

JULY 2019

TODAY IN THE WORD™



*“Return to me,” declares the LORD Almighty,
“and I will return to you.”*

Zechariah 1:3

ZECHARIAH: Return to the Lord

TODAY WITH MARK JOBE

President of Moody Bible Institute

Is Your God Too Small?



When our children were little, they would ask Dee and me some pretty deep theological questions: *How big is God? What does He look*

like? Because we wanted to be good parents and raise our children in the knowledge of the Lord, we would do our best to explain exactly who God is. I would tell them that God is bigger and more powerful than anything they could imagine: bigger than the tallest skyscraper, more powerful than their favorite super hero. And I would read to them from the Bible where Isaiah says God is so big He holds the oceans in the palm of His hand (Isa. 40:12).

Today, many people have an incorrect view of God. In their minds, they create an image of God they can shape and control. And this watered-down version of God seems ineffective in a world that seems to be spinning out of control.

When the people of Judah returned from 70 years of exile in Babylon, they were discouraged. The rebuilding of the temple seemed an impossible job. Their faith in God was weak. The prophet Zechariah wanted the returning remnant to remember who God was and that He had not forgotten them. No matter how

tough their struggles might have been, they were not beyond God's control. Zechariah describes God as one who "stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the human spirit within a person" (12:1). The Lord Almighty was sufficient.

You and I need that reminder as well. We can glimpse God's greatness through His attributes, revealed in His Word: **God is eternal**. "I am the Alpha and Omega", says the Lord God" (Rev. 1:8). There was no time when God did not exist. **God is immutable**, He can never change. You cannot improve on perfection. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). **God is omniscient**. He knows all things at all times. He knows the past, present, and future. God knows the desires of our heart and the mysteries of the universe. Nothing is beyond His understanding (Isa. 40:28). **God is sovereign**. God controls the entire universe (Col. 1:17). He is the storyteller of the past, the engineer of the present, and the architect of the future.

Zechariah proclaimed: "The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD Almighty is their God." (12:5). You and I can be strong and confident and have an unshakable hope for the future because the Lord Almighty is our God.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

The Holy City

Jerusalem is often called the “holy city.” What makes this particular city so special? It is because God chose to make Jerusalem His city. In Deuteronomy 12:5 the Lord promised Moses that He would choose a “place” among the tribes of Israel “to put his Name there for his dwelling.” This special place would become a center for worship, a place where God’s people would bring their burnt offerings, sacrifices, and tithes.

Before the construction of the temple, the tabernacle was this chosen place. All throughout Israel’s journey in the wilderness, the tabernacle traveled with God’s people. Its location at the very center of the camp signified God’s continued presence with them. When Israel settled in Canaan, the tabernacle resided in a variety of locations, first at Gilgal and later at Shiloh (Josh. 4:19; 18:1). After the Philistines destroyed the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant was eventually brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:1–17).

David made plans to build a temple for the ark. The location for its construction, on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, was revealed to David by the angel of the Lord (2 Sam. 24:18). Many Bible scholars believe this mysterious figure was the Lord Jesus

Christ. Considering this view, Jesus’ words to the woman of Samaria in John 4:21 seem especially significant. When she asked where people should worship God, Jesus replied, “Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.”

Does this mean God has lost interest in Jerusalem? Not at all! The Bible says that after His second coming Jesus will reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4–6).

When the new heavens and earth are created, New Jerusalem will also come down out of Heaven from God (Rev. 3:12; 21:12). Not only will this be a city fit for the King but also the city God has specially prepared for the saints. The New Jerusalem will not have a temple because it is where God Himself will dwell with His people. God’s people will be its temple (Rev. 21:22). It will be a city without death or tears (Rev. 21:3–4). ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more about the New Jerusalem, read *Answers to the Most Important Questions About the End Times* by Dr. John Hart (Bethany House).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

Meet This Month's Devotional Writer: Dr. John Koessler



John Koessler, professor of Pastoral Studies at Moody Bible Institute, recently celebrated his 25th year as a member

of the Moody faculty. Originally from the Detroit, Michigan area, John and his wife, Jane, now live in northwestern Indiana. They have two adult sons. Writer, teacher, and pastor, John writes devotionals for Today in the Word, authors the "Theology Matters" column every month, and serves as our theological editor. His latest book is Practicing the Present: The Neglected Art of Living in the Now (Moody Publishers). Read more of John's writing at johnkoessler.com.

If you had to pick a favorite, what course do you enjoy teaching the most?

Two courses stand out. In Pastoral Theology I get to lay the foundation for the next generation of the church's pastors. In another favorite course on congregational dynamics, I help future pastors understand why churches behave the way they do.

Is there a teacher who has influenced you as a lifelong student of the Bible?

I have been shaped by all the pastors

I've sat under over the years. Each one has left a mark on me and influenced the way that I lead and teach others to pastor. I've also been deeply affected by the writing of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

What did you find especially meaningful while writing this month's study on Zechariah?

I was impressed by God's abiding love for His people Israel. His faithfulness to them both in the past and the future gives me assurance that He will be faithful in His promises to me.

If I wanted to go deeper with this month's study, what resources would you recommend?

Two resources that I found helpful are Joyce Baldwin's commentary on Zechariah (IVP) and, of course, *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Moody Publishers). Both give a concise and scholarly treatment of the book.

Do you have a favorite hymn?

Jane and I had "Be Thou My Vision" sung at our wedding. It reflects the theme of our lives. The hymn writer says: *Thou and Thou only, first in my heart / High King of Heaven my treasure Thou art.* We want Christ to be first in our hearts. ■

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Zechariah: Return to the Lord

With so many distractions and voices in the world, and even in the church, that lead us away from communion with God, no wonder He often seems distant and silent. Sometimes we wish there were a direct phone line to call Him, a 1-800-number for God. But if we look in the Bible, we'll see that this line exists. The psalmist reveals to us his 1-800-line to God: prayer. "I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer" (Psalm 17:6).

The prophet Zechariah also showed the people of Israel the way back to God: repentance, rebuilding the temple, prayer. As we study the book of Zechariah with *Today in the Word* this month, we'll notice that it's full of consolation, hope, and encouragement. Even the name of the prophet, which means "Yahweh remembers," provides comfort.

Our prayer is that the words of Zechariah—describing the Lord's love for His people and the wonderful prophecies of Christ's coming—will rekindle the reality of God's presence in your life. And if God at times seems silent to you, may these words of one Bible scholar encourage you: "I have moments in prayer when I lose heart, I know . . . I misinterpret the silence on the other end of the line. In reality it is the silence of presence . . . Silence is a mark of someone who is listening carefully." ■

—Elena Mafter, Senior Editor

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MONDAY
JULY

1

*Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate.*

Joel 2:13

Return to the Lord

Many drivers rely on the help of a GPS (Global Positioning System) device to get to their destination. The beauty of this technology is that it adapts to your mistakes. When you make a wrong turn, it tells you what you need to do to return to the right path. The Bible does the same for us. When we stray from God's path, it shows us what steps we need to take to return to the right one. The Bible is the primary tool God's Spirit uses to keep us on track in our daily lives.

This month we will study the book of Zechariah. Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai and ministered to the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Zechariah's grandfather Iddo was among those exiles who returned with Joshua and Zerubbabel. By the time Zechariah began his prophetic ministry,

the building project had ground to a halt. Delayed by opposition from enemies and the demands of day-to-day living, the returning exiles had become more concerned with their own affairs than with God. For this reason, the book begins with an appeal to those who had returned to Jerusalem to return to the Lord as well (v. 3).

Zechariah's opening prophecy reminds us of the need to serve God from the heart. Even when we follow the rules, our hearts may be disengaged (Mark 7:6–8). Sometimes, like the returned exiles, we may substitute God's priorities with our own. We can be very religious and still be far from God. Staying on the right path isn't just about following the rules. It begins with the heart. When our hearts go wrong, our lives will not be far behind.

APPLY THE WORD

As we begin this month's study, take stock of your heart. Is it in the right place? This is probably not a determination you can make on your own. Proverbs 21:2 warns: "A person may think their own ways are right, but the LORD weighs the heart." Ask God to use His Word to reveal the state of your heart.

PRAY WITH US

Please keep in your prayers the MBI trustees who serve Moody with dedication, wisdom, and commitment. We thank God for their leadership! May they continue to follow the Lord's guidance in their service.

How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?

Psalm 13:1

Waiting for God

Does it seem like you are always waiting in line? It may not be your imagination. Some studies report that the average person spends about two years of their life waiting in line. Delays can make us feel anxious or even angry, especially when we are waiting for God.

Waiting is also the theme of the vision described in today's passage. This is the first of eight visions which comprise almost half the book. The visions came to Zechariah during the night (v. 8). The Bible does not call them dreams even though the prophet may have been asleep. Zechariah's inaugural vision was of a "man" on a red horse standing among myrtle trees in a ravine with three other groups of horses. According to verse 11, this "man" was the "angel of the LORD," a figure many scholars consider to be the pre-incarnate Christ. Although the text does not say that the

other horses had riders, the explanation of their mission suggests that they were mounted. Verse 9 also indicates there was another angel who interpreted the vision for Zechariah.

After being sent throughout the earth, the riders return and report that they found "the whole world at rest and in peace" (v. 11). To most people these words might sound like good news, but they meant that those who oppressed God's people did so unchecked.

The cry of the angel of the Lord in verse 12 is often echoed in the Psalms. More than a question, it is an appeal to God for deliverance. The Lord responded with words of assurance and comfort. Although God had used the nations to discipline His people, they too would be held accountable for their sin (v. 15). Jerusalem would be restored (v. 17).

APPLY THE WORD

We often wait for others because they are not perfect. A clerk, for example, is able to deal only with one person at a time. Our doctor may be uncertain of the right diagnosis. Waiting for God, however, is usually a matter of timing. God has not forgotten you. When the time is right, He will act according to His perfect plan.

PRAY WITH US

As we pray for Moody's president, Dr. Mark Jobe, we ask God to keep sharpening his spiritual focus for the future of Moody and show him the best course for our three main areas of ministry: education, radio, and publishing.

WEDNESDAY
JULY

3

The LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.

Deuteronomy 20:4

Mighty Is the Lord

Protestant reformer Martin Luther stood before the greatest powers of his day to defend the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone. His opponents used intimidation and threats in their attempt to persuade Luther to back down. “Of whom shall I be afraid?” Luther responded. “One with God is a majority.”

Zechariah’s second vision had to do with horns (v. 18). These were not musical instruments but animal horns, like those of a bull. Horns sometimes appear in Scripture as a symbol of power. They can represent nations or those who rule. Horns were also a common feature in ancient architecture and design. The sacrificial altar in Jerusalem had horns (Ex. 29:12; 1 Kings 1:51).

The prophet also saw four craftsmen (v. 20). The Hebrew term can refer to

many kinds of work. It could be used to speak of someone who works with metal, stone, or wood. The craftsmen were God’s agents employed by Him to defeat the powers. The number four in each case is probably not specific. It seems unlikely this prophecy was referring to four particular leaders or four specific servants of God who would oppose them, instead, it is a general promise of ultimate victory.

This vision not only promises that God will be victorious in the end but also reminds us that God works through His servants. In the New Testament, those who serve God are also called “workers” (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1; Phil. 4:3). God often exercises His power through human agents. You may feel insignificant. However, if you belong to Jesus Christ, you are God’s agent.

APPLY THE WORD

If you find it difficult to share the hope of Christ with others, remember that when you talk about Christ with someone, you are not alone. You are God’s agent. He displays His power through your life and your words. The next time you feel nervous before talking to someone about Christ, remember that one with God is a majority!

PRAY WITH US

Pray for Moody Distance Learning’s instructional quality team—Doug Murphy, Andrew Beaty, Troy Dueck, Nicholas Moon, Madeline Seghers, and Tyrome Turner—as they launch and oversee online courses, as well as Moody’s accreditation reporting and assessment.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.

Revelation 21:15

God's Measuring Line

The Weights and Measures Division of the US government works to promote uniformity and accuracy. It is easy to see how important weights and measures are to commerce, but accurate measurements are also important for builders. A common proverb among carpenters advises, "Measure twice and cut once."

Zechariah's third of eight visions was of a man with a measuring line (we would probably call it a measuring tape today). His mission was to measure Jerusalem (v. 2). As soon as this divinely appointed surveyor set out, the interpreting angel ordered Zechariah to run after him with a message about Jerusalem's future. The scope of God's promise extends far beyond the immediate project of rebuilding the temple to the Messianic kingdom. They are promises of restoration and peace. They also include an invitation to those who remained in Babylon

to flee to Jerusalem (vv. 6–7). Israel's enemies were God's enemies (vv. 7–9). He would raise His hand against those who laid their hand upon "the apple of his eye." Two of the promises are of special interest to the church. One is the promise of God's presence in verse 10. This promise will be completely fulfilled when the New Jerusalem descends from heaven (Rev. 21:2). The other promise is that the nations will be included among God's people (v. 11). This promise foreshadowed the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles.

The prophet's words are a reminder that the hope of Jerusalem is also the hope of the church. Through Christ, those who otherwise would have remained outsiders to the promises of God can be included (Eph. 2:12). Just as Abraham did, they can become friends of God by faith (Rom. 4:16). The church's Savior is also Israel's promised Messiah.

APPLY THE WORD

God is still deeply interested in Jerusalem. Psalm 122:6–7 tells us how we can pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." Spend some time asking God for His peace to rule in your life and in our world.

PRAY WITH US

Pray with us for Moody students as they celebrate today's 4th of July holiday with family and friends. We also thank our donors who give toward student tuition so these men and women can be free to follow God's calling.

FRIDAY
JULY

5

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?

Micah 7:18

Cleansed by God

Some people (often single males), rely on the “sniff test” to ascertain whether their clothes are clean enough to wear. According to *Reader’s Digest*, 70 percent of the soil on your clothing is invisible. Your clothes may look clean, but they still need to be washed. Even if they pass the sniff test!

Zechariah’s fourth vision involved the high priest Joshua. He had been the high priest sixteen years earlier when the exiles returned from captivity in Babylon. In a shocking image, Zechariah saw Joshua clothed in priestly garments spattered with human excrement. Satan stood on his right side to accuse him. This picture probably did not reflect Joshua’s personal character so much as it portrayed the condition of those he represented (v. 8). It is certainly true that even the works of God’s best servants are flawed by sin. In a way, this disturbing portrait of Joshua is a picture of us as well. However, in a

beautifully symbolic act, the interpreting angel commanded that Joshua’s filthy garments be replaced and announced that his sin was forgiven (vv. 4–5).

This vision not only anticipates the gospel’s promise of a new nature but also foreshadows the coming of the great high priest Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews describes the problem faced by Israel’s ordinary priests. Every priest was a sinner just like those he represented. The high priest had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins, as well as the sins of the people (Heb. 5:3). But Jesus Christ had no sin (John 8:46). Because of this, He was able to be both the perfect High Priest and the perfect sacrifice when He sacrificed Himself “once for all” (Heb. 7:27). This transforming power of Christ’s forgiveness is compared to a change of clothes in several places in the New Testament (Rom. 13:13–14; Eph. 4:22–25; Col. 3:10–12).

APPLY THE WORD

Every time you wash your hands or change your clothes, remember today’s lesson. When you trust in Christ, you are clothed in His righteousness! Like Joshua in Zechariah’s vision, you must receive this gift from Christ Himself. Once you receive His righteousness, make a daily choice to live in its power. Take off the old ways and put on the new.

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer Samuel Choy, chief marketing officer, as he heads Moody’s strategic marketing initiatives and expands the ways we interact with the local communities and public at large.

After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

Galatians 3:3

By My Spirit

In April, a fire ravaged the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris. The Gothic cathedral, which began construction in 1163, took nearly 300 years to be complete. Compared to this, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem might seem relatively brief. However, discouragement can make even the most worthwhile effort seem to drag.

Rebuilding the temple began in 536 BC. When the foundation for the new temple was laid, some of the returned exiles who could still remember Solomon's temple viewed it with contempt. They considered the dimensions of this new project to be "nothing" compared to the old temple (Hag. 2:3). It was delayed for fourteen years due to opposition from Gentiles who lived in the region.

Zechariah's fifth vision may have been aimed at this discouragement. Zechariah saw a vision of a solid gold candlestick and two olive trees. The candlestick

or lampstand was similar to the seven-branched lampstand in the tabernacle. It likely represented the rebuilding of the temple. The two olive trees probably symbolized those who led the rebuilding effort, Zerubbabel and Joshua. The angel's interpretation began with encouragement to Zerubbabel and then identified the two olive trees as "the two who are anointed to serve the LORD of all the earth" (Zech. 4:14).

The angel's exhortation to Zerubbabel seems to be pointed at those who complained that the new temple was "nothing" compared to Solomon's: "Who dares despise the day of small things, since the seven eyes of the LORD that range throughout the earth will rejoice when they see the chosen capstone in the hand of Zerubbabel?" (v. 10). Two witnesses also appear in Revelation 11:3–12, and it may be to them that the prophecy ultimately points.

APPLY THE WORD

God's great building project was not limited to Zerubbabel's temple. He continues to build the church today (Matt. 16:18). We may feel that our contribution to the church amounts to nothing. But we should not underestimate what God's Spirit can do through our willingness. Consider how God can use you to serve His people in the body of Christ.

PRAY WITH US

Please pray for the Event Marketing and Management team: Mary Chapman Deas, Anna Gonzalez, Daniel Fleming, Lauren Cuevas, and Scott Johnson. Their ministry helps create a warm, hospitable environment for hundreds of visitors.

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer.

Ephesians 4:28

The Importance of Honesty

Most people don't consider themselves to be dishonest. Yet, researchers found that workplace theft is surprisingly common. One survey released in 2013 revealed that most employees stole from the retail and service companies that employed them. Some of those thefts might not be what you'd expect. For example, many employees claimed they worked longer than they actually did. Others stole supplies. Theft can even be a problem for those who claim to be followers of Jesus. The apostle Paul felt it necessary to remind Ephesian believers that they must not steal (Eph. 4:28).

Dishonesty was also a problem in Zechariah's day. The sixth vision warned of impending judgment. Zechariah saw a huge scroll which displayed several unusual features. For one thing, instead of being rolled up and resting on a table, it was

unrolled and floating in mid-air. The physical dimensions of the scroll were unexpectedly large. The scroll had writing on two sides (v. 3). One side condemned those who stole and the other side condemned those who gave false testimony. Both sins were included in the Ten Commandments, suggesting the scroll could represent the Law as a whole.

The threat of banishment was a kind of promise. Zechariah's prophecy not only served as a warning to those who ignored God's Law but also pictured a time when those who persist in sin would be excluded from the land. The God of grace who invites us to come back to Him in repentance is also a God of justice. Those who refuse His grace opt for judgment. Sin is never a purely private matter. It always has an effect on the community as a whole (v. 3).

APPLY THE WORD

Sometimes we are too lenient with ourselves. Do not let God's grace make you complacent about your own sin. Take a moment to ask God to reveal areas in your life that need change. Christ's blood has purchased forgiveness for you. Confess your sins today, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you power over them.

PRAY WITH US

Would you support in prayer Moody's senior vice president of Media, Greg Thornton? Today, ask the Lord to bless Greg and the teams he leads at our media ministries: Moody Radio and Moody Publishers.

I know your deeds.

Revelation 3:15

MONDAY
JULY

8

The Danger of Harboring Sin

It seems that most dieters underestimate their weight. The opposite happens with people who suffer from anorexia. They tend to see themselves as heavier than they are. Something similar happens when it comes to how we view our own sin. Sometimes we underestimate our sinfulness. We downplay or excuse our sinful actions, concluding that they are not really as bad as they actually are. Or we overestimate our righteousness, incorrectly concluding that the good things we have done far offset the bad.

The vision of the flying scroll gave way to the even stranger sight of a woman stuffed into an ephah, which was a basket or barrel normally used for measuring grain. Zechariah's seventh vision reinforced the message of the floating scroll. As shown throughout Scripture, God has promised to deal with sin. The angel explained that the

woman represented “the iniquity of the people throughout the land” (v. 6). After being stuffed down into the basket, the woman was carried off by two winged creatures to Babylonia.

Were these figures angels or something else? The fact that they had wings like a stork seems to identify them with iniquity. In the Law of Moses, storks were listed among the “detestable” animals that could not be eaten (Lev. 11:13, 19). Their actions seem to preserve iniquity rather than eliminate its presence. They transported the basket to “the country of Babylonia” (v. 11). The Hebrew text says they took the basket to Shinar, the original location of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). The tower was an act of rebellion against God, an example of worldliness and false worship. The “house” mentioned in today's passage (v. 11) may be a place of worship.

APPLY THE WORD

When we harbor sin, it can take hold in our lives. We may even nurture sin by giving it a special, secretive place in our lives. Every sin is a kind of false worship. When we yield to sin, we give preference to it over God. Once again, ask God to bring your sins to mind, then confess those sins to Him.

PRAY WITH US

Your prayers will be an encouragement to the staff of WKES, Moody Radio's station in Florida: Andrew Leuthold, John Blok, Kate Bruington, Kurt Goff, and Pierre Chestang. May God's love always shine through their programs!

TUESDAY
JULY

9

*He makes his angels spirits,
and his servants flames of fire.*

Hebrews 1:7

The Lord's Army

Society may be getting more secular, but angels have nothing to fear from this trend. A majority of Americans believes that angels exist. According to one poll, 88 percent of Christians, 95 percent of evangelicals, and even a majority of those who consider themselves to be non-religious believe in angels.

Today's passage features what might be called an angel army. In his eighth vision, Zechariah saw four chariots drawn by horses. The chariots were positioned between "two mountains of bronze" as the horses strained against their reins (v. 1). The mountains are not identified. Some scholars speculate that they represent Mount Moriah and the Mount of Olives. However, the description seems to emphasize their nature rather than their location. The chief characteristic of bronze is strength or hardness. Bronze was used in biblical times to make weapons and shields (1 Sam. 17:5–6; 2 Sam. 22:35).

The chariots were drawn by horses of various colors. There is a similar scene in Revelation 6, where four riders are sent out on horses of various colors. When Zechariah asks the meaning of his vision, the interpreting angel tells him: "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the LORD of the whole world" (v. 5). They are angelic beings sent from God's to patrol the earth.

The chariot drawn by black horses was sent north to Babylon. Although the NIV translation says the chariot drawn by white horses went toward the west, many scholars think that in Hebrew it means they went after the black horses. The chariot drawn by dappled horses went south towards Egypt. The command of verse 7 could mean that the chariot drawn by red horses roamed throughout the earth.

APPLY THE WORD

Zechariah's vision is an encouraging reminder of God's power and involvement in our world. Although we cannot always see what He is doing, God is moving to further His plans. Bring before Him today your concerns about the world, whether big or small. Ask Him to open your eyes to see how He is shaping your circumstances today.

PRAY WITH US

Would you pray for the ministry of Jim Elliott, vice president of Stewardship at Moody? Ask for God's wisdom as he coordinates the work of the Stewardship branch and cares for the many friends who support Moody's ministry.

*His eyes are like blazing fire,
and on his head are many crowns.*

Revelation 19:12

WEDNESDAY
JULY

10

Crown Him Lord of All

On June 2, 1953, Queen Elizabeth was crowned in Westminster Abbey. The crown, which dates back to 1661, was solid gold. It weighed over four pounds. The Queen also held a golden globe wrapped by a band encrusted with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and pearls topped with a large amethyst.

Today's passage also describes a coronation. Scholars disagree about whether it describes an actual event or it was another vision. However, the opening formula in verse 9 sets it apart from the previous eight visions. The mention of specific individuals seems to imply that Zechariah was talking about something that actually took place. Even if this was a historical event, it had symbolic significance.

The precious metals brought by Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah were probably

originally intended for the reconstruction of the temple. Instead, Zechariah was told to take them to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah and fashion a crown out of them. The implication is that Josiah was a smelter or craftsman equipped to work with gold and silver. Joshua was a surprising candidate for this honor since he was a priest.

If this had been an ordinary coronation, we might expect the crown to go to Zerubbabel, because he was heir to the throne of Judah and the appointed governor. Joshua is a picture of the Messianic king. He is called the "Branch," a Hebrew word that means "shoot" or "sprout" (v. 12). The same word appears in the Messianic promise of Jeremiah 23:5–6. We might think of this event as a dress rehearsal for the coronation of King Jesus!

APPLY THE WORD

Today, let's pay respect to our King! Honor Jesus as your King by singing or listening to the hymn "Crown Him With Many Crowns." You can easily find this hymn on Spotify, Google Play, Apple iTunes, or in your favorite hymnal. If you have children, have them fashion a crown out of construction paper and tell them about King Jesus.

PRAY WITH US

Paul Santhouse, vice president of Moody Publishers is in our prayers today. We thank God for Paul's faithful, consistent leadership and pray that God would continue to lead him in developing the Moody Publishers' vision.

THURSDAY
JULY

11

You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Isaiah 58:4

False Fasting

If you have ever fasted, you know it's not easy. Now it is done for a wide variety of reasons. Many of us have fasted for a medical test. The Christian practice of fasting is intended to focus our mind and heart on God.

In today's Scripture reading, fasting was the concern of a delegation sent to the prophet from Bethel (v. 1). The people of Bethel had regularly been fasting for many years and wanted to know if they should continue. The practice of fasting in the fifth month was linked to the destruction of the temple (2 Kings 25:8–9; Jer. 52:12). Now that a new temple was under construction, they wanted to know if this observance was still necessary. Perhaps they felt it was no longer appropriate.

The question itself betrays a measure of impatience, as if the people were saying: "How long do we need to keep doing this?" The Lord's response

through the prophet came in the form of a series of questions (vv. 5–6), implying a lack of sincerity in people's practices. The Lord's rebuke makes it clear that religious rituals and practices are no substitute for genuine righteousness. There is an echo of Isaiah 58:2–14 in the Lord's response. Notice that He does not answer their specific question in these verses. The answer will come in chapter 8, but first He addressed the attitude of their hearts.

We can be so caught up in the details of our religious practices that we lose sight of God. Observances that are meant to honor Him can be degraded by selfishness, compartmentalizing, and perfunctory obedience that do not engage the heart. In his response to the delegation from Bethel, Zechariah noted that empty religious observance was one of the factors that led to exile in the first place. Circumstances had changed, but apparently, some hearts had not.

APPLY THE WORD

Can you think of a religious observance that too easily loses its meaning? The prophet's response focuses on two key areas that contribute to this problem: wrong motives and hypocrisy. To test a practice, we can ask ourselves two questions: **Am I doing this for myself or for the Lord? Is it reflected in the way I treat others?**

PRAY WITH US

Would you lift up in prayer Moody Publishers' marketing team for the next three days? Pray that marketing and promotional efforts of Grace Park, Ashley Torres, and Janis Todd will bring the Word of God and proclaim a biblical worldview to our culture.

*For we are co-workers in God's service;
you are God's field, God's building.*

1 Corinthians 3:9

FRIDAY
JULY

12

Rebuilding the Temple

Building projects can be hazardous to church leaders! The danger doesn't come from falling bricks or loose boards but from discouragement. About 20 percent of pastors who lead their church through a construction program leave within two years of its completion. There may be good reasons for this. New circumstances in the church may require a different kind of leader. But it is also possible that the pastor has just grown weary in well doing.

As God continued to answer the question posed by the delegation from Bethel, He painted a picture of a restored city and renewed zeal for the rebuilding of the temple. The book of Zechariah began with this invitation: "Return to me," declares the LORD Almighty, "and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty" (Zech. 1:3). In today's passage, the Lord assures that

He will make good on this promise (v. 3). God not only set the conditions of return but also promised to change the hearts of His people so they would respond to His invitation.

One of the greatest challenges God's people faced was the size of the task. The exiles were scattered and often marginalized. Resources were limited. Their surrounding neighbors were hostile. These problems looked very different to God. In verse 6 the Lord asks, "It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?" The implied answer is "No!" The Hebrew word "marvelous" expresses the idea of something beyond one's ability. What seemed beyond their capabilities was not beyond God's. The same is true for us. God's power is far greater than our problems. His plans for us exceed our greatest longings.

APPLY THE WORD

Are you facing a situation that seems beyond your ability today? Why not take a sticky note and write on it: *He is more than able!* (Eph. 3:20). Place it where you can see it several times a day. Is your church going through a building project or renovation? You might also take a moment to pray for your pastor.

PRAY WITH US

Again, Moody Publishers marketing staff is the focus of our prayers. Thank God today for the service of Jeremy Slager, Zack Williamson, and Kathryn Eastham, as they bring information about Moody's publishing ministry to the public.

SATURDAY
JULY

13

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Genesis 12:3

Faithful Hearts and Strong Hands

Marsha was a great organizer in the church. She had a knack for getting people involved. Whenever she made a plea for help from the congregation, she always quoted the same proverb: “Many hands make light work.”

As Zechariah continued to respond to the question raised by the delegation from Bethel, he moved from promise to exhortation: “Let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built” (v. 9). The command echoed what the prophets had said at the beginning of the project. Haggai, in particular, urged God’s people not to be afraid, calling upon them to “be strong” (Hag. 2:4). The incentive was the certainty of God’s presence. Similar promises were given to another Joshua, Moses’ successor, at the start of his ministry: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go”

(Josh. 1:9). Christ makes the same promise to His church (Matt. 28:20). The promise of God’s presence is a reminder that our strength comes not from ourselves but from God. Those who do not feel strong can still be strong because the power resides with God.

The returned exiles of Zechariah’s day had even more incentive to work since the Lord promised a reversal of conditions. Many of the hardships that plagued those who had begun the work had ended or were about to end. Circumstances had improved, but that may have been part of the problem. Improved conditions led to distraction. Some may have forgotten how to sacrifice. The final two verses of today’s reading signal a reversal of the conditions that were a result of the Babylonian captivity. They describe the age of comfort declared by the prophet Isaiah and the end of Israel’s “hard service” (Isa. 40:1–2).

APPLY THE WORD

You can be a blessing today! The promise that God’s people would be a “blessing” among the nations goes all the way back to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). Consider a way you can be a blessing to someone who does not know Christ. Your unexpected act of kindness may help them see Jesus!

PRAY WITH US

Concluding our prayer time for Moody Publishers marketing, please add Kevin Utecht, Rachel Kawate, and Siripayaree Chammavanijakul to your prayer list. May the Lord bless their advertising and publicity ministry.

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

1 John 3:11

SUNDAY
JULY

14

Righteousness and Justice

It seems like more people than ever before are talking about justice. Once the province of social activists, a few religious leaders, and some politicians, justice is now a primary concern for many. But what exactly do we mean by the word? Everybody agrees that justice is important. We do not agree on what justice should look like in practice.

Justice was a major concern in Zechariah's day too. In today's passage, the Lord provides a snapshot of what justice should look like among God's people. First of all, justice is grounded in truth (v. 16). Acts of injustice are always rooted in deceit. This emphasis on truth is coupled with a command to "render true and sound judgment in your courts." True justice is impossible in a culture that does not value truth. Perhaps this is why the injunction about giving false testimony against your neighbor is included in the Ten

Commandments (Ex. 20:16). Although the primary context of this command may be legal, it also has implications for ordinary relationships. A community that thrives on gossip will never be a just community. Even in those few instances where gossip is not an exaggeration or outright falsehood, it aims to condemn rather than correct. Biblical truth, on the other hand, is always motivated by love (Eph. 4:15).

The third mark of justice is relational. Those who are committed to justice will not "plot evil against each other" (v. 17). This command is all about intent. Those who value biblical justice not only look out for their interests, they also seek after the well-being of others (Phil. 2:4). The fourth mark, a hatred of false swearing, may seem out of place in this list or at least redundant. However, false swearing isn't only about the truth. It is about keeping our commitments.

APPLY THE WORD

How do you live out God's value of justice? Jesus captured the way we are to practice justice in a single command: loving your neighbor as yourself. "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Consider how you can live justly today.

PRAY WITH US

Amanda Cleary and Connor Sterchi of the Moody Publishers editorial department appreciate your prayers for God's grace and guidance as they work with authors, helping them develop ideas and edit their manuscripts.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Michael Rydelnik, Professor of Jewish Studies and *Open Line* Host

Q **With so many versions of the Bible, how do I know which is the right or best one?**

A The most important issue in choosing a translation of the Bible is to find the one you will enjoy reading and understanding. It may be helpful to know two basic approaches to translation. The first approach uses *formal equivalence*, translating in a word for word or literal way (New American Standard Version, English Standard Version). But since the Bible was written in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, this approach sometimes produces a clunky translation that doesn't always capture the correct meaning of ancient idioms.

The second approach is called *dynamic equivalence* (New Living Translation, New International Version), translating thought for thought, bringing figures of speech into modern language, and making the text clear and readable. The downside is that it may be more difficult to assess the original author's meaning.

There is another method which tries to strike a middle road (Christian Standard Bible, Tree of Life Version). Such translations are generally more readable. For Bible study, I suggest using a formal equivalence translation; for fast reading, I would use dynamic equivalence. For my personal Bible

reading and study, I find the combination of both approaches most helpful.

Q **According to Genesis 2:2, God blessed the seventh day and set it apart. Shouldn't we be worshipping on Saturday, not Sunday?**

A People often wonder whether Sabbath worship is still required by God. Even though the Sabbath was mentioned in the creation story (Gen. 2:2), the Sabbath command was not a creation ordinance. God ceased His creative activity on the seventh day and set it apart, but He did not command His people to keep the Sabbath at that time.

The first time we see the Sabbath presented as a command is after Israel's Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 16:23–26) with the 10 Commandments (Ex. 20:8–11). Just as the rainbow was an outward sign of God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:12–17) and circumcision of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:11), the Sabbath was a sign of the Mosaic covenant. In Exodus 31:13, God commanded the Israelites: "You must observe My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between me and you for the generations to come."

When Jesus came, His followers no longer had to live according to the Mosaic Law; they were under the New Covenant. In Hebrews 8:13 (TLV), the

Although Christians are no longer under the Law of Moses, we shouldn't disregard it.

author declares: "He has treated the first as old; but what is being made old and aging is close to vanishing." Paul describes the Mosaic Law as "chiseled in letters on stone" (2 Cor. 3:7), a reference to the Ten Commandments. He says their glory is "fading away," and the New Covenant, which endures, is even "more glorious" (2 Cor. 3:11).

How does this affect our view of the Sabbath? First, we are not required to worship on the seventh day. The Sabbath command is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the New Covenant. However, this does not mean we don't need a day of rest and worship. Although Christians are no longer under the Law of Moses, we shouldn't disregard it. It is God's Word. Clearly, God commanded His people to take one day a week for physical rest and spiritual renewal. We should continue to do so, it just doesn't have to be on the seventh day.

Q Since Jesus was raised from the dead on a Sunday morning, hasn't Sunday become the correct day of worship for Christians?

A There are only three New Testament passages which seem to make the case for Sunday worship. But a close examination shows that none of them

supports this answer. First, Acts 20:7 describes Paul's farewell meeting with the people of Troas: "On the first day of the week, we assembled to break bread." Although they met on the first day of the week, there is no mention of it being their regular worship time. Also, there is no command to worship on the first day.

Second, Paul tells the Corinthians to put aside money "on the first day of the week" for the offering (1 Cor. 16:2). He wasn't talking about an offering during Sunday worship or even a public meeting. He used the phrase *par heauto* (commonly translated "each of you") literally meaning "by himself, in his home" to encourage the Corinthians not to wait until the end of the week.

Finally, John speaks of being in the Spirit "on the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10). Most likely it means John received his vision on "a day filled with the Lord." It may also refer to "the day of the Lord," describing John's vision in the book of Revelation. What it *doesn't* mean is that this day is Sunday.

The New Testament gives a great deal of freedom to choose on which day to worship. The great news is that we are able to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every day. ■

MONDAY
JULY

15

You turned my wailing into dancing.

Psalm 30:11

From Fasting to Feasting

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a diagnosis often given to those who experience a wide range of reactions after going through a tragedy, disaster, or terrifying event. Those who suffer from PTSD can spend years dealing with the consequences of a traumatic event and must often seek counseling.

No doubt, those who returned to Jerusalem from exile had trouble adjusting to their new circumstances. For seventy years they had grieved over the destruction of the temple. The first years for those who had come back continued to be difficult. However, things were about to change. In Zechariah 8:18–23 we finally come to the specific answer to the question that had been asked by the delegation from Bethel (see July 11). They had wanted to know if they should continue fasting. Today’s passage reveals the answer: yes. But instead of being an

act of mourning, their fast would be transformed into a celebration (v. 19).

Isaiah 58:5 describes the tone of most fasting in biblical times. Fasting was often an expression of repentance. Those who practiced fasting sometimes wore sackcloth and ashes, typically associated with mourning. Zechariah predicted that fasts previously associated with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple would become “joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah.” The Lord promised that Jerusalem’s renewed growth was not over. Jerusalem would become a magnet for all those who sought the Lord (vv. 22–23). These promises will find their ultimate fulfillment when Jesus reigns as King in Jerusalem. But we don’t need to wait until that time to celebrate. Every time we observe the Lord’s Supper, we anticipate the coming of the kingdom.

APPLY THE WORD

Romans 12:15 urges: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” We should not be ashamed to do either. Both actions are an appropriate part of worship depending upon the circumstance. Do you have a reason to rejoice today? Give thanks to the Lord and celebrate. Are you grieving? Pour your heart out to the Lord.

PRAY WITH US

Please commit to prayer today the ministry of Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of Moody Theological Seminary. We praise God for MTS—a great opportunity for students to use its various flexible formats to receive the graduate education.

The wicked go down to the realm of the dead, all the nations that forget God.

Psalms 9:17

TUESDAY
JULY

16

Judgment on the Nations

A popular Christian radio station advertises itself as “positive” and “encouraging.” A majority of contemporary worship songs are upbeat. Many churches advertise themselves as “the friendly church.” None of this is necessarily bad. Visitors might hesitate to try a church that promises, “We will make you miserable!” However, for the nations that reject God, today’s prophecy is anything but encouraging.

The third major division of the book of Zechariah opens with a series of threats aimed at nations and cities that had shown hostility toward Jerusalem. Such threats may seem uncharacteristic of God to modern worshipers who have only heard upbeat preaching that promises to bless. But we should remember the promise to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed

through you” (Gen. 12:3). Modern readers, especially those unfamiliar with biblical history, may be tempted to view these judgments through the lens of nationalism or ethnic prejudice. However, verse 8 makes it clear that they reflect divine justice. They focus on those who practice oppression. There is grace as well as judgment in the verses. According to verse 7, Israel’s ancient enemies, the Philistines, would eventually be incorporated into the people of God. This promise foreshadows the wonderful truth which is spelled out more explicitly in the New Testament: God’s grace of forgiveness is available to both Jew and Gentile.

The church’s desire to make everyone feel happy and comfortable is understandable. But it may also be doing a disservice to those who need to remember judgment. Judgment is consistent with its offer of grace and forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Take a few moments today to consider the heavy weight of your sin and the tremendous gift you have been given through Christ’s sacrifice on your behalf. As you thank God for this gift, consider the words of this hymn by Philip P. Bliss: “In my place condemned He stood; Sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah! What a Savior!”

PRAY WITH US

In addition to our Chicago campus, Moody Theological Seminary provides classes in Plymouth, Mich. Today and tomorrow, join our prayers for this campus’s faculty and staff. Amber Tucker, Eric Moore, and Eugene Mayhew are in our prayers today.

WEDNESDAY
JULY

17

Say to Daughter Zion, “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Matthew 21:5

The Arrival of the King

When the president travels by motorcade, streets and expressways are blocked. Secret service agents are positioned at strategic locations on overpasses and bridges. The goal of these measures is not only to make certain there is no delay but also to limit access to the president. When Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem the week before His crucifixion, there were no blocked streets or armed guards. Instead, there were cheering crowds who spread their cloaks and palm branches on the road (Matt. 21:8–9). In his Gospel account of that event, Matthew makes it clear that Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy of the arrival of Israel’s Messianic King.

Zechariah’s prophecy not only describes the manner of His coming, lowly and riding on a donkey, but also the character of Messiah’s reign. He will be righteous and victorious (v. 9). He will

put an end to warfare and “proclaim peace to the nations” (v. 10). His rule will be worldwide, extending from sea to sea and the ends of the earth. These aspects of Zechariah’s prophecy have not yet come to pass. This may be why Matthew quoted only a portion of it in his Gospel.

Old Testament prophecies of Israel’s Messiah often combine aspects of Christ’s first and second comings. Someone has compared these prophecies to looking at a mountain range from an angle which makes two peaks look like one with the valley between them hidden from view. Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem foreshadowed His ultimate victory. At His first advent, Christ came in lowliness. He offered Himself as Israel’s King, was rejected, and was crucified for our sin. When Jesus comes again, He will return in power to claim what is His by right.

APPLY THE WORD

Unlike the president, Jesus does not rule by popular vote. He is God’s Son and Israel’s King. Scriptures predict that one day every knee will bow to King Jesus (Phil. 2:10–11). If we do not do so willingly by faith, we will eventually bow to Him under compulsion. Say yes to Him today.

PRAY WITH US

We are grateful for the MTS-MI ministry in the Detroit area and the service of the seminary’s professors: James Wood, John Restum, and Brian Tucker. Praise God for their ministry to the students!

*Do not be afraid of them; the LORD
your God himself will fight for you.*

Deuteronomy 3:22

THURSDAY
JULY

18

The Lord Is Our Defender

The President is sometimes called the Commander in Chief. This title emphasizes the President's role as supreme commander of the armed forces. Protection is one of the primary responsibilities of civil government. As Paul notes in Romans 13:4, God's design is that rulers function as servants for good. They "do not bear the sword for no reason."

In the same way, the Messianic King will protect His people. The promises in today's reading are intended for Israel. Although Jews and Gentiles will both experience the blessing of Messiah's reign, its primary purpose is to fulfill promises made to Israel. If God is for all people, why single Israel out? The most basic reason is that God keeps His word. He entered into a covenant of blood with Israel (v. 11). Paul explains in Romans 11:29 that God's gifts and call are "irrevocable." God will be faithful to His promises.

Some scholars see a partial fulfillment of these promises during the period of Alexander the Great and the 2nd Century BC when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Greek ruler of the Seleucid empire, was defeated by Judas Maccabee. The full extent of the deliverance waits for the second coming. According to verse 14, the Lord will "appear," and His arrow will "flash like lightning." Jesus used similar imagery when speaking of His return: "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:27).

The Lord is the defender of His people. Sometimes God empowers His people to defend themselves. The book of Esther is a good example. On other occasions, God intervenes directly and delivers His people without human effort. Either way, when you feel afraid, you can be sure that God has your back!

APPLY THE WORD

Are you fearful today? Consider memorizing Psalm 56:3: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." You might even personalize it by adding the particular reason for your fear. For example, "When I am afraid of my diagnosis, I put my trust in you." "When I am afraid of losing my job, I put my trust in you."

PRAY WITH US

Dr. Timothy Arens, VP and dean of Student Life, leads several teams who help students with various aspects of their life on campus. Your prayers will encourage them during this busy time, as they are getting ready for the start of another school year at Moody.

FRIDAY
JULY

19

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

Isaiah 55:6

Seek the Lord

I was just a few feet from the mall bookstore, trying to muster up the courage to go inside. I needed a job but was afraid to ask. “Go ahead and ask,” my wife urged with a smile. “The worst they can do is say no.” The assistant manager grinned widely when I nervously inquired whether the store needed any part-time help. “Can you start tonight?” she said. “We need help so badly that my manager told me this morning to hire the next person who applies, whether they are qualified or not!”

“Go ahead and ask” is the same advice in today’s reading. Specifically, the Lord invites His people to ask for rain in the springtime (v. 1). The request almost seems out of place, since most of this chapter and the next have to do with leadership. Is this prophet being literal or figurative? The request is probably

literal, pointing to God’s promised blessing in the Messianic kingdom. But the reminder that it is the Lord who sends rain is probably aimed at past leadership who tended to turn to idols in their time of need.

Nothing is more fundamental to our human existence than food and water. These verses remind us that God is master and provider of both. He sends the rain that enables crops to grow. The gods of idols do not exist. Those who claim to represent them are liars. But that does not mean that there are no spiritual forces in play. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul warned that food sacrificed to idols is really offered to demons (1 Cor. 10:19–21). The deceit of idols is often false teaching by those who claim to speak for them. But it can also be demonically inspired teaching intended to mislead God’s people.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul warned: “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). Idolatry can also mean relying on anyone or anything that is not God for that which God alone can provide. What are you relying on?

PRAY WITH US

Please support in prayer our Student Accounts staff—Janet Mitchell, Paulette Phillips, and Samuel Slennett—whose diligent, accurate bookkeeping and accounting are important for our students and for the success of a Moody education in general.

I am the good shepherd.

John 10:11

SATURDAY
JULY

20

Shepherd of the Flock

Most churches have a pastor. The title *pastor* comes from the Latin word for *shepherd*. A pastor is someone who cares for God's people the way a shepherd watches over a flock. Many of the Old Testament prophets used this title to refer to kings. Today's reading is aimed at those rulers who had led God's people poorly.

The focus in these verses is on past rulers. "During the time the temple was being built the community had good leadership. But it had not always been so," commentator J. A. Motyer notes. "The scattering of Israel, culminating in the exile to Babylon, had been largely due to the bad leadership of rulers of both the northern and southern kingdoms."

The Lord promised to provide a leader out of the tribe of Judah. In verse 4 he is called "the cornerstone." Paul uses the same title to speak of Jesus

in Ephesians 2:20, when he says that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." Jesus called Himself the "good shepherd." His leadership differs radically from one who is only a hired hand (John 10:12–13). Jesus purchased the church with His blood. Caring for the flock is not merely a job to Him. The flock belongs to Christ. Those who lead the church as pastors serve under Christ's authority. They are called shepherds, but Jesus is the "Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4).

The Messiah will strengthen and multiply His people (vv. 5–8). The church's leaders do the same. They "equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12). The church cannot be all that God intends it to be without its shepherds.

APPLY THE WORD

Take a few minutes today to pray for your church's leaders. Ask God to encourage them in their shepherding work, guard their hearts, and guide them with His wisdom. If you feel led to do so, write a brief note of appreciation describing how your church's ministry has blessed you.

PRAY WITH US

Janet Stiven, VP and general counsel at Moody, leads a group of legal professionals whose services and advice are very important for the MBI leadership, faculty, and staff. Please join us in prayer for the team at Moody's Legal department.

SUNDAY
JULY

21

*I will bring them back from Egypt
and gather them from Assyria.*

Zechariah 10:10

Homecoming

One summer after a long vacation trip, my five-year-old son Drew recognized the large grain silo that marked the edge of our town. “Hooray!” he cheered. “We are at the end of home!” There is nothing quite like coming home. The Jewish exiles felt a great longing to return to Jerusalem. Not just because it was their home, but also because it was the center of their worship.

Homecoming is one of Zechariah’s great themes. God had not really forgotten His people in exile. The Hebrew word for “scatter” in verse 9 is an agricultural image. Israel’s exiles had been “sown” among the nations. God preserved them as a people and caused them to grow. The promise in verse 10 envisioned a growth so great that the land would not be able to contain it. The scope of these promises extended beyond Zechariah’s lifetime to a greater restoration during the time of the Messiah.

The list of nations is representative rather than exhaustive (v. 10). Egypt was the prototypical land of bondage for God’s people. It was the location of their first great deliverance. The first wave of exile came when the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom of Israel. The prophet Jeremiah mentioned Gilead in one of his laments over the fall of Jerusalem (Jer. 8:22). The mention of Gilead and Lebanon signaled the restoration of Israel’s land to its original boundaries. This passage speaks of a spiritual restoration as well. Not only will there be a return to the Land of Promise in the last days, but there also will be a great turning to Christ.

God did not forget His people during their exile. When they were cut off from the sanctuary in Jerusalem, God was their sanctuary (Ezek. 11:16). He promised to make a home for them in the distant lands to which they had been sent (Jer. 29:28).

APPLY THE WORD

God has the power to use our times of greatest adversity to make us grow and prosper. He is the master of our circumstances. He also does not confine His presence to a particular location. He is with you, no matter where you go! Whatever situation you find yourself in today, turn to Him. He promises to meet you there.

PRAY WITH US

We rely on the expertise of our ITS personnel to troubleshoot computer issues, fix hardware problems, and provide technology support. Today, please pray for the Support Center staff: James Bachelder, Jonathan Peyer, and Luke Shumate.

*It is a dreadful thing to fall into
the hands of the living God.*

Hebrews 10:31

MONDAY
JULY

22

Our God Is a Consuming Fire

Last year damaging wildfires swept through several states. During one of them, Nicole Jolley feared for her life. Flames surrounded her car and filled it with smoke. She called her husband on her cell phone, convinced she was speaking to him for the last time. “Nick, I’m gonna die, and I’m not gonna make it out of here, there are flames everywhere, and I don’t know what to do,” she told him. “Don’t die, run,” said her husband. “If you’re going to die, die fighting. You have to run.”

Today’s reading speaks of a great fire that devours the lush forests of Lebanon and Bashan. Lebanon was famous for giant cedars that covered its mountain slopes. Bashan was a fertile plateau where cattle, sheep, and goats often grazed. Isaiah and Ezekiel mentioned the oaks of Bashan (Isa. 2:13; Ezek. 27:6). The fire depicted in these verses would destroy land and animal so that those who tended them wailed

in grief. As a result of this devastation, “the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined” (v. 3).

Was this fire literal or figurative? Many scholars believe the fire is a symbol of God’s judgment. Despite the mention of Lebanon, Bashan, and the thicket of the Jordan, the details are quite general. If the language is meant to be figurative, then both the trees and the shepherds may be understood as symbols of leadership. The prophet Ezekiel used the cedar to symbolize Judah’s king and nobles in a parable (Ezek. 17:3, 4, 12). Jeremiah called leaders of Judah shepherds (Jer. 23:1–4). Zechariah follows suit and condemns false shepherds in Zechariah 11:17.

Scripture often employs fire as a symbol of divine judgment. The Bible especially speaks of God’s wrath in this way (Deut. 32:22; Jer. 4:4). God’s judgment is a “consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24).

APPLY THE WORD

In a very real sense, Jesus is our fire blanket. His blood shields us from the fiery judgment our sins deserve. Do you know Him as your Savior? Have you given your life to Him? If you do, thank Him for His redeeming love and constant protection. And if not, won’t you turn to Him today?

PRAY WITH US

Mark Wagner, executive vice president, welcomes the prayers of the Moody family for the Moody Bible Institute’s executive cabinet and its key role in maximizing our potential for ministry. Thank God for His grace and sufficiency in every task!

TUESDAY
JULY

23

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Acts 20:28

The Parable of the Shepherd

Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* contains a play within the play. Hamlet hopes the story will cause his unsuspecting uncle to betray himself, showing that he was complicit in the murder of the king. “The play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King” Hamlet declares.

Some of the prophets acted out parables for a similar reason. Jeremiah hid a linen belt in the crevice of a rock then dug it up after it rotted to show that God would ruin the pride of Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 13:1–11). He bought a clay jar from a potter and then smashed it as a symbol of the disaster God would bring (Jer. 19:1–12). Ezekiel acted out the siege of Jerusalem and lay on one side for 390 days then on another for 40 days. He also lived on a daily ration of two pints of water and a half-pound of bread that had

been baked over human excrement to symbolize the deprivation God’s people would suffer (Ezek. 4:1–17). Zechariah likewise acted out the role of a shepherd in two acts. First, he played the part of a good shepherd who was treated with contempt and rejected (vv. 7–14). Next, he took on the role of a foolish shepherd who deserts the flock.

The mention of 30 pieces of silver in v. 12 has caused some scholars to conclude that this parable ultimately points to Israel’s rejection of Jesus Christ as Messiah at His first advent. According to v. 13, this money was cast “to the potter at the house of the Lord.” Likewise, in his remorse, Judas threw the 30 pieces of silver paid to him by the religious leaders into the temple (Matt. 27:5). The religious leaders used the money to buy “the potter’s field,” a burial site for foreigners (Matt. 27:7).

APPLY THE WORD

If you have wandered away from God, it is not too late for you to return. First Peter 2:25 calls Jesus the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul. He paid the price of your sin with His blood. Turn to Him today, and you will find welcome.

PRAY WITH US

Finding the best deals on supplies for MBI is one of the tasks of our Procurement Services: Brenda Crump and Stephen Richardson. Will you bring them before the Lord in prayer today? “He supplies the needs of those who honor him” (Psalm 145:19).

In Jerusalem I will put my Name.

2 Kings 21:4

WEDNESDAY
JULY

24

Jerusalem the Golden

The hymn *Jerusalem the Golden* is based on a text by the twelfth century monk Bernard of Cluny. The hymn concludes with this prayer: *Oh, sweet and blessed country/The home of God's elect!/Oh, sweet and blessed country/That eager hearts expect!/In mercy, Jesus, bring us/To that dear land of rest!/You are, with God the Father/And spirit, ever blest.* These words symbolically associate Jerusalem with Heaven. But the Bible's interest in Jerusalem is on earth. Jerusalem plays a central role in God's redemptive plan, especially in the days that lead up to Christ's return.

The designation "prophecy" or oracle in verse 1 indicates the predictive nature of Zechariah's message. The siege in verse 2 must refer to the battle of Armageddon described in Revelation 16:13-16. It cannot be the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians since it had already taken place. The extent of the battle also makes it unlikely that it

refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans. The battle that Zechariah describes involves "all the nations of the earth" (v. 3).

The outcome of the battle is certain. Those who oppose Jerusalem will be defeated. God promises to make Jerusalem "an immovable rock." Those who try to carry it away will only "injure themselves" (v. 3). The Hebrew word used here means to cut or lacerate. Their defeat is a self-inflicted wound brought on by the hostility of the nations toward Jerusalem. Jerusalem's defense will not come about by ordinary military means. Her armies or her allies will not save her. God Himself will defend Jerusalem. He will strike terror into the hearts of Jerusalem's enemies (v. 4). Second Thessalonians 2:8 says that when Jesus comes, He will overthrow the Antichrist "with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming."

APPLY THE WORD

Anti-semitism is on the rise around the world and in the United States. Sadly, it is growing among Christians as well. Those who hate the Jews will find that God opposes them. He has plans for Jerusalem that no earthly power can stop. Pray today for our Jewish friends, that God will sustain and protect them.

PRAY WITH US

Heather Shalley, interim VP of Student Enrollment Services, invites you to pray for further expansion of Moody education in the new school year as we seek to increase our student population. It's the support of friends like you that makes it possible.

THURSDAY
JULY

25

*On that day I will set out to destroy
all the nations that attack Jerusalem.*

Zechariah 12:9

Judgment on Jerusalem's Enemies

Anne Rice, a well-known author and an atheist, wrote a series of books about the life of Christ. In the first, entitled *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, she includes an author's note which explains how and why she had been drawn back to God. She wanted to understand a historical mystery: the survival of the Jewish people. "It set in motion the idea that there may, in fact, be God" she explains. "And when that happened there grew in me for whatever reason an immense desire to return to the banquet table."

The book of Zechariah reveals the solution to this mystery. The survival of the Jewish people can only be explained by divine intervention. What has proven to be true repeatedly in the past will be definitively demonstrated at the end of time. When the world comes against Jerusalem, God will be

her defender. The images of a firepot in a woodpile and a flaming torch touched to dried sheaves of grain (v. 6) describe the actions a marauding enemy or invading army might take. But those who attempt to harm Jerusalem will destroy themselves instead. The city will remain intact and unmoved while those who hoped to overthrow her will face ruin on every side.

God will protect the most vulnerable first. The "dwellings" of Judah are tents located outside the city walls. God will not overlook the feeblest (literally: those who stumble or totter) among them when He delivers the city (v. 8). The strong will not have an advantage over the weak. No one will be more valuable than another when God delivers Jerusalem. Nobody will be left behind to fend for themselves.

APPLY THE WORD

Thank God for His protection and provision in your life. He holds your past, present, and future. The survival of the Jewish people is evidence that the God of the Bible exists. Jerusalem's hope is the church's hope because Israel's Messiah is our Savior. Our destiny is bound together, as we will see more clearly in tomorrow's study.

PRAY WITH US

Jesse Ruggles in Moody Radio's Engineering Services helps Moody Radio broadcast without interruption. We appreciate his technical acumen. Please ask the Lord to encourage him in his work today.

Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 11:25

FRIDAY
JULY

26

The Spirit of Grace

One of my favorite professors in college was Dr. Goldman, a rabbi who liked to bait me in class. During one session I determined not to say anything for the whole period. Finally, I couldn't resist. "What took you so long?" Dr. Goldman said with a smile. "I've been trying to get you to talk the whole hour." I tried to share my faith in Christ with my professor, but he was happy with his own beliefs. What does it take to lead a Jewish person to Jesus? In one respect, it takes the same thing that is necessary for everyone who believes. It takes a miracle.

Today's text depicts the climax of the long path traveled by God's chosen people. Zechariah writes of the second coming of Christ and of Israel's recognition of Him as their long-awaited Messiah. The turning point that leads to this recognition will be a work

of God. The Lord will "pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication" (v. 10). This will happen at a particular moment in time. It is the moment when they see their Messiah and recognize that He is "the one they have pierced." The sight of Christ's wounds will spark an outpouring of grief that is both deep and personal. Zechariah describes a moment of collective repentance that includes everyone (v. 12).

The moment Zechariah depicts is the culmination of the work of God that Paul describes in Romans 9–11. It will reach its peak when Christ comes again, but it was already going on in the apostle's day and continues to this day (Rom. 11:1–2). What Paul said of his age is still true: "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (Rom. 11:5).

APPLY THE WORD

Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, the path to God is the same—Jesus Christ. If you have been praying for someone to come to know Christ as Savior, ask God to give them "a spirit of grace and supplication." Pray today for an opportunity to talk with them about Jesus.

PRAY WITH US

Ken Heullitt, chief financial officer at Moody, extends our gratitude to MBI's friends for your faith and confidence in Moody's mission and for your financial support this past fiscal year. Thank you for your generosity. Let's pray for another successful year!

SATURDAY
JULY
27

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Revelation 22:1

There Is a Fountain

Buckingham Fountain, located in Chicago’s Grant Park, is made of pink Georgia marble and contains a million and a half gallons of water. From April to October, the fountain shoots 14,000 gallons of water 120 feet into the air.

When God pours out His Spirit of grace and supplication on the remnant of Israel, there will be a fountain of cleansing for the house of David and the city of Jerusalem (v. 1). Those who embrace Jesus as Messiah will turn from sin and idolatry (vv. 2–5).

The transformation described in these verses points to a new order that is ushered in when Jesus claims His throne and reigns in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, it will not come without suffering. The time leading up to Christ’s return will be one of great suffering (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14). Zechariah predicts that two-thirds of those who reside in the land of Palestine will perish (Zech. 13:8–9).

The term *fountain* (v. 1) could also be translated as spring. Jesus used the same imagery when he spoke to the woman at the well. “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst,” He told her. “Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13–14).

The fountain of forgiveness that Jesus provides is a fountain of blood because Jesus cleansed our sins when He shed His blood on the cross (Heb. 9:14). Zechariah connects this fountain of cleansing to the suffering of Christ in verse 7 where he predicts Christ’s death. Jesus quoted this verse to His disciples on the night of His betrayal (Matt. 26:31). The hymn writer was right to say, “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins; And sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.”

APPLY THE WORD

There is no substitute for the blood of Christ. There is no gospel without the resurrection of Christ, and there would be no salvation without His blood (1 Peter 1:19). “It is not enough to preach the resurrection, for it is principally by Christ’s death that we are saved,” John Stott observes.

PRAY WITH US

Our Digital Marketing team lend their expertise in social media and analytics to increase Moody’s outreach. Ask the Lord to use the skills of Alexandra Horn, Andrew Youngquist, and David Kyrouac to make Christ known to the online community.

This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

Acts 1:11

SUNDAY
JULY

28

The Lord's Return

From *Mad Max* to the animated Disney film *WALL-E*, popular books and movies reveal society's persistent obsession with the apocalypse. Typically, a few brave survivors navigate a blasted landscape trying to restore human society or at least keep it intact. Ironically, the biblical idea of apocalypse focuses on something else. The term *apocalypse* comes from a Greek word that means "to reveal." This is why the New Testament's primary apocalyptic book is called the book of Revelation.

The book of Zechariah has much in common with Revelation. Much of the book focuses on the return of Christ and events that surround it, especially chapters 9–14. The New Testament book of Revelation echoes many of its themes and images. Zechariah's prophecies repeatedly return to the final siege of Jerusalem, the Second Coming, and the establishment of

Messiah's rule. As we finish the study of this book by exploring its final chapter, we will see that it returns to the Second Coming, the kingdom of God, God's plans for Jerusalem, and the reign of Christ.

Chapter 14 begins by speaking of the "day of the Lord." Whenever this phrase appears in Scripture, it often refers to a time of divine judgment. In this case, it refers to the final siege of Jerusalem and the Lord's defense. Verse 4 reveals an important detail when it says: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south." This verse not only mentions the location where Christ will return but also makes it clear that He will return in person. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.

APPLY THE WORD

When Jesus comes again, He will not be alone. He will bring "all the angels" with Him (Matt. 25:31). If you have trusted in Him as your Savior, you will be there too! Colossians 3:4 promises: "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

PRAY WITH US

As we continue in prayer for the Digital Marketing team, please mention Dominic Kindler, Liz Doogan, and Jacob Iverson. We ask God to be their guide when they work online and when they step away from their computers.

MONDAY
JULY

29

The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

Zechariah 14:9

King of Kings

On May 19, 1790, New England experienced a remarkable “day of darkness.” The day began cloudy and cool with light rain. However, as the day progressed the sky grew darker so that by midday, the sun could not be seen at all. Many people feared that the day of judgment had come.

It is easy to see why, given today’s passage which describes the day of the Lord as one where “there will be neither sunlight nor cold, frosty darkness” (v. 6). According to verse 7 the day of Christ’s return will be a “unique day—a day known only to the LORD.” Cosmic changes will make this day one of a kind. Jesus spoke of that day as one in which “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (Matt. 24:29).

Not only will the return of Christ bring judgment on God’s enemies, but it will also usher in a new creation. Living water will flow out from Jerusalem (v. 8). This picture corresponds to the one we find in the book of Revelation which depicts the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God. The river will be spanned on each side by the tree of life (Rev. 22:1–2). Zechariah doesn’t mention the throne but rather the one who sits upon it. “The LORD will be king over the whole earth” (v. 9).

At that time Jesus will not rule alone. He promised the disciples, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28).

APPLY THE WORD

Very often we live as if this world is the only one that matters. Reading of the Lord’s return reminds us that God’s plan for our life is far greater. Thank God today for His promise of your eternal future, and may He remind you that, in Him, there is so much more than this world offers!

PRAY WITH US

Concluding our prayer time for the digital Marketing team, please include Jacob Rositano, Kiel Russell, and Ryan Smith in your time with God today. Thank the Lord for their service every time you see an email or a social media post from Moody.

Glorious things are said of you, city of God.

Psalm 87:3

TUESDAY
JULY

30

City of God

Every year magazines like *Money*, *Kiplinger*, and *U.S. News & World Report* publish lists of the best places to live. They make their choices based on a variety of factors, including income rates, crime, taxes, and even the number of days of sunshine per year!

If such a list were made during the thousand-year reign of Christ, one city would always make it to the top. Today's reading describes the exaltation of Jerusalem over all the other cities on earth. This will literally be true as the topography of the region surrounding Jerusalem changes (v. 10). Mountainous regions will become a plain like the Arabah, which is the lowest spot on earth. Jerusalem will be "raised up high" and secured permanently (vv. 10–11). Jerusalem will attract worshipers from all over the world. Indeed, they will be compelled to go up to Jerusalem (v. 16).

In vv. 12–15 Zechariah returns to the scene of the last battle as he describes the consequences of defeat for Jerusalem's enemies. Their fate will parallel that of the Egyptians when Pharaoh opposed Moses or Sennecharib when his army besieged Jerusalem (Ex. 7–12; 2 Kings 19:35). This description of punishment is a sobering reminder of how dangerous it is to reject God. We now live in an age where God graciously invites those who have rejected Him to repent and turn to Christ. We should not misinterpret God's patient waiting as disinterest or indulgence when it comes to our sin. As the prophet Isaiah says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon" (Isa. 55:6–7).

APPLY THE WORD

Is God your friend or your enemy? Only those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ may call God their friend. If you would like to talk to someone about Jesus Christ, call (800) NEED HIM. Don't hesitate to make this call! It could change your life!

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers our Theology professors: David Finkbeiner, John Clark, Marcus Johnson, Michael McDuffee, and Sanjay Merchant. Ask for God's hand on their work of equipping students to serve Christ and His church.

WEDNESDAY
JULY

31

*But just as he who called you
is holy, so be holy in all you do.*

1 Peter 1:15

We Are Holy to the Lord

The nature versus nurture debate in psychology questions whether our behavior is inherited or learned. Do we behave the way we do because we have been wired to think and act a certain way from birth? Or is our behavior a result of a combination of learning and environment. Many feel both play a role.

Holiness is another matter. Moral ideas and some moral practices may be learned. Our nature may make us more inclined to certain kinds of responses. But true holiness only comes from a work of God. It begins with God's declaration that those who are "in Christ" are righteous. That gift is worked into our life and behavior as we learn from God's Word and are empowered by His Spirit.

The closing verses of Zechariah describe what life will be like during the Millennium. It is proof that a perfect

environment and good teaching do not guarantee belief. During the millennial period, there will be some who will reject the Messiah's rule (vv. 16–18). A more comprehensive transformation must still take place. It is not spoken of by Zechariah but is described in Revelation (Rev. 21–22).

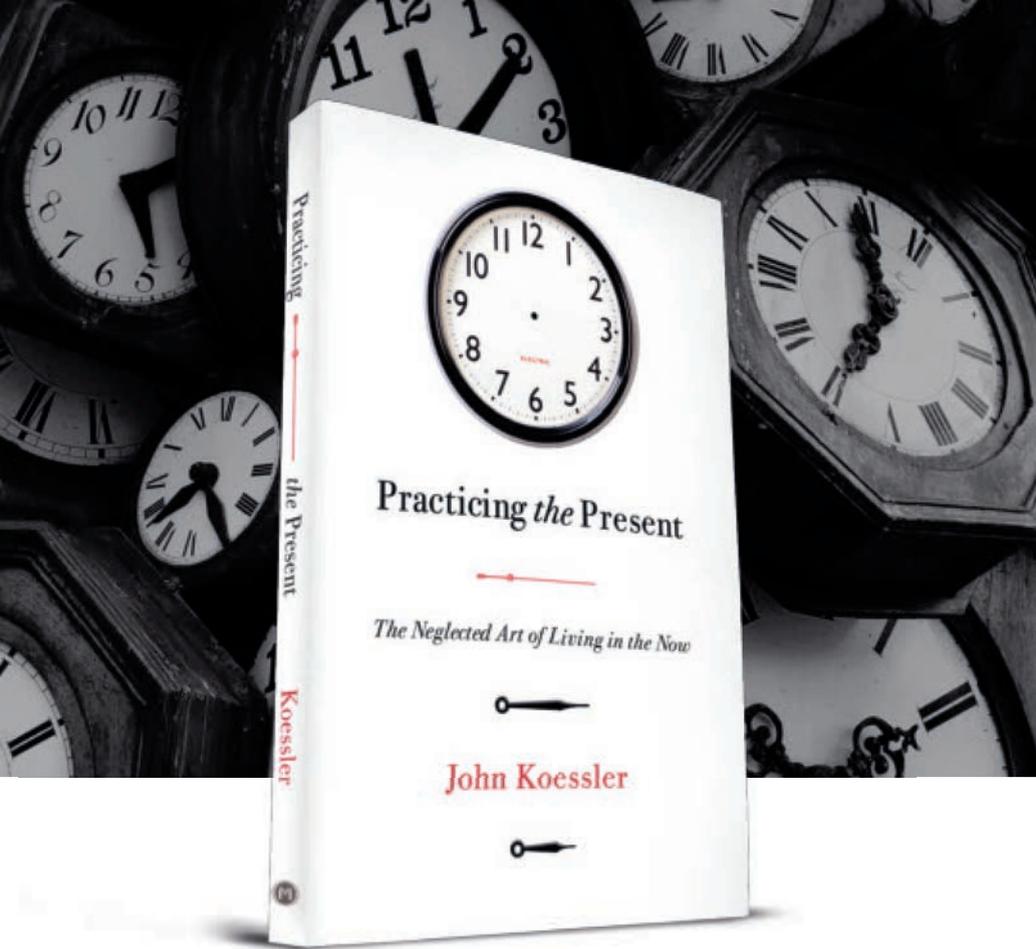
The reign of Jerusalem's Messianic king will be unlike any other period in human history. Holiness will be this kingdom's predominant feature. Ordinary life, even down to the cooking utensils, will be lived in a way that honors God (vv. 20–21). The mention of the Canaanites at the end of verse 21 may be symbolic rather than ethnic. It could be pointing to the absence of idolatry in the kingdom. However, some scholars point out that the literal meaning of the word is "trader." They suggest it signifies purity of life and motives. Either way, the message is the same. Holiness will be the order of the day.

APPLY THE WORD

How should we respond to the message of Zechariah? Its promises are for the future, but its teaching on how to live is for today. Holiness does not have to wait for the Millennium. As 2 Peter 3:14 urges, "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."

PRAY WITH US

As we come to the end of our study of Zechariah this month, let's thank the Lord for the wonderful prophecies in the Old Testament that reveal God's love to His people. Let us also thank Him for His Son—the promised Messiah, the hope of the nations.



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