

Small Group Guide: Zechariah Chapters 1-3



Overview

This guide is based on a sermon covering the first three chapters of Zechariah, a prophet who ministered alongside Haggai around 520-519 BC. Zechariah's visions point both to the immediate concerns of the returning exiles and far into the future, revealing God's faithfulness, his zeal for Jerusalem, and the coming of the Messiah who would provide atonement in a single day.

Key Takeaways

- The meaning of Zechariah's family names -- "the Lord remembers," "the Lord blesses," and "in his time" -- summarizes the entire message of the book: God remembers and blesses his people according to his own timing.
- God's words and statutes outlast every generation. The prophets are gone. The ancestors are gone. But what God said came to pass and his words endure.
- God used pagan nations to discipline his people, but he holds those nations accountable for the cruelty they exercised beyond what he intended.

- God describes Jerusalem as the apple of his eye. To touch Jerusalem is to touch something he guards with fierce personal investment.
- The vision of Joshua the high priest -- stripped of filthy garments and reclothed in rich robes -- is a direct picture of the gospel: God removing our sin and clothing us in righteousness.
- The "Branch" from the stump of Jesse points directly to Jesus, who shares the name with Joshua the high priest, and who would remove the iniquity of the land in one day.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. When you think about a promise someone kept for you after a long time, how did it feel when it was finally fulfilled? How does that experience shape the way you think about God's promises?
2. The names in Zechariah's family line -- "the Lord remembers," "the Lord blesses," "in his time" -- form a kind of summary statement. What does it mean to you personally that God works on his own timetable rather than yours?

Digging Deeper

3. God told the returning exiles not to be like their fathers who ignored the prophets. In what ways do you think Christians today are tempted to tune out what God is saying? What does it look like practically to have ears that actually hear?
4. The sermon pointed out that God's words outlasted the prophets who delivered them and the people who ignored them. Read Psalm 119:89 and Isaiah 40:8 for reference. How does the permanence of God's word change the way you approach it day to day?
5. God used nations like Assyria and Babylon to discipline his people, but then held those nations accountable for going too far in their cruelty. What does this tell you about the difference between God's sovereignty over circumstances and human moral responsibility within those circumstances?
6. The vision of the horses going to and fro on a quiet earth prompted the angel of the Lord to ask how long God would withhold mercy from Jerusalem. Have you ever

brought a "how long, Lord" prayer to God? What was that experience like, and how did God respond over time?

7. The image of Jerusalem as a city eventually without walls -- so full of people that walls cannot contain it, with God himself as a wall of fire around it -- points to a future reality. How does holding onto future promises affect the way you live in the present, especially during seasons that feel small or difficult?

The Gospel in the Vision

8. In chapter 3, Joshua stands before the angel of the Lord in filthy garments while Satan stands ready to accuse him. The Lord rebukes Satan and has the filthy garments removed. What does it mean to you that God's response to our sin is not condemnation but reclothing?
9. The sermon connected this vision directly to the gospel -- our filthy garments replaced with the righteousness of Christ. How does this image of being reclothed change the way you see yourself before God? Are there areas where you still tend to stand before God as if you are still wearing the filthy garments?
10. The Branch from the stump of Jesse, who would remove the iniquity of the land in one day, is a picture of what Christ accomplished on the cross. How does the fact that atonement was secured in a single day affect the way you think about guilt, ongoing sin, and your standing before God?

Practical Applications

- **Examine your posture toward God's word.** The generation that returned from exile actually listened to the prophets -- unlike their fathers. Identify one specific area of your life where you have been hearing God's word without responding to it. Bring that area before God this week and take one concrete step of obedience.
- **Pray the "how long" prayer honestly.** If there is a situation in your life or in the world where you are waiting for God to act, bring that prayer to him directly and specifically this week. Write it down. Return to it and watch how God answers over time.
- **Meditate on being reclothed.** Spend time this week reflecting on the image of filthy garments being removed and rich robes being put in their place. Consider journaling

about what the old garments represented in your own life and what it means that Christ has replaced them with his righteousness.

- **Anchor yourself in God's permanence.** Identify one promise from Scripture that applies directly to something you are facing right now. Write it somewhere visible as a reminder that God's words outlast every circumstance and every generation.
- **Share the gospel picture with someone.** The vision of Joshua in chapter 3 is one of the clearest pictures of the gospel in the entire Old Testament. Look for an opportunity this week to share that image with someone -- a believer who needs encouragement or someone who has never heard the message of what Christ has done.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying together around these themes:

- Gratitude that God remembers, blesses, and acts in his time
- Honesty about areas where your group members have been slow to listen and respond
- Confidence in the atonement secured in one day on the cross
- Hope in the promises God has not yet fully fulfilled but has guaranteed through his word

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on the Themes of Zechariah 1-3



Day 1: The God Who Remembers

Reading: Zechariah 1:1-6

Devotional: The names woven into Zechariah's opening verses are no accident. The Lord remembers. The Lord blesses. In His time. These are not mere genealogical details but a declaration of God's character. When the exile felt like abandonment, God was not absent. He was working. His words outlasted the prophets who spoke them and outlasted the generations that ignored them. Whatever season of waiting you are in, whatever silence feels like forgetfulness on God's part, return to this truth: He remembers you by name. His timing is not your timing, but His timing is always faithful.

Day 2: The Invitation to Return

Reading: Zechariah 1:3; Joel 2:12-13

Devotional: "Return to me and I will return to you." These words carry both a command and a promise. God does not ask His people to earn their way back. He asks them to turn. The

direction of your face matters to Him. The generations before had every opportunity to hear and respond, and they did not. But this generation stood at a new moment of grace. Every morning you wake up is also a new moment of grace. The door has not closed. The invitation has not expired. Wherever you have drifted, the same God who promised to return is still standing at the threshold, waiting.

Day 3: The Apple of His Eye

Reading: Zechariah 2:8; Deuteronomy 32:10; Romans 8:31-32

Devotional: God describes Jerusalem as the apple of His eye, meaning the very center of His vision, the most tender and protected place. To touch Jerusalem is to touch what God guards most closely. This is not merely geopolitical language. It reveals the nature of God's love. He is not a distant administrator of history. He is a guardian who takes personally every act of cruelty against those He loves. If God watches over a city with that kind of fierce devotion, consider how He watches over you. You are not a footnote in His story. You are guarded by the One who neither sleeps nor slumbers.

Day 4: Filthy Garments and Rich Robes

Reading: Zechariah 3:1-5; Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:21-24

Devotional: Joshua the high priest stood before the angel of the Lord wearing filthy garments. Satan stood nearby to accuse. This is the condition of every person who approaches a holy God on their own merit. Our best efforts, our religious performance, our moral record, all of it amounts to garments that cannot stand before perfect holiness. But God does not send Joshua away. He commands the filthy garments removed. He clothes him in rich robes. He places a clean turban on his head. This is the gospel in a single image. Christ does not improve your old garments. He removes them entirely and dresses you in His own righteousness.

Day 5: Atonement in One Day

Reading: Zechariah 3:9-10; Hebrews 10:10-14; Revelation 21:3-4

Devotional: God declares through Zechariah that He will remove the iniquity of the land in one day. That day came. A hill outside Jerusalem, a cross, a death, a burial, and a resurrection. Everything broken between God and man was addressed in a single day. The

Branch from the stump of Jesse absorbed in one moment what no system of sacrifice could ever fully resolve. And the promise that follows, of neighbors gathered under vines and fig trees, is a picture of the peace and restoration that flows from that one day into eternity. Live today in the freedom that one day purchased for you.