



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

**EZRA, NEHEMIAH, HAGGAI,
ZECHARIAH & MALACHI**

Week 4

Facing the Future, Understanding the Past

Zechariah 6–7

OPENING
up to the Word

As you face your future—what are you most excited about God doing? As you remember your past, what is the most important spiritual lesson you need to remember?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Joshua, the high priest, was to be given a crown of silver and gold, indicating royalty and power. The gold would be provided by returning exiles from Babylon. Who might Joshua represent in this vision (vs. 12-13)?

2. What question did the people of Bethel have for God (7:3)?

4. In reply, what question did God have for them (vs. 4-6)?

5. What did the people lack in their worship that God told them to correct (vs. 9-10)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What has God taught you as you mature in Christ, and how might your maturity and change continue in the future?

WINDOW
on the Word

The **Branch** (6:12) is a reference to the Messiah (Isa 42:1; 50:10; 53:11). Joshua may represent the Messiah.

“The angel answered me, ‘These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world.’”

Zechariah 6:5



Artwork by Gustav Doré

Good Times Are Comin'!

Zechariah 8

OPENING
up to the Word

When we are in the midst of discouraging times, it's comforting to know that they won't last—that better times, whether in this life or in the age to come, are on their way. What good thing would you like to happen right now that would solve your current problems?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What emotion does God express toward Israel (vs. 1-2)? Do you find this a strange emotion for God to have?
2. God asked that Israel change their conduct toward each other. What were the specific changes (vs. 16-17)?
3. How were the nature of fasts, normally times of soberness, going to change (v. 19)?
4. Although at that time the Jews were a small and insignificant people, how did God describe their changing fortunes? Since all nations are now one in Christ, is it better to see future blessings on a particular nation or on a "new creation"—the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:15-16).

LIVING
out the Word

1. Do you remember a time in your life when problems seemed insurmountable? How did God help you then?

REALITY OF ANGELS



The book of Zechariah mentions angels more often than almost any book of the Old Testament.

Angels are described many ways in the Old Testament: “watcher” (Da 4:13, NKJV), “messenger” (Da 4:13, NIV), “holy ones” or “assembly of the holy ones” (Ps 89:5, 7), and more than 100 times as God’s “host” or “army.”

The New Testament refers to them as “the angels in heaven” (Mt 24:36), “the heavenly host” (Lk 2:13), “ministering spirits” (Heb 1:14).

The most common biblical terms translated as “angel” are *malak* in the Old Testament and *angelos* in the New Testament.

Malak means messenger, representative, courier or someone (human and supernatural) who performs a special mission. **Cherubim** and **seraphim** also appear in the Bible. The cherubim guard Eden in Genesis 3 and are described as throne bearers of Yahweh (1Sa 4:4; Eze 1:19-28).

The **seraphim**—from a root word meaning “fire” or “burning”—are found only in Isaiah 6:2, 6, though aspects of them seem featured in the vision in Revelation 4.

The names **Gabriel** (man of God) and **Michael** (one who is as God) each appear twice in the Old Testament (Da 8:16; 9:21; 10:13, 21). The New Testament says that Gabriel stands in the presence of God (Lk 1:19) and calls Michael an archangel (Jude 9).

In the New Testament, **angelos** is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *malak*. *Angelos*, messenger or angel, is found 175 times and used of men only six times. Sometimes it refers to evil spirits.

Archangel is found only in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Jude 9. Guardian angels are alluded to only in Job 33:23 and Acts 12:15.

Demon refers to a fallen angel. In popular Greek usage, demons were spirits of the departed that appeared in lonely places at night. Judaism described them as evil or unclean spirits set on leading people into sin. While the Hebrew culture of Jesus’ day seems to have had a preoccupation with and fear of demons, Jesus amply demonstrated his triumph over the dark angelic world. For Christians, the fear of such entities is no longer appropriate because of faith in Christ.

Vengeance and Victory

Zechariah 9

OPENING
up to the Word

The old covenant often places a focus on revenge and retribution, whereas the new covenant primarily is concerned with restoration and redemption. Why?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What did all the countries in verses 1-6 have in common (v. 8)?

2. When was verse 9 fulfilled for Israel and who fulfilled it (Lk 19:35-38)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Can you think of someone who has ridden roughshod over you—against whom you would like to retaliate? Have you thought of ways you would like to retaliate?

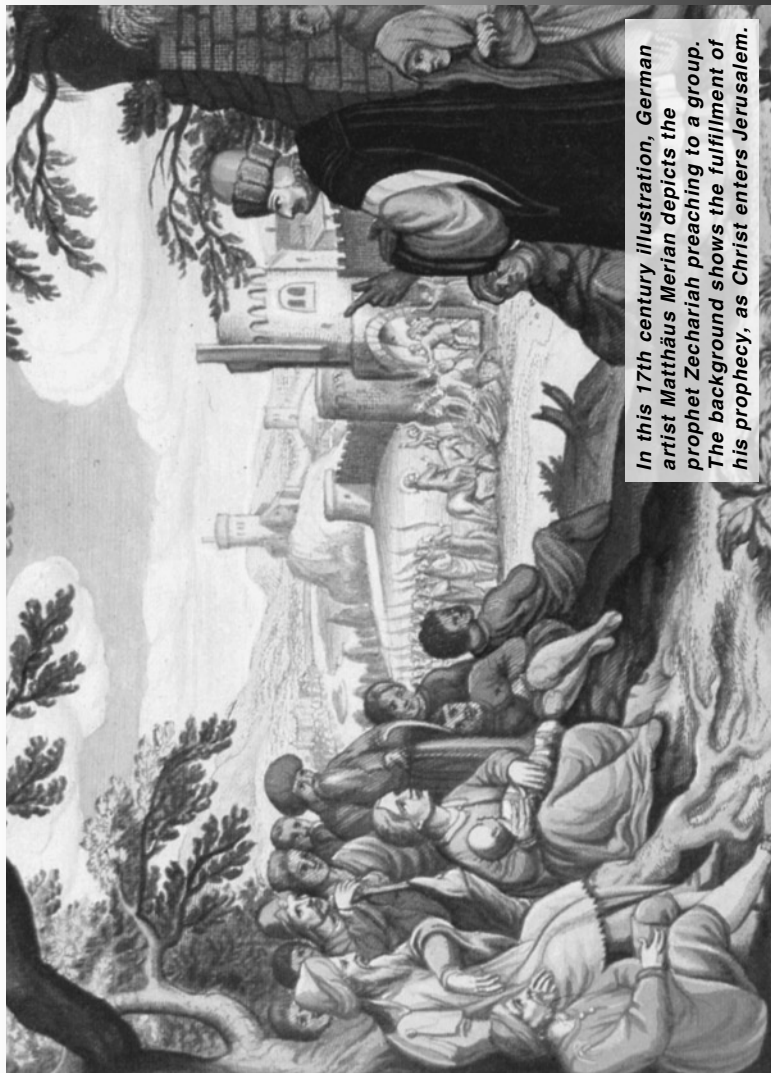
2. How would you describe yourself? (a) you are by nature vengeful; (b) you take revenge, but only in extreme situations; (c) you are, by nature, forgiving, and never seek revenge.

WINDOW
on the Word

Some believe the catastrophes experienced by the city-states mentioned in vs. 1-6 seems to correspond to the conquests of Alexander the Great. The order of cities seems to correspond to Alexander's march. "I will defend my house" (v. 8). Alexander's army passed Jerusalem several times without laying siege to it. "I will rouse your sons, O Zion" (v. 13). It is possible that the passage from verse 13 to the end of the chapter refers to the successful wars of the Maccabees against the Greek rulers of Syria.

*“Rejoice
greatly, O
Daughter of
Zion! Shout,
Daughter of
Jerusalem!
See, your king
comes to you,
righteous and
having
salvation,
gentle and
riding on a
donkey, on a
colt, the foal
of a donkey.”*

Zechariah 9:9



In this 17th century illustration, German artist Matthäus Merian depicts the prophet Zechariah preaching to a group. The background shows the fulfillment of his prophecy, as Christ enters Jerusalem.

Shepherds: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Zechariah 10–11

OPENING
up to the Word

It is a sad truth that not all professionals who exercise authority within Christendom are spiritual and godly. What kind of shepherds have you experienced? _____

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What was always a major cause of stumbling for the people of Israel (10:2)? Do you think the situation has changed all that much in today's world?

2. How does God feel about shepherds who lead his sheep astray (v. 3)?

3. Some feel that 11:4-11 deals with how God would respond to Israel's rejection of Jesus. If so, what historical calamity visited the Jews in A.D. 70? Could this be what is being prophesied?

4. Who was priced at 30 pieces of silver (Mt 26:14-16)?

5. Do you think the foolish shepherd is one particular individual, or that a number of individuals have fulfilled this role down through time (Zec 11:16)? _____

LIVING
out the Word

1. What signs do you look for in a good shepherd? What are the signs of a bad shepherd?

WINDOW
on the Word

"I will bring them back" (10:10) refers to a regathering of God's people. Some scholars view this regathering as specific, with the context of time and space. Others believe the regathering to generally refer to all who respond to God's grace, whenever that might happen. **"The flock marked for slaughter"** (11:4) may refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans. **"Two staffs, Favor and Union"** (11:7). Many shepherds used two staffs to protect and lead their flocks. God uses these to represent his care for his people. **"Foolish shepherd"** (11:15-16). The identity of this shepherd is unclear.

“And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter.”

Zechariah 11:13



Triumph and Tears

Zechariah 12–13

OPENING
up to the Word

To triumph in any great endeavor involves great sacrifice. Have you ever had to sacrifice greatly in order to achieve something important in your life?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Zechariah speaks of all nations being gathered against Israel (v. 3). Do you think this is a reference to a specific time and place or of many such times and places?

2. Who is “the one they have pierced” over whom Israel would mourn (v. 10)? When would the mourning take place?

3. The kingdom will not tolerate false prophets (13:2-6). Why do you think prophets might be in such disgrace?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What one goal or ambition in life have you sacrificed for more than any other? What did you have to give up?

2. In retrospect, as you look at all it cost you, would you say the sacrifices were worth it? Why, or why not?

WINDOW
on the Word

“The one they have pierced” (12:10) appears to refer to the crucifixion of Jesus (his piercing).

What a Day of Rejoicing That Will Be

DAY 27

Zechariah 14

Zechariah, especially chapters 9-14, is written within the apocalyptic literary genre. Apocalyptic literature is usually written in the context of suffering, using symbolic and even mysterious language to assure readers that good will ultimately triumph over evil. Attempts to reduce symbolism to literal interpretations usually yield preposterous results.

1. Some read the reference to the old covenant “Feast of Tabernacles” (v. 16) as an indication that an old covenant festival made obsolete under the new covenant would again be required after Jesus’ Second Coming. Will bells of horses and cooking pots also include inscriptions at such a time...how illogical are such interpretations?

2. Can we dogmatically conclude from verses 3-5 that a literal earthquake will accompany Jesus’ Second Coming?

1. If we remember the original audience, then don’t you think glorious images of the old covenant reality they knew would help them visualize a glorious future? Just as a holy kiss was appropriate and understandable in the new covenant, so too were old covenant references in Zechariah.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

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out the Word

Introduction to Malachi

Authorship: The name *Malachi* means “my messenger.” Some believe that Malachi was not really a personal name, but an anonymous designation given to a series of oracles. Yet, it seems clear from the reading that Malachi was written by a single prophet. Nothing is known of his family line, and he is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible.

Date: It is believed that Malachi was written about 450-430 B.C. His ministry began about 100 years after Cyrus issued the decree permitting the Jews to return to Judah from Babylon (538 B.C.). Malachi is viewed as the last prophet of the Old Testament period before John the Baptist arrived on the scene. In fact, Malachi predicted John’s arrival (3:1).

Setting and purpose: The walls of Jerusalem and the Temple were either being rebuilt, or were already done—but life was not easy. The Jews were still ruled by Persia, harvests had been poor and locusts had been severe. Both the priests and the people had been guilty of breaking old covenant law regarding sacrifices and offerings. The people were involved in divorcing their lawful Israelite wives and marrying pagans. A general moral apathy had set in.

Malachi’s message was similar to that of other old covenant prophets: covenant blessings require covenant faithfulness. The old covenant was a covenant that promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Malachi reminded the people of God’s past, present and future dealings with them to change their perspective, reestablish hope and motivate them again to godliness and faithfulness.

Outline:

I. THROWING LIGHT ON JUDAH’S SIN, 1–2

- A. Offering God a White Elephant Sacrifice, 1
- B. Priests Who Stray and the People Who Follow Them, 2

II. THROWING LIGHT ON THE COMING DAY OF GOD, 3–4

- A. The Coming Judgment, 3–4

Offering God a White Elephant Sacrifice

Malachi 1

A white elephant gift is unwanted by the giver, and of little value to the person who receives it. Have you ever received a white elephant gift?

- 1.** God's love for Israel is proven, says the Lord. What proves it (vs. 2-5)?
- 2.** What did God tell Israel that he deserved to get from them, but that he was not receiving (v. 6)?
- 3.** Israel's level of respect for God was so low that they were offering God detestable sacrifices (v. 8). What was wrong with the sacrificial animals they were offering? To whom did God suggest they offer the animals?
- 4.** God was so disgusted with their meaningless offerings that he made a request to anyone who would listen. What did he request (v. 10)?
- 5.** Do you feel the attitude of the worshippers was revealed in what God knew they were thinking—that the offerings were a burden to them (v. 13)?

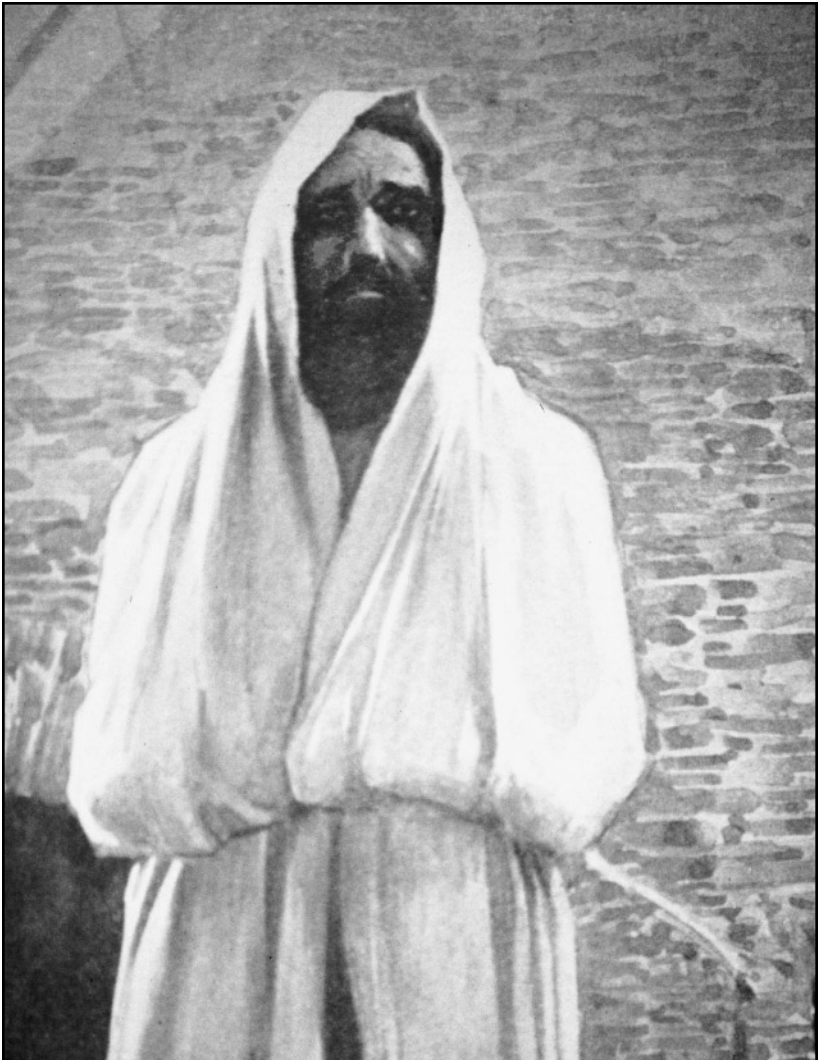
- 1.** Giving in the new covenant is from the heart, rather than by obligation—so are you a “cheerful giver” (2 Co 9:7)?
- 2.** What have you given God that required the greatest of sacrifices from you? Have you ever regretted giving it?

DAY 28

OPENING
up to the Word

DIGGING
into the Word

LIVING
out the Word



“An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. ‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord. ‘But you ask, “How have you loved us?” Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ the Lord says. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob.’”

Malachi 1:1-2

Priests Who Stray and the People Who Follow Them

DAY 29

Malachi 2

Can you think of any prominent clergymen or Christian personalities whose sinful activities have led others astray?

1. How had the priests earned a rebuke from the very God they promised to serve (vs. 1-2)?
 2. Because of their unfaithfulness, God planned to humiliate the priests. What did he threaten to do to them (v. 3)?
 3. With whom did God compare the priests (v. 4)? How did that man differ from them in his attitude (vs. 5-6)?
 4. Though God had expressly warned them against it and they had vowed as a nation not to—the men of Israel had fallen into the familiar sin of marrying pagan women (v. 11). Why do you think this was such an important issue within the old covenant?
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1. What kinds of sins of prominent Christian leaders seem to be most publicized?
 2. Has the loss of integrity of Christian leaders negatively influenced any of the people you know? If so, how did it affect them?
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"I will spread on your faces the offal" (v. 3), or the waste matter from the animal sacrifices, which was mostly discarded. Similarly, God would discard the priests who were no longer faithful.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS: SETTING THE STAGE FOR JESUS

PERSIAN ERA 397BC 336BC

- Persia had dominated the Middle East since 536 B.C.
- Jewish scribes became influential in the interpretation of Hebrew Scripture.
- A temple was built in Samaria, rivaling the worship in Jerusalem. Jews continued to live outside of Canaan.

EGYPTIAN ERA 323BC 198BC

- The Greek Empire split into four segments, under the rule of the four top generals.
- Ptolemy Soter took control of Egypt and Israel.
- Jews adopted Hellenistic culture.
- A Greek translation of the Old Testament was made, called the Septuagint.

MACCABEAN ERA 165BC 63BC

- Thousands of Jews rallied behind a man named Mattathias who revolted against Syrian idolatry.
- Mattathias's three sons, Judas Maccabaeus, Jonathan, and Simon recaptured Jerusalem and restored worship.
- Governor and high priest, John Hyrcanus, was supported by the Sadducees to be king in Jerusalem. But they were opposed by the Pharisees, who only recognized kings of the line of David.

GREEK ERA 356BC 323BC

- Alexander the Great of Greece conquered the Middle East as far as western India, taking control of Jerusalem around 332 B.C.
- The Greek Empire became Hellenized, or heavily influenced by Greek culture and language.
- Initially, Jews resisted Hellenization.

SYRIAN ERA 198BC 165BC

- The Syrians defeated the Egyptians the in the Battle of Panion (198 B.C.).
- In Israel, a group, loyal to the high priest emerged, which would later become the party of the Sadducees.
- In 168 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes tried to settle a conflict between the Hellenists and the Hasidim (strictly observant Jews), by forbidding all Hebrew worship.

ROMAN ERA 63BC 4BC

- Pompey of Rome overran Syria, entered Israel and captured Jerusalem.
- Julius Caesar appointed an Idumaean, Antipater, as procurator of Judea. Antipater's son Herod rose to power and was king at the time of Jesus' birth.
- The Zealots, a Jewish opposition group, refused to submit to Rome and formed an armed rebellion.

400 B.C.

300 B.C.

200 B.C.

100 B.C.

1 B.C.

Birth of Jesus 4-6 B.C.

Death of Herod the Great 4 B.C.

Jews were free to rebuild the temple

The Coming Judgment

DAY 30

Malachi 3-4

Do you feel God judges, in the sense of retribution and revenge, or that God reluctantly consents to the inevitable negative consequences that individuals and nations bring on themselves as a result of their own choices?

1. Who do you think the “messenger who will prepare the way before me” refers to (3:1; see Mt 11:7-10)?

2. Once again, in verses 8-12, we see a clear reference to blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience. The specific subject is “tithes and offerings.” Given the fact that tithing is not required by the new covenant, do you feel it is wrong and perhaps unethical for churches to demand “tithes”? Has anyone ever demanded them of you?

3. Before the coming of the Lord, who would appear first (4:5-6)? Is this a reference to Elijah literally, as God will resurrect him, or to another like Elijah?

1. How appropriate to the feel, message and theme of the old covenant that the last words of the last book of the Old Testament characterize God as threatening to “come and strike the land with a curse” (4:6). Of course, he did come to this earth in the person of Jesus, to be one of us—but was it with a curse?

OPENING

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LIVING

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