved by God in Christ from all eternity. Nothing could be more secure than that.

23rd November 2020

Polluting the Lord's Table

"You profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted,
and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised"
(v. 12)

Read: Malachi 1:6-14

God demonstrated His peace with the nation of Israel when He allowed the elders to eat a covenant meal in His presence (Ex. 24:1-11). The Lord then made provision for His people to have regular covenant meals, both in the celebration of festivals, like Passover, and in the sacrifice of peace offerings (Ex. 12; Lev. 3; 7:11-18). If the Israelites followed the stipulations in the Mosaic law regarding these meals and the spotless animals that were to be a part of them, they could experience God's blessing in a unique way, recalling His redemption of them from Egyptian slavery.

Unfortunately, that is exactly what the nation as a whole failed to do. Being holy ordinances, the covenant meals were not to be profaned through the offering of less than-perfect animal sacrifices. Just before the voice of prophecy ceased prior to the first advent of Christ, the prophet Malachi was sent to the people of God to call them to repent for profaning worship. Their sacrifices were polluting the altar, for they had been offering up blemished animals instead of the first and best of their flocks (Mal. 1:12–14). They were violating the “Lord’s table,” sharing food, metaphorically speaking, with God that was not fit for even an earthly king. The covenant meal and the honour of the Lord were profaned by such insolence. Matthew Henry comments, “There cannot be a greater provocation to God than the profanation of his name; for it is holy and reverend.”

It is better to offer no worship at all than to offer false worship. So the covenant Lord called for the Israelites to shut the doors of the temple and stop pretending when it came to their praise of Him (v. 10). Interestingly, however, immediately after saying He will not receive an offering from the hands of the unrepentant covenant community, the Lord then makes a pledge that He will be honoured among the nations, with incense being offered up to Him in purity (v. 11). This pointed to a day when animal sacrifices would be ended entirely and the Gentiles would be reckoned among those who have a chance to sit at the Lord’s Table. That offering was given two thousand years ago when the spotless Lamb of God gave up His life on the cross. Consequently, we celebrate a new covenant meal to commemorate this event, and, as under the old covenant, it cannot be treated with contempt (1 Cor. 11:17–34).

Coram Deo

The covenant meals during the old covenant all pointed to the marriage supper of the Lamb, which will occur when Jesus appears to judge the world (Rev. 19:6–8). In a new way, and until then, the Lord’s Supper anticipates that day, for in it we proclaim the Lord’s death until He returns. Let us eat the covenant meal in reverence, looking forward to the day when Christ will consummate His kingdom and living like that day has already dawned.

24th November 2020

Vain Priestly Offerings

“Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors,
that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!
I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts,
and I will not accept an offering from your hand”
(v. 10)

Read: Malachi 1:6–14

Scripture tells us repeatedly that divine election brings with it important responsibilities. Certainly, election itself is by grace alone, based not on anything we do, and we can in no way take credit for it; otherwise, grace would not be grace (Rom. 11:1–6). However, God

does not elect people to salvation so that they can sit around and do nothing. All whom He has chosen are called to bear fruit and, indeed, prove their election by their love for the Lord in word and deed. This is why the New Testament is insistent that justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. Good works of obedience are not the ground of justification, but they are its proof and the fruit of sanctification (James 2:14–26; 2 Peter 1:3–15).

Malachi understood this doctrinal point quite well, which explains why he is so harsh on the post-exilic community in today's passage. God had chosen Israel to be His people, not Edom or any other nation (Mal. 1:1–5), but the people in Malachi's day were providing hardly any proof of their election. The prophet charges the community—particularly the priests, who should have known better—with dishonouring Him with polluted offerings (vv. 6–14). When the ancient Jews brought animal sacrifices to the Lord, these animals had to be perfect and free from all diseases and other defects (Deut. 17:1). Yet the people were offering blind, lame, and sick animals to God. They had the gall to bring animals that they would not offer as gifts to the governor, who, important as he was, was not the most holy Creator of all things (Mal. 1:8). But worst of all, the priests, who were supposed to be the guardians of the sanctity of worship, did not stop the people from bringing impure offerings.

We do not know precisely why the priests were doing this. It probably had to do with their personal economic situations. Old covenant priests depended on the sacrifices for food and income, and they usually ate a portion of the meat or grain that the worshipper brought to the temple (for example, see Lev. 2:1–3). Meat from a defective animal tasted just as good as meat from a stronger animal with no defects. By allowing the Jews to sacrifice a greater quantity of the defective animals instead of the stronger breeding specimens, the priests had more food resources at their disposal.

Given the sorry state of the temple, the priests would have been better off shutting its doors and calling worship off (Mal. 1:10). Malachi condemns them for not doing so and for allowing the people to be complacent in their hypocritical, half-hearted worship.

Coram Deo

God wants all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength in all that we do, but particularly in the case of worship. If we are not endeavouring to worship according to His commands and with the right intent, it would be better for us not to worship at all. He does not seek perfect worship from us at the present time, which is impossible given our sinful condition. What He seeks is true, intentional worship that is a testimony to His great glory.

25th November 2020

Problems in Post-Exilic Judah

“For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts.

So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless”

(v. 16)

Read: Malachi 2

False worship comes in two main varieties. The first and easiest to identify of these is the worship of false gods. The second variety is the worship of the one true God in a manner that He does not approve. Because this second form of false worship is more subtle, it is sometimes difficult to identify. Even worse is when the strongest proponents of worshipping the Lord in ways that He does not approve are the guardians of worship themselves. In the middle of the fifth century BC, the post-exilic Jews in Jerusalem had to deal with priests who allowed for the sacrifice of defective animals even though God commanded that anything offered to Him had to be blemish-free (Mal. 1:6–14; see Lev. 1:10; 4:23).

Our Creator’s response to this was to warn the priests in Jerusalem that persistence in their sin would lead to all manner of problems for them. Malachi 2:1–9 describes the consequences promised to the priests who were not doing their jobs. God would cause their words of blessing not to achieve the good outcome that was spoken; instead, He would make their blessings into curses that did the opposite. But in Malachi’s day, this was not merely a possibility but a reality (v. 2). God’s blessings were tied to prosperity, so those whom the priests allowed to sacrifice improperly would suffer great loss. Moreover, the prophet told the priests that God would remove them from office if they were to persist in sin. The graphic metaphor of animal dung on the faces of these priests underscores the thorough loss that they would have to endure for their impenitent sin (vv. 3–9). Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8–13 refer to thorough religious reforms that occurred at this time, which likely means that the priests Malachi addressed did not repent and that God removed them from office.

Religious intermarriage was also a problem for the post-exilic community. Malachi 2:10–16 references this reality, describing faithless dealings between men and the wives of their youth. Jewish men were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying women of other religious faiths. In all likelihood, this had to do with money. Given the choice of one’s first wife and a life of poverty in Judah, instead of a secure financial future, the Jews likely engaged in the intermarriages in an attempt to better themselves, since the foreign wives would not have come from economies that had been as devastated as was Judah’s. Choosing money over fidelity to the covenant, the people were looking to earthly provision and not what their heavenly Father could give them.

Coram Deo

Scripture tells us that marrying someone who does not share the beliefs of the covenant community leads to trouble. For example, Solomon’s marriages to pagan women led him

astray and gave paganism a foothold in Israel (1 Kings 11:1–8). If you are single and looking for a spouse, you must look for a Christian. Married couples should encourage one another in the Lord. If you are already married to a non-Christian, pray daily for your spouse's salvation.

26th November 2020

Waiting for the LORD at His temple

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts”
(v. 1)

Read: Malachi 3

Before we look at today's passage, let us briefly consider Malachi's teaching on divorce that we only touched on yesterday. Malachi 2:16 is exceptionally difficult to translate from Hebrew into English, and many translations render the verse so as to say God “hates divorce” (NKJV). On account of this, many believers have thought that divorce is never legitimate. However, we must read Malachi's teaching in the context of Scripture as a whole, and Jesus and Paul say divorce is lawful in certain cases (adultery and desertion; see Matt. 19:1–10; 1 Cor. 7:12–16). True, divorce was not the Lord's intent for creation from the beginning, but He graciously permits it in specific situations to help us deal with life in our fallen world. Malachi teaches not that divorce is always unlawful but that it is wrong to divorce one's spouse simply because one wants to marry someone else—especially an unbeliever.

This problem with rampant divorce, intermarriage, and improper sacrifices (Mal. 1:6–2:17) indicates that even after the exile, things remained seriously wrong in Judah. True, there was no blatant idolatry as there was prior to the exile (see 2 Kings 17:7–23), so the Jews learned that lesson. But the covenant community as a whole did not recognize what matters to God more than anything else—true love for Him with one's heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deut. 6:4–5). Thus, hypocritical worship and maltreatment of neighbour characterized the post-exilic situation. Is it any wonder, then, that the Lord did not return to His temple and dwell in the Holy of Holies after the exile? Malachi 3:1 indicates that this was the case because the prophet predicts the return of the Lord to His temple, which would have only been necessary if He was not there. Moreover, the Bible does not mention the presence of God filling the second temple like He did the first one (Ezra 6:13–18; see 1 Kings 8:1–11).

The Lord remained with His people after the exile, for a faithful remnant always remained in Judah, including men such as Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. But God did not meet with His people in the temple because the community as a whole had no interest in Him. This lack of commitment is also seen in the community's failure to tithe (Mal. 3:6–12). The people held back the full tithe required of them. Since the priests

depended on the tithe for their living, this hurt them, and so they were willing to take whatever they could get, even impure animals. Yet though it was bad enough not to support the priesthood, even worse was that in holding back the tithe, the people were actually robbing God (v. 8).

Coram Deo

Dr. R.C. Sproul has often pointed out that Malachi 3:10 is the only place in Scripture where God commands us to put Him to the test. It is otherwise sinful to test the Lord, but we may test Him with the tithe. When we give to the work of the Lord, He promises to bless us and meet our needs—not necessarily to make us rich materially but to satisfy us and make us content. Let us give to the Lord’s work that we might see Him keep His promises.

27th November 2020

God Unchanging

“I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed”
(Mal. 3:6).

Read: Malachi 3:6

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are familiar to most of us as the greatest of all the ancient Greek philosophers. Less known to many people are the pre-Socratic philosophers who developed their own systems of philosophy before these bigger names did their work. Heraclitus was one of these significant pre-Socratics. “Man cannot step into the same river twice” is perhaps Heraclitus’ best-known observation. When water flows, there are always changes that occur, both perceptible and imperceptible. Riverbanks slowly erode, water molecules constantly move, and, at the very least, people age between the first and second time they step into the river, even if only by a matter of seconds.

Heraclitus’ point in this statement was that change is the only constant. Modern science may tell us that each individual’s DNA code, under normal circumstances, remains largely the same throughout life, but we all experience physical, mental, moral, and spiritual changes over time. Yet as today’s passage reveals, the Creator does not change like His creatures do (Mal. 3:6).

Question 4 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism argues that God is “unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” This is a brief exposition of the Lord’s attribute of immutability, which means that it is impossible for His character or being to undergo any mutation. The power of God cannot be augmented or diminished. He never learns or forgets, and He cannot be anything other than perfectly holy and just. Human beings are ever changing, but not our Father.

It is important to remember that immutability does not mean God cannot move or that He is inert. Scripture testifies often of the Lord’s constant work and movement to sustain His creation (Heb. 1:3a). Moreover, immutability does not mean the Lord’s relationship with us is unreal. Actually, His unchanging righteousness moves Him to pour out His wrath on

the impenitent (Rom. 1:18–32), and His ever-abiding love moves Him to redeem His people (Ex. 2:23–25).

Jonathan Edwards said sinners hate the Lord because His immutability guarantees that God cannot overlook their rebellion. For believers, however, the unchanging character of our Creator means we can rely on Him in every circumstance (Ps. 46).

Coram Deo

One of the most comforting truths that we can ever lay hold of is the truth that God's character cannot change. He is not capricious and He can always be trusted to fulfill His promises. Men and women may change and not be true to who we think they are, but the Lord is always faithful to us. Let us never be afraid that He will act in a manner that does not line up with the way He has revealed Himself in the Bible.

28th November 2020

Stealing from God

“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions”
(Mal. 3:8)

Read: Malachi 3:6-12

Due to their failure to keep the covenant confirmed on Mt. Sinai, God sent His people into exile a few hundred years before the birth of Jesus. First, the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, and then Babylon captured the people of Judah about 140 years later in 586 BC (2 Kings 17:7–23; 25:1–26). In 538 BC, a remnant of the covenant community, consisting mostly of the exiled citizens of Judah, returned to the Promised Land to renew the covenant with the Lord, rebuild the temple, and await the restoration of David's throne (Ezra 1–2).

On the whole, this returned people failed in their calling, as the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi tell us. By the time of Malachi in the fifth century BC, the transgressions of the people had increased greatly, to the point where the covenant community was even stealing from God, as we see in today's passage.

It might seem strange to speak of human beings robbing the Lord. He is sovereign over all and owns the whole creation, so how then can it be said that a person could steal from Him? Yet in forming a covenant with the Israelites, our Creator established them as stewards over His bounty, responsible to enjoy and manage that which was rightfully theirs. They were not, however, permitted to keep for themselves that which did not belong to them, which is what they were doing when they kept the tithes and offerings for the temple and priests for themselves (Mal. 3:6–9).

We saw yesterday that the eighth commandment assumes the right to private possessions (Ex. 20:15). This right, however, does not mean we can use our possessions against the

law of God. Along with the right to private possessions comes the duty to hold to them loosely and to give of them freely to the work of the Lord's worship and instruction (Num. 18:8–32). To fail to give to the work of those who lead His people in worship and the teaching of Scripture is to take from God, for these leaders are the Lord's appointed shepherds. When we do not support kingdom work, we show ourselves disdainful of the covenant God has made with us.

The temple and priesthood have passed away, but Malachi's charge that God's people rob Him when they do not support the expenses associated with worship and instruction in His kingdom remains. May we never be guilty of this great sin.

Coram Deo

It is tempting to give God only the leftovers after we have spent our income on ourselves. Yet this should not be the attitude of the Lord's people, for what we own is His, and He has said that a portion of it belongs to the work of His kingdom. As we sit down to write checks and issue payments each month, let us give to our Father first by supporting gospel ministers and helping the needy — especially those in Christ's church the world over.

29th November 2020

How to Be a Good Steward

“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need”
(v. 10)

Read: Malachi 3:8–12

Generally speaking, we are commanded to never put the Lord to a test. So, it is a remarkable thing indeed when God Himself makes an exception to this principle and calls us to test Him. This is exactly what our Creator does in today's passage. Speaking to the ancient Israelites, who had forgotten their duty to be good stewards of their resources and bring tithes into His house, God exhorted His people to return to their vocation of stewardship, promising to bless them far beyond what they could ever hope or dream if they were to obey (Mal. 3:8–12).

If we were quick to test the Lord through faithful tithing and stewardship, we could sit in judgment over the ancient covenant community. Yet we do not test God as He has called us to do when it comes to stewarding His resources. Church leaders know all too well the truth of surveys that tell us that less than 10 percent of professing evangelicals tithe regularly. This reflects the degree to which we struggle with sin and with making the Lord's priorities our own. Our Father prizes His worship and the education of His people

in His Word (Lev. 10:3; Deut. 6:6–7), but pastors and teachers are among the lowest-paid professionals in the United States.

Even the Israelites, however, were not the first people God called to exercise wise stewardship. Ever since our first parents were called to exercise dominion over His world, the Lord has tasked all people with managing their resources for kingdom purposes (Gen. 1:27–28). It is easy to understand why impenitent people do not recognize this responsibility, but even we tend to think of our funds, time, and energy as our own. But if the fullness of the earth belongs to the Lord (Ps. 24:1), everything we have is temporarily “on loan” from God.

Being pleasing to God requires us to exercise wise stewardship. A dollar spent here is a dollar that cannot be spent there, and we sin if we do not use our time and priorities according to the Lord’s standards. We must not waste our resources like the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–13) but use them in the service of His kingdom.

Bringing the tithe to God’s storehouse was not abrogated with the old covenant. Our treasures and our hearts are always in the same place (Matt. 6:21). That we might grow in grace, let us consider what our checkbooks say about our hearts.

Coram Deo

We want to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, but our growth will be hindered if we study the Bible all day yet do not bring our tithes and offerings to the Lord. How can we improve in our giving? One practical way is to make and live on a budget, which is wise even on an earthly level. Yet budgeting is also a great thing to do from a heavenly perspective because it helps us see how we can give more abundantly to God’s work. Let us steward our time and money to His glory.

30th November 2020

The Coming Day of the LORD

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction”
(vv. 5–6)

Read: Malachi 4

Judahites living in the middle of the fifth century BC found themselves in what seemed to be a hopeless situation. Though back in their land, they were not in charge of their own destiny, as they were but a small province of the mighty Persian Empire. The temple was rebuilt, but God’s presence had not yet returned to the Holy of Holies (Mal. 3:1). David’s line had no throne in Jerusalem. In sum, none of the great restoration promises seemed to be coming true (Deut. 30:1–10; Amos 9:11–15; Mic. 4:1–5). Thus, we are not surprised

that the Jews who lacked faith looked around them and said, to paraphrase it: “What is the point of serving Yahweh? We are getting no blessing from it” (Mal. 3:13–14).

Those of faith such as Malachi, however, saw the real problem. God was not unfaithful to His promises; rather, the nation as a whole remained unfaithful to the covenant. Full restoration was dependent upon true repentance, but this repentance was not forthcoming (Lev. 26:40–45; Dan. 9). Blemished sacrifices were being offered. The tithe was being withheld from the Lord. The poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner living in the land were being oppressed (Mal. 1–3). By and large, the people were no longer worshipping idols. But this was merely superficial, for they were not truly worshipping the one true God.

By the end of Malachi’s ministry, the prophet understood that the restoration could not come without God’s mightily and dramatically intervening as He did in days of old. It would take a prophet no less than Elijah, whose miracles and boldness proved without a shadow of a doubt that He was God’s spokesman, to preach the message that would bring about true repentance (Mal. 4:5–6). The day of the Lord, the day in which He completes salvation, sets Israel over the nations, and defeats all of His enemies would come, but not before Elijah returned (vv. 1–4). He would be the messenger to prepare the way of the Lord (3:1a; see Isa. 40:3–5). Immediately following Elijah’s ministry, the Lord Himself would come to His temple, to His repentant people, and He would refine them in glory that they would serve Him all of their days (Mal. 3:1b–4).

With the end of the ministry of Malachi, the voice of prophecy fell silent in Israel—but not forever. The great day of the Lord in which He reveals His mighty arm of salvation would come. David would return to His throne. The conditions of exile would be ended. But the faithful old covenant believer would have to wait just a little bit longer to see all this.

Coram Deo

The hardest thing about the life of faith is that the Lord often seems slow to keep His promises. Sometimes we feel like we must wait, wait, and then wait some more for God to intervene. Faith, however, trusts that God is not slow but is working out all things in His time. It was hundreds of years after Malachi’s day that the Messiah came—but He came. As we wait for His return and for answers to prayer, we must remember that all this will come as well.