

**The Minor Prophets**  
**Lesson 28: God and His Leaders**  
**(Zechariah 3—4)**

**Introduction:** According to management experts James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, one of the popular myths about leadership is that “leaders are prescient visionaries with Merlin-like powers.” In other words, leaders know everything and can do anything. But if that were true, leadership wouldn’t be the difficult and demanding task that it is. Certainly, successful leaders enjoy the “perks” and “peaks” that go with their positions, but they also must deal with the valleys and sacrifices that are also a big part of their job. Real leadership isn’t easy.

Zechariah 3 and 4 focus on Joshua and Zerubbabel, the two leaders of the Jewish remnant who knew how tough it is to lead. Joshua was high priest and had the concern for the spiritual life of the people, while Zerubbabel was governor and had the responsibility of managing the civil affairs of the nation. But their work wasn’t easy. Zerubbabel was trying to motivate people who were discouraged and selfish, and Joshua was trying to educate people who were disobedient and sinful. Is there any hope for a defiled and discouraged nation, or a defiled and discouraged church or individual?

Yes, there is! God gave the prophet Zechariah two visions that speak to us today to keep serving the Lord no matter how difficult the people or circumstances may be.

**1. God Cleanses His People for Services (3:1—10)**

Haggai’s first message (Hag. 1:1-11) and Zechariah’s call to repentance (Zech. 1:1-6) are evidence that the spiritual level of the Jewish remnant was very low. Most of these people had been born in Babylon, where there wasn’t much religious example or instruction to nourish their worship of Jehovah, and the difficult circumstances in their own land tested their faith greatly.

- a. **The accused (vv. 1a, 3).** Joshua stood before the Lord as a representative of Israel, a people He had called to be a holy nation of priests (Ex. 19:5—6).
  - i. He wore filthy clothes, not because he was sinful personally, but because the people had sinned and were unclean in God’s sight. The emphasis here is on the nation collectively and not Joshua individually, for both Joshua and Zerubbabel were “men symbolic of things to come” (Zech. 3:8 NIV).
  - ii. God had chosen Jerusalem and had plucked the Jews out of the fire of Babylonian captivity (v. 2). What God did for Joshua symbolically, He would do for Israel personally: The iniquity of the land would be removed in a day (v. 9).
  - iii. To “stand before the Lord” means to be in a place of service (Gen. 41:46; Deut. 10:8; 1 Sam. 16:21), so the Jews became defiled while they were attempting to serve the Lord. If their service was unclean in God’s sight, what must their deliberate sins have been like! The Hebrew word translated “filthy” denotes the worst kind of defilement for a Jew.
  - iv. Since the priests were commanded to keep themselves clean at all times, on penalty of death (Ex. 28:39-43; 30:17-21), Joshua’s wearing filthy garments would be a terrible personal embarrassment and an offense against God’s law. Those garments were “for

glory and for beauty” (Ex. 28:2, 40), but the Lord saw neither glory nor beauty as He beheld His servant.

- b. The accuser (v. 1b).** Zechariah has described a courtroom scene in which Joshua is the defendant, God is the Judge, Satan is the prosecuting attorney, and Jesus Christ is the defense attorney, the Advocate of God’s people before the holy throne of God (1 John 2:1-2).
- i. The word *Satan* means “adversary” and refers to the enemy who resists God’s work and God’s people. Satan has access to the throne of God (Job 1—2), where he accuses God’s people (Rev. 12:10).
  - ii. When Satan talks to us about God, he lies, but when he talks to God about us, he tells the truth!
  - iii. God’s throne is a throne of justice and God is a righteous Judge. Knowing this, Satan pointed out Joshua’s defilement, which symbolized the defilement of the nation, and insisted that a holy God punish His sinful people.
  - iv. It seemed like an airtight case, except for one factor: the grace of God.
- c. The Advocate (vv. 2-5).** Christ’s present ministry in heaven is two-fold. He’s our High Priest, interceding for us and giving us the grace, we need for life and service here on earth (Heb. 4:14-16; 13:20-21), and He’s our Advocate, representing us before the throne of God when we do sin (1 John 2:1-2).
- i. Don’t get the erroneous idea that the Father yearns to punish us, and the Son pleads with Him to change His mind, because that isn’t the picture at all. The Father and the Son both love us and want the best for us, but God can’t ignore our sins and still be a holy God.
  - ii. This explains why Jesus took His wounds back to heaven with Him (Luke 24:39-40; John 20:20, 25-27): They prove that He was “delivered over to death for our sin and was raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25 NIV). Satan cannot accuse us, nor God condemn us, for sins for which Christ died!
  - iii. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).
  - iv. The Lord rebuked Satan on the basis of His own electing grace. He had chosen Jerusalem and the Jewish nation in His own love and grace (Deut. 7:7-11; Ps. 33:12; 132:13). He had not chosen them because of their good works, so how could He condemn them for their bad works? “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:33-34 NKJV).
  - v. God proved His grace to Israel by rescuing them from Babylonian captivity; the Jews were “a brand plucked out of the fire” (Zech. 3:2; see Amos 4:11). Scripture often compares Israel’s suffering as going through the fire. Their trials in Egypt were like being in a furnace (Deut. 4:20, and the exile in Babylon was compared to being refined in the fire (Isa. 48:10; see 43:1-6).
  - vi. When Israel goes through the tribulation in the end times, it will be an experience of refining (Zech. 13:9; Jer. 30:7).
- d. The answer (vv. 4-5).** The same Savior who died for our sins arose from the dead and now intercedes for His people at the throne of God (Heb. 7:23-28). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). God’s reply to Satan’s accusation was to say to the angels before His throne, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” This is forgiveness.

- i. He gave a word of assurance to Joshua: “See, I have taken away your sin” (Zech. 3:4 NIV). Believers today know they are forgiven when they confess their sins, because they have the assurance of His promise. According to 1 John 1:9, God is not only faithful (to His promise), but He is also just (toward His Son) and will not condemn His people for sins for which His own Son had already been condemned.
  - ii. But God in His grace goes beyond forgiveness and clothes us in His own righteousness. “I will put rich garments on you” (Zech. 3:4 NIV). Adam and Eve tried to hide their guilt under garments of their own making (Gen. 3:7), but God killed animals and clothed them in skins (v. 21).
  - iii. Blood was shed that sin might be forgiven. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa. 6:10 NKJV; see Luke 15:22).
  - iv. The climax of the cleansing (forgiveness) and robing (righteousness in Christ, 2 Cor. 5:2) was the placing of the special turban on Joshua’s head, for the golden plate at the front of the turban was inscribed: HOLINESS TO THE LORD (Ex. 28:36-38; 39:30-31).
  - v. It was this that made him, the people, and their gifts, acceptable to the Lord. We have no righteousness of our own, but we come in the righteousness and merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior (1 Peter 2:5).
- e. **The assurance (vv. 6-7).** The Lord Jesus Christ gave a change to Joshua because cleansing and restoration always involve responsibility. Joshua and his fellow priests weren’t put on probation; they were cleansed and restored to service. But the continuation of their service depended on their faithfulness to the Lord and His Word. It’s a privilege to serve the Lord, and we must never take it for granted.
- i. “I will give you a place among these standing here” (Zech. 3:6 NIV) indicates that Joshua’s service was in cooperation with the angels of God! (See v. 4, “those that stood before him”). The angels are God’s servants, obeying His every command without fail, and God’s earthly servants are united with them in accomplishing His will.
  - ii. “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10 NKJV). God’s invisible messengers play a vital part in His plan both for Israel (Dan. 10:10-21; Matt. 24:31) and the church (Heb. 1:13-14).
- f. **The announcement (vv. 8-10).** This remarkable announcement to Joshua and his fellow priest focuses on Jesus Christ and presents three different images of the coming Messiah: The Priest, the Branch, and the Stone. Zechariah says more about the priest in (6:9-15), so we’ll save our detail study for that passage.
- i. The Branch is an image of the Messiah frequently found in the prophets (Isa. 11:1-2):
    - “My servant Branch” (Zech.3:8). “The Branch of the Lord” (Isa. 4:2).
    - “The Branch of righteousness “raised up for David (Jer. 23:5; 33:15), and “the man whose name is The Branch” (Zech. 6:12-13).
  - These four titles parallel four aspects of the person of Christ as seen in the four gospels:
    - Matthew, Gospel of the King, *Branch of righteousness for David*.
    - Mark, Gospel of the Servant, *My servant the Branch*.
    - Luke, Gospel of the Son of Man, *the man whose name is The Branch*.
    - John, Gospel of the Son of God, *The Branch of the Lord*.
  - ii. “The Stone” is another image of Messiah found often in Scripture, revealing several aspects of His ministry. Messiah is the cornerstone (Ps. 118:22-23; Matt. 21:42; Eph.

- 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:7). Other references a stone of stumbling (Isa. 8:14; 1 Peter 2:8; Rom. 9:32-33), the rejected stone (Ps. 118:22-23; Matt. 21:42), the smitten stone (Ex. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4), and the smiting stone (Dan. 2:34-35).
- iii. At His first advent, Jesus was stumbling stone to Israel who rejected Him, but He became the foundation stone for the Church.
  - iv. The seven “eyes” on the stone probably speak of our Lord’s omniscience (Zech. 4:10 NIV; Rev. 5:6).

The key message of this difficult verse is the removal of Israel’s sins in one day. This miracle of grace is described in Zechariah 5 and 12:10-13:1 and will be considered in later chapters. At the second advent, when Israel beholds the One whom they pierced (12:10), they will repent and be cleansed.

Resting under one’s vine and fig tree (Zech. 3:10) is an image of peace and security (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Kings 18:31; Mic. 4:4), something that Israel has always longed for but never found. Knowing that God would forgive and cleanse His people and restore the ministry of His priest must have encouraged Joshua greatly. In the next vision, God will encourage His servant Zerubbabel.

## **2. God Empowers His People for Service (4:1-14)**

The young prophet had seen four wonderful visions, and the experience had exhausted him. He fell asleep and had to be awakened by the “interpreting angel” before God could reveal the fifth vision to him. Seeing divine visions and understanding their meanings made Daniel very weary and like a man who was dumb and without strength (Dan. 10:18, 15-19). The flippant, jovial way some of God’s people speak of prophetic matters today makes us wonder if they have really seen what the Word of God communicates about the future.

### **a. The vision (vv. 1-3, 11-14).**

- In the holy place of the tabernacle, in front of the veil and to the left of the altar of incense, stood a golden candlestick with seven branches (Ex. 25:31-40). At the end of each branch was a golden lamp, and it was the high priest’s duty each morning and evening to trim the wicks and provide the oil needed to keep the lamp burning (Lev. 24:2-4).
- This candlestick provided light in the Holy Place so the priest could see to burn the incense on the golden altar each morning and evening (Ex. 30:7-8).
- The candlestick that Zechariah saw was totally unlike the one Moses had put in the tabernacle. Along with the seven branches and lamps, this candlestick had a bowl at the top into which olive oil dripped from two olive trees (Zech. 4:3), which symbolized Joshua and Zerubbabel (v.14). The candlestick had seven pipes going from the bowl to each lamp, making a total of forty-nine pipes.
- No priest had to provide oil because it was always coming from the trees.
- The lampstand in the tabernacle was symbolic of Messiah, the Light of the World (John 8:12), who one day would come and give the “light of life” to all who would trust Him. The light from the golden lampstand would shine on the table in the Holy Place (Ex. 25:30) and reveal the loaves of bread, Christ the Bread of Life (Ex. 25:30; John 6:33, 35, 48, 50-51).

- The tabernacle candlestick also spoke of the nation of Israel, the nation God had chosen to be the light in a spiritually dark world (Isa. 60:1-3; 62:1). (The seven-branched candlestick, the menorah, is the official symbol of the modern State of Israel.)
- Believers today must keep in mind that the church is a light in a dark world, and we must depend on the Holy Spirit to enable us to bear witness (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:14-16). In Revelation 1—3 local churches are symbolic by individual lampstands, and the purpose of a lampstand is to give light. If we don't do what Christ commands us to do, He may take away the lampstand (2:5).

**b. God provides the power (vv. 4-7a).**

- When Solomon built the temple that the Babylonians destroyed, he had almost unlimited resources at his disposal. His father, David, had fought many battles and collected spoil to be used in building the temple (1 Chron. 26:20, 27-28), but the remnant didn't have an army. Solomon was monarch of a powerful kingdom that ruled over many Gentile nations and took tribute from them, but the Jews in Zechariah's day had no such authority.
- That's why God said to them through His prophet, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zech. 4:6). The word *might* refers to military might. The word "*Power*" refers to the strength of the individual, but Zerubbabel's strength was no doubt wanting.
- "Don't be discouraged!" was the prophet's message. "The Spirit of God will enable us to do what the army could never do! (See Hag. 2:5 NIV).
- There are three ways we can attempt to do the work of God: We can trust our own strength and wisdom; we can borrow the resources of the world; or we can depend on the power of God. The first two approaches may appear to succeed, but they'll fail in the end. Only work done through the power of the Spirit will glorify God and endure the fires of His judgment (1 Cor. 3:12-15).
- With their limited resources, completing the temple must have looked to those Jews as impossible as moving a mountain, but God told Zerubbabel that he would, by God's power, level the mountain and make it a plain!
- What mountains was Zerubbabel facing? Discouragement among the people, opposition from the enemies around them, poor crops, an unstable economy, people not obeying God's law—problems not too different from those people of God have faced throughout the centuries. The answer to these problems is prayer that releases the Holy Spirit's power.
- When the early Christians faced problems, they turned to God in prayer, and He answered by giving them a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:23-31).

"We say we depend on the Holy Spirit," wrote Vance Havner, "but actually we are so wired up with our own devices that if the fire does not fall from heaven, we can turn on a switch and produce false fire of our own. If there is no sound of a rushing mighty wind, we have the furnace all set to blow hot air instead. God save us from a synthetic Pentecost!"

**c. God finishes His work (vv. 7b-10).** God assured Zerubbabel that he would complete the rebuilding of the temple and the people would rejoice at what God had done through them. Zerubbabel would "bring out the capstone [the last stone to be placed in the building] to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'" (Zech. 4-7b NIV).

- God gave a clear promise that Zerubbabel would complete the temple (Zech. 4:9), which reminds us of God's promise in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus

Christ” (NKJV). It also echoes David’s words to his son Solomon (See 1 Chron. 28:20 NKJV). To some of the Jews, the project was but a “small thing” (Zech. 4:10) in comparison to Solomon’s grand temple, but we must look at God’s work through His eyes and not the eyes of the people of the world.

- Great oaks grow out of small acorns and great harvests from small seeds. When Messiah came to earth, He was but “a shoot...from the stump of Jesse” (Isa. 11:1 NIV) and was “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3). The church began with 120 people and today ministers around the world (Acts 1:15).

Bible history is the record of God using small things. When God wanted to set the plan of salvation in motion, He started with a little baby named Isaac (Gen. 21). When He wanted to overthrow Egypt and set His people free, He used a baby’s tears (Ex. 2:1-10). He used a shepherd boy and a sling to defeat a giant (1 Sam. 17) and a little lad’s lunch to feed a multitude (John 6). Never despise the day of small things, for God is glorified in small things and uses them to accomplish great things.

- God and His servants must work together to accomplish His purposes. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil.2:13 NIV). God supplies His servants with the Spirit, and the people are encouraged as they see Zerubbabel on the job with the plumb line in his hand, making sure the walls are straight.
- While Zerubbabel is working, the eyes of the Lord are watching over His people and monitoring the nations of the earth. (The phrase “those seven” in Zech. 4:10 refers back to 3:9, the eyes of the Lord, meaning His omniscience.)
- The vision climaxes (4:14) with God calling Zerubbabel and Joshua “the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” What a noble title for His servants! As the two olive trees, Joshua and Zerubbabel received the empowering Spirit of God and kept the light of Israel’s work and witness burning.
- Oil is a general symbol for the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Prophets, priest, and kings were anointed with oil, and the word Messiah and Christ mean “anointed one.”

If our God is “Lord of all the earth,” what have we to fear? If He promises us the power of His Spirit, why should we falter and fail? Let’s remember Joshua and Zerubbabel, men who are encouragements to all who seek to serve the Lord in any way.

There are no “small places” or small ministries,” and there are no “big preachers.” But we do have a great God who can empower and bless servants who are dedicated to Him. He can cleanse us, and He can empower us, so let’s trust Him and do His work!

Homework: Read **Zechariah 5-6**. Study title: God and the Nations