

Hope for a New Day

Focal Verses • Haggai 2:23; ZECHARIAH 4:1–14

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will ACKNOWLEDGE the connection between God’s promises to Israel for rebuilding the Temple and the Israelites’ obedience to Him, APPRECIATE the community’s restoration of the Temple and God’s restoration of the people, and ARTICULATE our thankfulness to God for the blessings bestowed upon us for our obedience.

In Focus

Selena had just moved to a new town. She had a great job, but hadn’t made any friends yet. Every day as she drove to work, she passed the county jail. After a few weeks, she felt like God wanted her to go to the jail to visit the inmates. This was way out of her comfort zone, but she wanted to obey God. Finally, she got up the courage to fill out the application to volunteer.

Shortly after, she nervously arrived at the jail, Bible in hand, for her first visit with the female inmates. As she prayed to God for courage, she noticed another group of women enter with their Bibles. She knew it was just the confirmation she needed. She introduced herself and found that the other women had been coming to the jail for months to conduct Bible study sessions. The women welcomed Selena. As they ministered together over the next couple of weeks, Selena not only made new friends, but discovered unexpected joy and hope in sharing with others.

Obedience to God brings blessing. In today’s lesson, we will learn how God enables us and works on our behalf to help us accomplish what He wants us to do.

Keep in Mind

“Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6, KJV).

Say It Correctly

Zerubbabel – zeh-ROO-bah-bell.

Shealtiel – shee-ALL-tee-el.

Sheshbazzar – SHESH-bah-zar.

KJV

Haggai 2:23; ZECHARIAH 4:1–14

2:23 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 4:1 And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.

2 And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof:

3 And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.

4 So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?

Hope for a New Day

5 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

7 Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

8 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.

10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

11 Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?

12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?

13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

14 Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the LORD of the whole earth.

NLT

Haggai 2:23; ZECHARIAH 4:1–14

2:23 “But when this happens, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, I will honor you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant. I will make you like a signet ring on my finger, says the LORD, for I have chosen you. I, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, have spoken!”

Zechariah 4:1 Then the angel who had been talking with me returned and woke me, as though I had been asleep.

2 “What do you see now?” he asked. I answered, “I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl of oil on top of it. Around the bowl are seven lamps, each having seven spouts with wicks.

3 And I see two olive trees, one on each side of the bowl.”

4 Then I asked the angel, “What are these, my lord? What do they mean?”

5 “Don’t you know?” the angel asked. “No, my lord,” I replied.

6 Then he said to me, “This is what the LORD says to Zerubbabel: It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

7 Nothing, not even a mighty mountain, will stand in Zerubbabel’s way; it will become a level plain before him! And when Zerubbabel sets the final stone of the Temple in place, the people will shout: ‘May God bless it! May God bless it!’”

8 Then another message came to me from the LORD:

9 “Zerubbabel is the one who laid the foundation of this Temple, and he will complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of Heaven’s Armies has sent me.

10 Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel’s hand.” (The seven lamps represent the eyes of the LORD that search all around the world.)

11 Then I asked the angel, “What are these two olive trees on each side of the lampstand,

12 and what are the two olive branches that pour out golden oil through two gold tubes?”

13 “Don’t you know?” he asked. “No, my lord,” I replied.

Hope for a New Day

14 Then he said to me, “They represent the two heavenly beings who stand in the court of the LORD of all the earth.”

The People, Places, and Times

Zechariah. A prophet (Zechariah 1:1) and a priest (Nehemiah 12:10–16) who was a contemporary of the prophet Haggai. Zechariah was born in Babylonia during the exilic period. He was one of the estimated fifty thousand exiles who returned to Judah under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua in 538 B.C. During his ministry to God’s people, Zechariah’s primary purpose was to encourage the people in their work to rebuild the Temple and continually remind them of God’s promise that He would take care of them and bless them if they returned to Him.

Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel from the line of Judah; his name means “seed or offspring of Babylon.” His Babylonian name was Sheshbazzar, and he was recognized as a prince in captivity. He was believed to be a man of great influence in direct service to King Cyrus. He led the first wave of exiles from Babylonian captivity. The king gave Zerubbabel favor to rebuild the second Temple and reestablish worship in Jerusalem.

Background

Apparently, some of the Israelites chose not to leave Babylon at the end of the seventy year exile. But “everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem” (from Ezra 1:5, NIV). They returned with joy and purpose, bringing gifts of livestock, gold, and silver bestowed upon them by the people of Babylon.

After settling in their towns, the people came together to begin the joyful but daunting project of rebuilding the Temple that had been destroyed seventy years earlier. Their first step was to rebuild the altar to reestablish the offering of sacrifices as required of God’s people (Ezra 3:1–6). The people then began offering to pay for the materials and labor needed to build the Temple’s foundation.

Approximately two years after returning to Judah, God’s people finished building the Temple’s foundation. The people sang and praised God, accompanied by the priests and Levites. They shouted and wept joyfully, and the celebration was so loud it could be heard from far away (Ezra 3:10–13).

Unfortunately, Zerubbabel and his builders soon faced opposition from their enemies, primarily inhabitants of nearby Samaria. These enemies purposely set out to discourage God’s people from rebuilding the Temple, even going so far as to hire people to work against them (Ezra 4:4–5). Sadly, the rebuilding of the Temple was halted for seventeen years.

At-A-Glance

1. God’s Promise (Haggai 2:23)
2. God’s Servants (Zechariah 4:1–7)
3. God’s Sovereignty (vv. 8–14)

In Depth

1. God’s Promise (Haggai 2:23)

All work on rebuilding the Temple had been halted for seventeen years, and God’s people had lost hope of ever finishing what they had started. But then the Word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai. God

Hope for a New Day

instructed him to tell Zerubbabel that He would literally move heaven and earth (Haggai 2:21–22) to accomplish His plan. God’s plan was that the Temple would be rebuilt and that Zerubbabel would be honored. God says He would make Zerubbabel like a signet ring on His finger. In biblical times, a signet ring was used as one’s signature and symbolized a pledge, a guarantee of payment or fulfilling one’s promise. God promised to honor Zerubbabel and tell His people that He would fulfill His promises. It was time for His people to once again return to Him and the work He had called them to.

2. God’s Servants (Zechariah 4:1–7)

Along with the promise given to Zerubbabel through the prophet Haggai, God also gave Zechariah a vision concerning the completion of the Temple. In 4:1–3, Zechariah saw an angel who showed him a golden lampstand with two olive trees, one on either side. The trees represented the offices of the priest and king. Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the leader of God’s people and a descendant of the royal house of David, were to lead God’s people forward to the Temple’s completion. However, neither the people nor their leaders could accomplish anything alone. In verse 6, the Lord says, “It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies” (NLT).

Only by the power of the Spirit would Zerubbabel be enabled to finish the rebuilding. The angel assured and encouraged him through Zechariah that even though there was a “mountain” of opposition and discouragement in his way, nothing could stand before God’s power working through His servant. Zerubbabel would see God’s plan accomplished amidst much rejoicing.

3. God’s Sovereignty (Zechariah 4:8–14)

God then reminded His people that Zerubbabel had already laid the foundation for the Temple. He promised that He would use Zerubbabel to complete the rebuilding, and when this was done, everyone would know that it was God who had accomplished this great deed.

Some people apparently thought that rebuilding the Temple wasn’t worth it or that what had already been accomplished was insignificant. However, God said that no one should discount what had already been done. Even though it seemed to be a small beginning, God would bring it to a glorious conclusion. And when God accomplished His plan, everyone would rejoice.

Finally, Zechariah asked for clarification about the olive trees and branches he saw in the vision. The angel clarified that Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the descendant of David, were the ones chosen for God’s purpose in His plan to rebuild the Temple. The oil that was poured out of the olive branches and used to anoint the leaders signified the Holy Spirit. The symbolism of both the king and priest points to the Messianic fulfillment in Jesus, who also descended from the royal line of David and is now our King and Priest, the “LORD of all the earth” (v. 14, NLT). God’s sovereign plan governs Zerubbabel, the exiles, and believers through the ages. He will do what needs to be done to accomplish His purposes and give us what we need to obey Him.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why is it significant that God calls Himself the “LORD of Heaven’s Armies” when speaking to both Haggai and Zechariah (Haggai 2:23; Zechariah 4:6, 9, NLT)?
2. What do the seven golden lamps represent? Why would this be important for Zechariah to know (Zechariah 4:2, 10)?

Discuss the Meaning

Hope for a New Day

After God delivered His people from exile, He had a specific task for them to complete—the Temple’s rebuilding.

1. Why did the people stop building the Temple?
2. How was the Israelites’ obedience to build the Temple tied to their restoration to God?

Liberating Lesson

God promised the people of Israel that He would restore them to their land and instruct them to rebuild His Temple. He did not leave them to their own devices; He provided favor, materials, and the power of the Spirit to enable them to obey what He asked. We often resist obeying God because what He asks seems too complex or demanding, yet He will bless us when we obey.

Application for Activation

Obedience to God brings great reward. One way to learn to be obedient is to read His Word regularly. God’s Word contains everything we need to know about how to treat others, handle our money, and be good employees, parents, or spouses. When we read God’s Word and apply it to our lives, we please Him.

More Light on the Text

Haggai 2:23; Zechariah 4:1–14, KJV

Haggai 2:23 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.

Haggai spoke eschatologically to a definite circumstance (Word Biblical Commentary, 163). The Temple was being restored, but slowly, and wouldn’t be finished until 516 B.C. (see Ezra 6:14–15). However, in this eschatological (end times) promise was hope for what would be. This made clear what Zerubbabel represented for the nation. This verse confirms that Zerubbabel was God’s chosen servant and speaks to God’s people. Not only was Zerubbabel chosen, but he also represented God’s signet. “The significance of comparing Zerubbabel to a ‘signet ring’ (a seal of royal authority or personal ownership) is clarified by the imagery in Jeremiah 22:24–25. God said that if Jehoiachin (Zerubbabel’s grandfather) were His signet ring, he would pull him off His hand and give him to Nebuchadnezzar. Possibly, Haggai was saying that in Zerubbabel, God was reversing the curse pronounced by Jehoiachin” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1544*). With that knowledge, it is interesting that the author would use the signet ring imagery here. Reversing the curse is God’s *modus operandi* (His mode of operation). That’s precisely what He’s done for us through the redemptive work of Christ on the Cross.

Zechariah 4:1 And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep. **2** And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: **3** And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.

The form of this chapter is a vision that is sandwiched between two oracles addressed to Zerubbabel, thus connecting the book of Zechariah with the closing of Haggai. It was typical for God to speak to His prophets via dreams and visions; therefore, this form fits God’s pattern. The dreamer is also expected to make sense of the signs and symbols in the dream, in this case, the questions asked in the dream. “What seest thou?” (v. 2) is not a literal question. It is a metaphorical question that moved to the interpretive eschatological for the dreamer, who was now awakened.

Hope for a New Day

The dream included a candlestick, a bowl, seven lamps, seven pipes, and seven lamps. There were also two olive trees beside the bowl on either side. “What do you see and what does this mean?” becomes the central question in the opening of this chapter.

4 So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? 5 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. 6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. 7 Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

While Zerubbabel was a literal person, and this prophecy spoke to a contemporary situation, this is also about God and His plan. The Temple was going to be rebuilt. Even though Zerubbabel was in the picture, the job was not only for him. The job wasn't complete until much later in history, but God clarified that would be accomplished by His Spirit. While the Lord never directly answered what each figure in the vision represented, He gave the prophet a broader understanding of what was happening. God was with Zerubbabel literally, figuratively, and symbolically. God's Spirit would ultimately be the driving force behind the task at hand. Human effort is never enough, and though there were mountains Zerubbabel faced, God, by His Spirit, was going to turn them into plains symbolically. We can expect the same thing with the mountains in our lives.

8 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.

The Lord explained to Zechariah (vv. 8–10) that Zerubbabel's finishing the Temple restoration would drive the critics to silence, for they would know God had sent the prophet and the ones to rebuild. The mere beginning of this project and prophecy would serve as a sign of God being with Zerubbabel. As the passage continues, we see that it was the work of Zerubbabel to lay the foundation. God's Word, as spoken in prophecy, is a type of foundation that has been laid. Embarking on the restoration project was as important as finishing it.

10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth. 11 Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? 12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?

The Lord now began to answer Zechariah's questions about what the symbols in the vision represented. While the text answers Zechariah's questions, scholars debate the meaning of these symbols. For example, it is said that the phrase “eyes of the Lord” symbolizes God's worldwide scrutiny and the fact that nothing is hidden from Him. In any event, the practical application here is that Zerubbabel will be given the power to finish the Temple.

13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. 14 Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the LORD of the whole earth.

Here, we find more symbolism. The olives and accompanying olive oil represented God's anointing or blessing of the project and His chosen vessel to do the work. “The two oil supplying branches represent the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1556*)— in this

Hope for a New Day

passage, Joshua and Zerubbabel. “The candlestick [from the previous section], then, seems to represent Israel as a light to the nations (see Isaiah 42:6; 49:6), potentially in Zechariah’s time . . .” (1556).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Ezekiel 21–22
Psalm 78:9–16

TUESDAY

Ezekiel 23–24
Psalm 78:17–24

WEDNESDAY

Ezekiel 25–27
Psalm 78:25–31

THURSDAY

Ezekiel 28–30
Psalm 78:32–39

FRIDAY

Ezekiel 31–33
Psalm 78:40–49

SATURDAY

Ezekiel 34–36
Psalm 78:50–64

SUNDAY

Ezekiel 37–39
Psalm 78:65–72