

PROPHETS OF THE RESTORATION

Zechariah 4

The teachers should read Ezra 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 to get a complete background for the lesson on Zechariah.

Doctrinal Points

The rebuilding of the temple was necessary as a preparation for the Lord's Advent.

The last three of the Minor Prophets prophesied after the return from captivity.

We should believe that the Lord is able to carry out His intentions. Love is essential.

Notes for Parents

I imagine that if most of us were asked, “What do you know about the Minor Prophets?” we might have to confess that we know very little. Perhaps we know that there were twelve of them and that their books are the last twelve books of the Old Testament. Some of us will remember that they begin with Hosea and end with Malachi. And most of us would remember a little of the story of Jonah. But just what the messages of the Minor Prophets were and what they mean for us we might find it hard to say.

Yet the books of the Minor Prophets are just as inspired and just as important as the other books of the Word. It merely takes a little more effort and study to understand them. And we often find in them single verses which we have heard quoted and which teach us an immediate and clear lesson.

Take our chapter for today as an example of what we can find out with a little study. We should know first that the last three of the Minor Prophets prophesied in the “Restoration” period, after the remnant was sent back from Babylon and commanded to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Cyrus said the Lord had charged

him to do this. The Lord, when He came, was to fulfill the Law and the Prophets; so He had to come among the people who had the Hebrew Scriptures. And He had to live in the Holy Land, which from the beginning of time had been the setting for the Bible story. So the Lord provided that the people of Judah, after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, should return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

They had not been back very long, however, and had only laid the foundation of the temple, when they lost their enthusiasm for building the house of the Lord and turned to the building of homes for themselves instead. This reminds us, perhaps, of some short-lived good resolutions of our own. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were inspired to rebuke them and urge them on. The Zerubbabel mentioned in our chapter was a grandson of king Jehoiachin of Judah and the leader of the returned captives. Zechariah's message to him is that if he will continue the building faithfully, the Lord will give him power to complete the work.

But this chapter has a lesson for us, too. We can all see that throughout the Bible light is the symbol of truth—for example, the Lord said, "I am the light of the world." But He also said, "Ye are the light of the world." The lampstand is the church in the world and in every individual one of us who will study the Word, try to live as it teaches us to live, and so obey the Lord's command: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Again we can easily see that the oil which burns in lamps stands for love. We remember the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25); the wise virgins took oil in their lamps. Throughout the Bible olive trees and olive oil are symbols of love. What are the two olive trees which stand one on either side of the candlestick and pour oil into its lamps? What are the two great loves which must be in our hearts if we are to make our lives temples of the Lord? Jesus said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Primary

The teacher may spend a good part of the lesson period telling the story of the return from captivity and the rebuilding of the temple. Then speak of the Minor Prophets and especially of the last three, and read the lesson from the Word. The children may be interested in hearing of the various ways in which the prophets were inspired. This information will be found in the Junior notes.

Most of the Minor Prophets lived in Judah or Israel before the people were carried away, but the last three came later. We learned one Sunday that when the people of Israel were carried away to Assyria, they never came back. But some of the people of Judah did.

King Cyrus, who followed Darius as king of Babylon, was told by the Lord to let them return.

He gave them back all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away.

Many of the people did not want to go back, but they helped those who went with money and supplies and animals.

The leader of the returning captives was Zerubbabel, a grandson of king Jehoiachin of Judah.

More than forty-two thousand returned to the Holy Land. They rebuilt Jerusalem and started to build the temple. But they stopped in the middle of building the temple and began to build homes for themselves instead. So the Lord had to speak to them again and tell them to finish the temple first. The last three of the Minor Prophets were the ones through whom He spoke to them at this time.

One of these was Zechariah.

In our lesson for today how did his vision come to him?

What did he see?

What did the angel tell him the seven lamps on the candlestick meant?

What did the two olive trees mean?

Junior

The lesson for this class is principally a factual account of the return from

captivity and the reason the three prophets of the restoration had to be sent, and a study of prophecy in general. But the lessons suggested in the last paragraph of the Junior notes should also be pointed out.

The last three of the Minor Prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—prophesied after the people returned from captivity. Cyrus the Persian, the king who followed Darius the Mede on the throne of Babylon, issued a proclamation in the very first year of his reign that all those who wished might go back to the land of Canaan. We find the story of the return in the book of Ezra, which is not one of the books of the Bible which has an inner sense, but which gives us very valuable historical information. Ezra says that “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus” to let the people go back, and Cyrus in his proclamation said that the Lord had charged him to build Him a house in Jerusalem. So the people who did not wish to go back were ordered to make a “freewill offering” toward the rebuilding of the temple and also to help those who went back “with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts,” and Cyrus himself gave them back all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away. Ezra tells us that there were fifty-four hundred of these vessels. More than forty-two thousand of the people went back under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was a grandson of Jehoiachin, the next-to-the-last king of Judah.

But after the returned captives had laid the foundation of the temple, they began to think about their own comfort and left the temple and built houses for themselves instead. Then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were inspired to rebuke them and urge them on to the completion of the temple. Do we ever get tired of doing something which needs very much to be done and turn to something which we think will be more fun?

Now read the first verse of our chapter for today. We often wonder just how the prophets were inspired, and this shows us one of the ways: Zechariah says an angel woke him in the night and then he saw a vision and the angel told him what it meant. In other places in the Bible other methods are mentioned. Sometimes

214 PROPHETS OF THE RESTORATION

the prophets were instructed by dreams, sometimes by visions in the daytime, sometimes by a voice heard within them, sometimes by speech with an angel who appeared to them, and sometimes by a voice heard from without. In every case, however, they had no doubt whatever that the dream or vision or voice came from the Lord.

What did Zechariah see?

To whom was Zechariah to give the message?

What was he to tell Zerubbabel first?

What was said about the temple?

What did the angel say the seven lamps were?

What were the two olive trees?

You will be able to understand the meaning of this vision better when you are older, but there are two or three lessons you can find in it now. One is that it is by the Lord's spirit and power that anything good is accomplished—not by our own strength or ability. Another is that the Lord is able to finish any work He begins; so we should not allow ourselves to be discouraged from trying to do right. A third is that divine providence sees and takes into account every least thing that happens anywhere. We learn this from verse 10. If you will read Revelation 5:6 and 11:4 you will see that the same symbolic visions were given to the apostle John hundreds of years later; so we know that they were meant not just for the people of Bible days but for us and for all people.

Intermediate

The real lesson for the Intermediates is the correspondence of Zechariah's vision, together with the necessity for the return. Facts concerning the Minor Prophets and concerning the return should be given as background.

The last twelve books in the Old Testament are called the Minor Prophets. They are short books and in the letter often rather hard to understand, but they are just as important as any other part of the Word. If the messages of these prophets had not been meant for people of all times, the Lord would not have had them recorded in the Word.

Some of these books are so short that they give us little clue to the time in which the prophets themselves lived, but most of them lived in Judah or Israel before the time of the captivity. The last three, however—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—are called prophets of the restoration. The Darius who is mentioned by both Haggai and Zechariah is not the Darius who cast Daniel into the den of lions, but a later king of the same name.

Cyrus the Persian took the throne of Babylon after the first Darius, and we read in the book of Ezra—which is a very valuable historical book although not one which contains an inner sense—that in the first year of his reign “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus” to let the captives from Judah go back to their own land. Because the Lord was to come into the world in the Holy Land and among the Jews, it was necessary that the nation be re-established there and that Jerusalem and the temple be rebuilt.

All the captives did not want to go back. Some were apparently quite satisfied with their life in Babylon. But, as we learn from the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, there were at least a few who had remained faithful to their own religion and longed to go back. Others possibly thought that their opportunities to prosper would be greater in the land of Canaan than in Babylon. You can easily see what these three classes of people picture. When a person who has been brought up in the church is carried away by worldly ambition, there is a part of his nature which is perfectly satisfied with the worldly life. But deep down inside him there is some little remembrance of the better life in which his childhood was passed and some little feeling that he ought to return to it. And then there is in such a person a restlessness and dissatisfaction with his present condition which makes him feel that any change must be for the better.

More than forty-two thousand returned to the land of Canaan. Their leader was Zerubbabel, who was a grandson of Jehoiachin, the last really independent king of Judah. We should note that Zerubbabel never was called king. The land of Canaan remained under the control of Babylon.

Cyrus said that he had been charged by the Lord “to build him an house at Jerusalem,” and he ordered the people to rebuild the temple and had those who remained in Babylon make a freewill offering toward it and also help those who returned “with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts.” And Cyrus himself gave them back all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away when the temple was destroyed.

In their first enthusiasm the returned captives laid the foundation of the temple, but then their natural selfishness cropped up again. They had some trouble with the Samaritans—the people, you remember, who had been brought in by Assyria to take the place of the people of Israel—and after Cyrus died, his successor forgot the command of Cyrus in regard to the temple. So the people turned to building houses for themselves and, just as they always had been, they were led astray into the ways of the people about them. Then the Lord sent the last three of the prophets to rebuke them and to encourage them to complete the building of the temple.

The vision of Zechariah in our chapter for today is part of this encouragement. Zerubbabel had used the opposition of the Samaritans as an excuse for discontinuing work on the temple. Verse 6 of our chapter is the Lord’s answer to this excuse, and the Lord is at the same time saying it to us when we allow ourselves to be easily discouraged from the building of the “temple” of a heavenly character in ourselves. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” We are not strong enough of ourselves to resist our temptations and do good, but if we keep trying, the Lord will accomplish it for us.

Zechariah’s vision is not too hard to understand. You remember that the seven-branched candlestick in the Holy Place of the tabernacle represented divine truth from the Word enlightening our minds. It represents the same here, but there is added the statement that the seven lamps are “the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth” (read also Revelation 5:6). This

pictures the fact that the Lord's divine providence sees everything that goes on in the world and makes provision for it, and that the truths of the Word will enable us to understand everything that happens to us and meet it as we should.

Then there are the two olive trees which furnished the oil for the lamps. Here read Revelation 11:4. The last verse of our chapter tells us that the two olive trees are the "two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." We know that oil represents love. There are two kinds of love which we have from the Lord, love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. These are the olive trees and they belong just where they are in the vision, one on either side of the candlestick, supplying oil for it. Love to the Lord takes us to the Word to find out all we can about Him, and love to the neighbor takes us to the Word to find out all we can about helping others.

Basic Correspondences

lampstand = the Word as containant of divine truth

oil = love

the two olive trees = love to the Lord and love to the neighbor

Senior

It is important that the Seniors have a clear knowledge of the history of the return and restoration as a background for the story of the New Testament. The general lesson from Zechariah 4, suggested at the end of their notes, is also important.

Many of us do not know much about the Minor Prophets. They are short books—the last twelve in the Old Testament—and in the letter their meaning is often obscure. The book of Jonah is the only one of them which has in it a continuous story, and for that reason it is better known than the others. But the books of the Minor Prophets are just as important for us as any other part of the Word of God. The Lord has nothing recorded in the Word which did not contain a message needed by people in all times.

We should read the Minor Prophets even though we do not understand them, partly because we know that our reverent reading of any part of the Word enables the angels who are with us to read it at the same time in its spiritual sense, and partly because as we read, the words are recorded in our memories and the Lord can recall them to us with meaning at some future time when we need their message. Further than this, if we really make the effort to study any particular chapter with the help of the writings, we shall find some lessons in it which will be helpful to us now, either by showing us states into which we have fallen or by pointing out trends in us which may be leading us in the wrong direction. Or, as in our chapter for today, we may find inspiration to be more faithful and persistent in our efforts to lead the heavenly life.

The last three of the Minor Prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—are called the Prophets of the Restoration. Seventy years after Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and most of the people of Judah carried off to Babylon, all of them who wished to do so were allowed to return. In the book of Ezra, which does not contain an inner sense but is nevertheless a very useful historical book, we are told that “in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia” to permit this return, and the proclamation of Cyrus declares that the Lord “hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.” Zerubbabel, a grandson of king Jehoiachin, was appointed to lead the return, and more than forty-two thousand went with him. Cyrus gave them back all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away, and he ordered all those who preferred to remain in Babylon to give a freewill offering toward the rebuilding of the temple and also to help those who went “with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts.”

The captives returned with rejoicing (read Psalm 126) and laid the foundation of the temple. But they rejected the overtures of the Samaritans—the people, you remember, who had been brought

in to settle the northern part of the land when Assyria conquered Israel—and the Samaritans in return sent an embassy to Ahasuerus and later to Artaxerxes, the kings who succeeded Cyrus on the throne of Babylon, and Artaxerxes was persuaded to order the building stopped. The men of Judah weakly obeyed and turned their energies to the building of houses for themselves, at the same time falling back into their old habit of association with the people of the land. It was not until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were inspired to rebuke and urge them on that they sent messengers of their own to Babylon. By their representations king Darius (the second Darius, who followed Artaxerxes) was led to unearth the original statute of Cyrus—which, as one of the “laws of the Medes and Persians” could not be changed—and he authorized the people to complete the temple. This they finally did, celebrating the feast of the Passover at its dedication.

We should all be familiar with this story of the return because it re-established Judaism in the Holy Land. The Lord had to be born in the Holy Land because of its correspondence; and because He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, He had to come among the people who alone had them. Therefore the return was necessary. But we should also remember that the nation was no longer the representative of the Lord’s church on earth. It is for this reason that the record of their history from the time of the captivity is not part of the inspired Word.

Our chapter for today, as we can easily see, is a vision given to Zechariah to be passed on to Zerubbabel to encourage him to complete the temple. The quotation at the end of this lesson gives us the meaning of some of the details of the vision, which is referred to by John in Revelation 11:4. We should note that Swedenborg, possibly following the Latin of Schmidius [*baccae olivarum*, . . . *filiis oleae*], gives us “olive berries” instead of “olive branches” and “sons of the olive-tree” instead of “anointed ones.”* The chapter has an important message for all of us, for we are often

*The Hebrew has “olive twig” and “sons of the oil.” –Ed.

like Zerubbabel, too ready to drop the effort to become the spiritual men and women we ought to be, and to turn our efforts to making ourselves more comfortable and prosperous in the world. You remember that the temple, the house of the Lord, is a representative of a heavenly character, which is the church in each one. We should all keep before us from day to day this vision of the golden lampstand and the two olive trees to remind us of our true goal in life and of the fact that only by obedience to the two great commandments can we attain this goal. We have no goodness or truth or power of ourselves, but as we persevere in the study of divine truth in the Word and in obedience to it, the Lord will complete our temple. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”

Adult

There are two major objectives for the teacher of Adults in this lesson. One is to give as clear a story of the return as possible, pointing out the reason for it and making clear the diminished role of the ancient Jewish nation. The other is to make the chapter itself as meaningful and inspiring as possible.

The Minor Prophets are seldom used for lessons in Sunday school. With the exception of the book of Jonah they contain little in story form, and even grown people often find them obscure. Yet they are as important for us as any part of the Word. If they had not contained lessons which all people need, the Lord would not have provided for their recording. As we all know, there are twelve books of the Minor Prophets, beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament. Some of them in the letter place themselves historically. The exact period of others is uncertain, but the first nine all prophesied before the captivity. It is thought that Obadiah may have witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and been carried away with the captives.

The last three of the Minor Prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—were sent after the return from captivity. The story of the return is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which are

therefore very valuable books although they do not have an inner sense. It had been given Jeremiah to prophesy (Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10) that after seventy years in Babylon some of the people would return to the Holy Land. So the first verse of the book of Ezra tells us: “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom.” In his proclamation Cyrus said that the Lord had charged him “to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah,” and that all of those who so desired might now return to their own land. The people knew, therefore, that the rebuilding of the temple was the primary cause and purpose of their return, and Cyrus restored to them all the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away. He also charged those who did not return to make a freewill offering for the rebuilding of the temple and also to help their returning brethren “with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts.”

More than forty-two thousand returned, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a grandson of king Jehoiachin, and the foundation of the temple was laid with great rejoicing, although some of the “ancient men” wept because they could see that the new temple was not to be so large and impressive as the former one. But now the Samaritans, whose offer of help in the building had been rebuffed by Zerubbabel, made false representations to the kings who had succeeded Cyrus in Babylon, and the people received a command not to continue the building. As we learn from the prophet Haggai, instead of protesting they yielded all too willingly and turned to the building of their own houses. At the urging of Haggai, however, they finally sent an embassy to the second Darius, as a result of which he unearthed the original statute of Cyrus and, as this was one of the laws of the Medes and Persians—which, we recall, “change not”—he ordered the building resumed. The temple was completed, and at its dedication the feast of the Passover was celebrated.

It is important for us to know this history because it gives us the background of the New Testament story. The Lord came to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures. He had to come, therefore, among those who possessed them. And Swedenborg tells us that because the Holy Land had been the home of the people of both the Most Ancient and the Ancient Churches and its geography had accordingly become correspondential in all its features, the Lord had to come in the Holy Land. So it was under divine providence that the remnant was brought back and driven to complete the temple. But we remember that the nation no longer represented the Lord's church on earth. Its history after the captivity, except for the warnings of the three prophets, forms no part of the inspired Word. Scholars, especially since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, have been much occupied with this history in an effort to trace the sources of the various sects in Palestine near the beginning of the Christian era. But we need not concern ourselves too much with their speculations, interesting though they are. The roots of the rejection of the Lord were in the people themselves who so reacted, not in any influences coming from without.

In his summary of the meaning of the prophecies of the last three Minor Prophets in *Prophets and Psalms*, Swedenborg shows us that they deal with the complete vastation of the ancient Jewish Church and with the imminent coming of the Lord and establishment of the Christian Church. There are a number of statements in these Prophets which latter-day Jews, knowing only the letter, quite naturally interpret as promises of the eventual restoration of their nation to preeminence in the world, but in the spiritual sense there is no suggestion of this.

Our chapter for today has still further implications. Read Revelation 11:4. This ties in the vision of Zechariah with the vision of John and with the Second Coming. In explaining Revelation 11:4 in the *Apocalypse Explained* (see below), Swedenborg quotes from our chapter.*

*See note on Senior notes regarding the translation of certain phrases. —Ed.

In our own personal lives we may think of this chapter as a charge and encouragement to complete the building of our temple—the church in us. In AC 9548⁴ we are told that Zerubbabel, “who should found the house of God and perfect it,” represents “the Lord who would come, and would restore the Spiritual Heaven and Church.” We become discouraged sometimes. There seem to be too many claims made upon us by our necessities in the world and too much opposition within us to our regeneration. But it is the Lord who is really building our temple and He is able to finish what He has begun, if we can only keep the vision fresh in our minds. We remember that in the first chapter of Revelation the seven candlesticks, or lampstands, were the seven churches. Each of us, insofar as he is faithful to the teachings of the Word, is a church or lampstand. The seven lamps, the “eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth,” picture the omniscience of divine providence, which sees our every thought and desire and leads us as straight and as far as we are willing to be led (see Ezekiel 1:18). The two olive trees or olive berries which pour oil into the lamps are the two great commandments—love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. And we should especially note the question, “Who hath despised the day of small things?” It is not by the moments of great crisis that the strength of our purpose is tested and measured, but by the things we do and think and feel in the little affairs of everyday life.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 638⁷: “This treats of the foundation of the house or temple by Zerubbabel; and the ‘house’ or ‘temple’ signifies the church, therefore a ‘lampstand’ was seen by the prophet, and ‘near it two olive-trees,’ almost the same as what was seen by John here in the *Apocalypse*; and the ‘two olive-trees’ and the ‘olive berries’ signify celestial goods, which are the goods of love to the Lord and of love towards a brother or companion; the former good is signified by ‘the olive-tree seen at the right side of the bowl,’ and the latter by ‘the olive-tree seen near the left side.’ The truths of this good are meant by ‘the sons of the olive-tree standing by the Lord of the

whole earth,' 'to stand by Him' signifying to be and to exist from Him."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. How long did the captivity in Babylon last? *about seventy years*
- P. What king permitted the people to go back to the Holy Land? *Cyrus of Persia*
- P. What did he tell them to do? *rebuild the temple*
- J. Who was their leader? *Zerubbabel*
- P. Did all the people want to go back? *no*
- P. What were those who remained in Babylon told to do? *give money and supplies*
- J. Why did those who returned interrupt the building of the temple? *more interested in their own comfort*
- P. What did they build instead? *houses for themselves*
- P. How did the Lord rebuke them? *through prophets (Haggai and Zechariah)*
- J. In our chapter how did Zechariah's vision come to him? *from an angel*
- J. What did he see in the vision? *lampstand and two olive trees*
- J. What message was given him for Zerubbabel? *"not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit"*
- J. What did the angel tell him the lamps were? *the eyes of the Lord*
- I. What were the two olive trees? *two anointed ones (love of Lord and neighbor)*
- I. What does the temple represent? *a heavenly character, or the church in us*
- I. What is pictured by the lampstand? *the Word, containing divine truth*
- S. What are the "eyes of the Lord"? *His divine providence*
- S. What do the olive trees picture? *the good of love to the Lord and love to the neighbor*