

KERUX COMMENTARIES

ZEPHANIAH—MALACHI

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A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching

GARY V. SMITH
TIMOTHY D. SPRANKLE

Herbert W. Bateman IV
EDITOR



Zephaniah–Malachi: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching

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EDITOR'S PREFACE TO THE SERIES

The Kerux Commentary series, unlike other commentaries written for preachers, joins experts in biblical exegesis with experienced communicators of biblical truth. Together they bring a heightened refinement in the handling of the Bible. Every volume emphasizes text-based truths that bridge from the context of the original hearers and readers to the twenty-first-century world. The name, *kerux* (KAY-rüxs) captures the aim of the series. Just as a *kerux* was one who proclaimed the official announcement of the king, so the forty-five volumes in this series will enable the preacher or teacher to accurately and authoritatively communicate the message of our divine King.

Every volume presents preaching units that offer *exegetical*, *theological*, and *homiletical* material to guide preachers and teachers to accurately interpret the Bible and ultimately engage today's world.



Solid *exegetical analysis* of the biblical text reveals the literary-theological movement of every biblical passage. The exegetical authors (trained experts in interpretation) engage the biblical text by interacting with original languages that shed light on interpretation (e.g., syntax, grammar, structure), hermeneutical issues relevant to a given passage (e.g., genre analysis), and pertinent secondary literature. From the exegetical analysis is derived a theological focus. The gnomic truths of a passage—those truths that transcend time and culture—emphasize the *theological focus* of each preaching unit. Following the careful exegetical analysis and insightful theological synthesis, homiletical authors (trained experts in preaching) offer suggestions for communicating the text. Based on the popular “big idea” preaching model, every preaching unit offers *preaching strategies*, contemporary connections, suggestions for creative presentation, illustrations, and more. These tools help the preacher and teacher effectively proclaim Scripture.

Kerux commentaries are written for trained pastors and teachers who speak regularly, who have some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and who spend a significant time preparing to preach and teach God's Word. As a result, each volume offers:

- a detailed introduction and outline.
- a summary of all preaching sections with their primary exegetical, theological, and preaching ideas.
- preaching pointers that join the original historical context with the contemporary one.
- insights from the Hebrew and Greek text.
- a thorough exposition of the text.
- sidebars of pertinent information and historical background.
- appropriate charts and photographs.
- a theological focus to passages.

Editor's Preface to the Series

- a contemporary big idea for every preaching unit.
- present-day meaning, validity, and application of a main idea.
- creative presentations for each primary idea.
- key questions about the text for study groups.
- lists of books and articles for further reading.

Many thanks to Jim Weaver, Kregel's former acquisition editor, who conceived of this commentary series and further developed it with the team of Jeffrey D. Arthurs, Robert B. Chisholm, David M. Howard Jr., Darrell L. Bock, Roy E. Ciampa, and Michael J. Wilkins. Much appreciation is extended to Dennis and Paul Hillman, whose thirteen-year tenacious commitment to the series contributed to Kerux becoming a reality. Finally, gratitude is extended to the two authors for each Kerux volume; the outside reviewers, editors, and proofreaders; and Kregel staff who suggested numerous improvements.

—Herbert W. Bateman IV

EXEGETICAL AUTHOR'S PREFACE

*This book is dedicated to Janson Chan,
the director of Timothy Training International,
a missions organization dedicate to the education of Chinese pastors.
He provided me the opportunity to share with them the message of the Minor Prophets.*

Understanding what God said through his prophets hundreds of years ago, in a culture very different from ours, requires the Spirit's guidance, careful attention to the meaning of words, the analysis of difficult sentences, knowledge of ancient Near Eastern history and literature, and a great deal of patience. Thankfully, God has directed many earlier authors to ponder over these prophetic messages, which makes it possible for us today to weigh alternative interpretations and at times humbly suggest new ways of interpreting what the prophets said. But the goal of this commentary is not just for the reader to gain knowledge about what a prophet said; it is to guide all those who read and study God's words (and especially the pastor who preaches it) to understand the heart of the theological message that can shape the preaching of the truth in a way that will be persuasive, biblically based, and relevant to the people we interact with today.

In order for this to happen, God had to guide the leaders and publishing staff at Kregel to design the format in such a unique way that the reader will approach each passage with certain questions that will naturally produce insights that might otherwise be missed. So I am thankful for those who designed the format of this commentary, and for our editors (particularly Dr. Herb Bateman) who repeatedly pushed us to stick with the format, who corrected our grammar, and who challenged us to rethink or defend an interpretation.

Of course, in a joint effort where two writers (Pastor Tim Sprankle and myself) are working together, it is essential for each of us to do our part to assist the other author in his task. So I am thankful for Pastor Tim's ability to think and apply the ancient truth in new ways that are faithful to the principles the prophets were communicating. Each person reading Tim's material would be wise to learn from his suggestions, to dare to illustrate a point in unusual ways, to address issues in a way that speaks to the people of the next generation who will soon be leading the church.

Through faith we believe that God is able to do abundantly more than we can ask or think (Eph. 3:17–20), if our ministries are rooted and grounded in love and if we are faithful in sharing the truth in ways that people understand.

—Gary V. Smith

PREACHING AUTHOR'S PREFACE

*This book is dedicated to my wife and kids,
who endured many hours of my disappearing into my basement study
to wrestle with words, both mine and the prophets'—and to
D. Brent Sandy, who first tuned my ear to hear the prophets preach.*

The last time I spoke at a nursing home chapel service, I opened my copy of the Bible to the book of Haggai. Looking out over a group of senior saints, I told them I simply wanted to read them some encouraging words. In their lifetime, they had heard more than enough sermons, homilies, and devotional talks. And I, a thirtysomething pastor, assumed I had little wisdom to offer them. Instead, I opted for some encouraging words from God's Word. They consented.

Then I gripped the edges of the pulpit, leaned into the microphone, and began to recite Haggai. The ancient words (ever true) resounded. The ancient words (ever true) related. The ancient words encouraged me and my present company.

The words of the minor prophets were meant to encourage, correct, inform, and inspire. They spoke of past failures, present challenges, and future realities. Most importantly, they spoke of God and for God. And God still speaks through them today.

Writing a commentary for the Minor Prophets is no small task. Neither is preaching the Minor Prophets. We read and study, draft and edit notes, deliver and apply a sermon, and then move on to the next section. Somewhere along the way we can get lost in the technicality of it all. Fortunately, prophets demand to be heard.

Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi shout. They shout *of* God—his goodness and power, mercy and judgment, and demand for purity and faithfulness to his promises—and they shout *for* God. They've been shouting to me as I've written. I pray they shout to you as you read.

—Timothy D. Sprinkle

OVERVIEW OF ALL PREACHING PASSAGES

Zephaniah 1:1–2:3

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Zephaniah supported Josiah's reform movement by warning that God would thoroughly judge all forms of false worship in Jerusalem on the approaching day of the Lord (1:1–15), so the only hope was for people to turn away from their sinful ways, humble themselves, and intercede for God's mercy before the beginning of the day of the Lord (2:1–3).

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Since one cannot hide from God's judgment, the prophet tries to motivate people to humble themselves and seek God before he executes his wrath on them.

PREACHING IDEA

Quit playing hide-and-seek with God.

PREACHING POINTS

Zephaniah did not bear good news for the people of Judah. Although his audience had several reasons for happy feelings—Assyria's decline, Israel's independence, and Josiah's initial reforms—their circumstances had not sparked widespread revival. God's covenant people continued to act, dress, and praise like their pagan neighbors. Using stark images of God's coming, doing battle, and bringing destruction, Zephaniah shattered their status quo. He sounded the trumpet of judgment, mercifully offering his people a final call to come clean and seek God.

Today, God's people could benefit from a similar wake-up call. The spiritual climate in the West is lukewarm, as believers have pressed the snooze button on alarming spiritual realities: the decline of biblical literacy, rise of sexual impurity, and pursuit of selfish gain. Furthermore, faith no longer claims a place of privilege or influence in society. Religious leaders are responsible for spiritual drift. Everyday believers are complicit. In an age of indifference and idolatry, the prophetic voice of the past offers an antidote. This passage serves as a plea to quit playing hide-and-seek with God.

Zephaniah 2:4–3:8

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The Lord would judge the nations for their pride (2:4–10) and people in Jerusalem for not trusting God or accepting correction (3:1–8), but he would bless a remnant of Judah (2:7a, 9b) and many from the nations who honor God (2:11).

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God will punish those who refuse to accept correction, as well as those who have oppressed God's people, so that people will repent and worship God.

PREACHING IDEA

When people all around you fall, check your path for pitfalls.

PREACHING POINTS

Zephaniah circled the compass to point out neighbors on every side of Judah who would face God's judgment. If the original audience in Jerusalem heard these oracles in a spirit of self-righteousness or indifference, the prophet disturbed their peace by pointing the finger at guilty Jerusalem. She was not immune to God's discipline; her record of wrongs had not gone unnoticed. The message was a warning to God's people to check their path for pitfalls after watching their neighbors stumble.

God's people today continue to wrestle with a sense of immunity to his discipline. Diagnosing God's judgment is slippery business, but it does not take a sage to see that others fall. All around us people's lives come crashing down: their marriages crumble, their businesses tank, their nations implode with civil war, their social circles shrink to a point, or their bodies bend to the will of cancer. Some falls may be bad luck or happenstance in a fallen world. But many falls are propelled by foolish choices and arrogance. This section urges us to check our path for pitfalls when people all around us fall.

Zephaniah 3:9–20

EXEGETICAL IDEA

People from around the world who have pure hearts and lips would enter the joy of living with God their King without fear of any enemies.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

People who seek God will be transformed and dwell in God's presence.

PREACHING IDEA

Look forward to a fearless and festive future with God.

PREACHING POINTS

Zephaniah turned a corner in the final section to address another motivation for seeking God. The prophet shifted from words of woe to images of hope, replete with singing, dancing, and international peace. At the center of the festivities stood Israel's God and King, Yahweh. For the original audience, such promises of fearless and festive living would have revived their hope. However, the question remained as to whether this hope would renew their character.

Today, God's people could use a fresh word of hope. Constant news cycles broadcast local and global suffering. Social media posts have perfected the art of cynicism and shame. Even the typical list of prayer requests is filled with illnesses, financial woes, and family

problems. In other words, life has a way of causing stress and choking out joy. A look beyond this life—not as a mere escape to a place in the clouds but finding our home as renewed people with God—lifts us up and gives everyone great hope. This closing passage teaches us to look beyond our present sufferings and anticipate a fearless and festive future with God.

Haggai 1:1–15

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Haggai confronted the excuses people used to explain why they were delaying work on the temple and challenged them to glorify God by changing their priorities and building the temple.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God is pleased with people who set aside their excuses for delaying his work and give priority to honoring him by immediately doing what he expects them to do.

PREACHING IDEA

Put an immediate end to “eventual” obedience.

PREACHING POINTS

Haggai shared a timely message with God’s people. Eighteen years after a remnant had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, the project remained incomplete. The inhabitants made excuses, sought to further their own comfort, and ignored signs of God’s displeasure. The prophet assumed that Persian politics had fed Israel’s procrastination. Haggai implored his original audience—Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and the Jerusalem populace—to gather wood and resume working. They responded immediately and ended their delayed obedience.

In today’s age of instant gratification, high-speed information, and one-click activation, God’s people have developed an ironic habit of putting off spiritual commitments. We hedge, weigh options, and wait for better opportunities. We make excuses and procrastinate, rather than make his will our priority. Why pray now, when I can pray later? Why share my faith now, when another opportunity will arise? Why give a portion of this paycheck to global missions, when I can make up for it next month? This passage redresses our tendency to put other priorities before God, exhorting us to put an immediate end to “eventual” obedience.

Haggai 2:1–9

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Although many were discouraged because this temple did not match the splendor of Solomon’s temple of bygone years, they should persevere because God promised that his Spirit would be with them. He would supply all their material needs to build the temple, and this temple would have more glory than Solomon’s temple.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God's people are to persevere in carrying out God's expectations, to move beyond the past ways of doing things, and to trust in God's ability to supply all their needs.

PREACHING IDEA

Beat the "good old days" blues by trusting God today.

PREACHING POINTERS

One month after the temple building project resumed, Haggai relayed his second message. Despite their recent activity, spirits remained low among Israel's leaders and the general populace. Not even a week's worth of celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles sustained optimism among them. Instead, nostalgia for Solomon's more glorious temple reigned in the minds of many. But God would not have his people sulk. He rallied them with imperatives: "fear not" and "look forward." Haggai's promise of God's presence, provision, and peace were meant to instill trust in his people for better days to come.

Getting stuck in nostalgia is an old problem. As forward-thinking and progress-oriented as the Western world seems to be, we continue to hear voices in the church pine for the "good old days." We lament the technological invasion, sexual perversion, moral corruption, political division, social tolerance, and secular convictions ruling our day. We recall better times when public schools mandated student prayer, marriages lasted a lifetime, and mothers stayed home to keep house. We think a return to "former glory" would revive national trust in God. Sadly, not only does nostalgia gloss over past sins, it also fosters a sense of defeat. But we must not be discouraged; God is not stuck in the past. This passage compels us to beat the "good old days" blues by trusting him today.

Haggai 2:10–19

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Applying the Levitical principle that God-honoring living could not be gained by touching something holy like the temple caused many people to realize they were already defiled and needed to repent, so that when they did God could bless them as he promised.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God-honoring holy living is not achieved through works, service, or sacrifices but through the removal of defilement inside so that God can provide his blessings.

PREACHING IDEA

A clean start with God starts within.

PREACHING POINTERS

Three months into the temple renovation project, Haggai brought the people a bad diagnosis. They were unclean. Their defilement was like a transferrable disease. Their material blessings were lacking. The original audience would have recognized Haggai's appeal to the covenant

curses. Fortunately, their revived effort to rebuild the temple showed God their desire for a clean start and future blessings.

The need for a clean start with God continues today. Fortunately, he welcomes a change of heart and grants fresh starts. Like a passionate father, he watches for prodigal sons and daughters in the distance and races to embrace them upon their return. Sadly, we wait too long to recognize our compromised motives and calloused consciences. We excuse our inner corruption as a personality quirk, pathology, or work in progress. Conversely, we deem ourselves holy, in varying degrees, due to religious activity, church attendance, and proximity to “spiritual giants.” Outside-in holiness breeds legalism, activism, and nagging guilt. This passage exposes our need for a clean start with God starts within.

Haggai 2:20–23

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Since God controlled the political rise and fall of every nation, Zerubbabel should lead Israel with confidence, knowing that he was God’s chosen servant, empowered by God to lead the nation.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God’s leaders are to find their confidence in God’s plans for the future and in God’s ability to carry out these plans through them.

PREACHING IDEA

Circumstances don’t shake those with deep trust in God.

PREACHING POINTERS

Haggai’s final message had an immediate audience of one: Zerubbabel. The first three oracles addressed governor Zerubbabel, high priest Joshua, and the remnant in Jerusalem. In the last speech, the prophet singled out Zerubbabel. God identified his need for a climatic word of assurance. Despite undesirable appearances—lack of material blessings, a sluggish rebuilding project, and Persian rule—God remained in control. Moreover, he had chosen Zerubbabel to lead his people forward. Haggai’s message pointed to Zerubbabel as God’s chosen servant, signet ring, Davidic successor, and unshakeable leader for the days ahead.

God continues to advance his kingdom efforts today through leaders with deep conviction. He provides gifted men and women to lead faith-based organizations, churches, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, sports teams, and healthy homes. Their unshakeable trust, remarkable courage, and consistent virtue shines in a world opposed to God. Not only has the religious climate in the West turned cold toward biblical values, it has become hostile. Coaches and teachers are fired for sharing their faith. Christian business owners are picketed for making their convictions public. Pastors are dismissed for their “outdated and intolerant” views. Amidst the torrents of cultural change and faith decline, God’s firm control of the world buoys these leaders. This passage reminds us that circumstances don’t shake those with deep trust in God.

Zechariah 1:1–6

EXEGETICAL IDEA

God was angry with former generations because they did not repent, so he judged them; but if the present generation would learn from these mistakes and turn to God, he would turn to them.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Sinful people who repent can restore their relationship with God.

PREACHING IDEA

Redirect your heart toward God to receive his heartfelt welcome.

PREACHING POINTERS

Zechariah's opening words were a summons. He beckoned his people to redirect their hearts to God. For nearly two decades, the original audience had dwelled within the borders of Judea after returning from Babylon. However, they had stopped work on the temple rebuilding project. The prophet Haggai's gave them an initial burst of motivation, but construction stopped soon after it started because God's people let sin, doubt, and despair come between them and God. Political and religious leaders failed to stir revival. To inspire genuine repentance, Zechariah promised a warm reception from God.

Today's church would benefit from an invitation for its people to redirect their hearts toward God. Externally, God's people may appear close to him: always smiling, morally upstanding, and active in their churches. But externals do not tell the whole story. Church gatherings may play host to hollow religious performance. Strong doctrinal positions may disguise ongoing moral compromises. Sin, doubt, and despair affect today's church as much as they hurt ancient Israel. This passage urges us to redirect our hearts toward God to receive his heartfelt welcome.

Zechariah 1:7–17

EXEGETICAL IDEA

God knew what was happening in every nation, so he announced his anger with some nations, his compassion toward his own people, the building of the temple, and the filling of Jerusalem with joyful people.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God's anger with sinful people does not overshadow his compassion for those who follow him.

PREACHING IDEA

God's not blind to our trials but brings healing on his timeline.

PREACHING POINTERS

Three months after sharing his first message, Zechariah recorded his first of eight visions. He saw a patrolling horseman and angelic messengers. To the original audience, the imagery

Overview of All Preaching Passages

would have brought assurance of God's watchfulness and power. While the specific details of the vision—different colored horses, myrtle trees, ravines, and various speakers—remain in question, the overall message is clear: God's plan to intervene on behalf of his people was a foregone conclusion. He would manifest his sovereign control in compassion for Jerusalem and rage against the nations.

The view of God in today's church must be challenged. For many believers, God appears as a distant despot or indifferent deity. God does not oversee our lives, answer our prayers, or heal our wounds. And on rare occasions of divine intervention, God's timing does not align with our wishes. We easily dismiss such a distant and indifferent God. Of course, God remains emotionally engaged with his people, working a plan for restoration in his timing. He maintains absolute control, shows tender compassion, and expresses justified fury. This passage rebuffs modern misunderstandings of God, offering assurance that he's not blind to our trials but brings healing in his timeline.

Zechariah 1:18–2:13

EXEGETICAL IDEA

God's zeal for Jerusalem would result in stronger nations defeating the nations that scattered his people, but God's presence in Zion signaled the restoration of his people, and this would draw many Gentiles to worship him.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God will judge the sinful people of this world and protect those who follow and worship him.

PREACHING IDEA

Old losses are fertile ground for new beginnings.

PREACHING POINTERS

God showed Zechariah two more visions meant to instill his hearers with hope. First, God would bring judgment (i.e., "four artisans/craftsmen") on the nations (i.e., "four horns") that scattered God's people from their land. Then he would set in motions a plan to expand Jerusalem and dwell within the city. This news would result in joyful songs and awed silence. While the visions lack specific names and set timelines, the imagery would have uplifted the original audience. God's loving affection and good intentions for his people overshadowed their painful losses in exile.

God's people suffer many losses today. In many countries around the world, following God leads to the loss of political freedom, job security, personal comfort, and one's own life. In the West, evangelicals are losing their majority voice in the public realm while the religiously nonaffiliated (e.g., Nones) and antagonistic (e.g., New Atheists) camps continue making gains. Political battles favoring secular values (e.g., same-sex marriage, transgender bathrooms, recreational drug use) over biblical values make God's people feel like they have lost their influence on the nation's conscience. Fortunately, losses in popularity, political persuasion, and personal comfort do not spell the end of Christian faith in the

Overview of All Preaching Passages

West or anywhere else. In fact, these losses often catalyze greater efforts to trust God and live according to his purposes. This passage challenges us to rethink old losses as fertile ground for God's new beginnings.

Zechariah 3:1–4:14

EXEGETICAL IDEA

After God's Adversary accused God's religious servant the high priest Joshua of sinfulness, God cleansed Joshua and restored him to serve in the temple; then God encouraged the political leader Zerubbabel with the promise that God's Spirit would enable them to complete the restoration of the temple.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God's servant leaders should not be discouraged because of difficult circumstances, for God forgives sins and will empower them to do the work he has called them to do.

PREACHING IDEA

God can powerfully use imperfect leaders.

PREACHING POINTERS

The fourth and fifth visions narrow from a national to personal focus. Zechariah received heavenly insight concerning Jerusalem's earthly leaders: Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor. The original audience likely had a low view of its leaders. Persian rule, lackluster harvests, regional tensions, and a stuttering temple project had done little to impress anyone. But God assured Zechariah that these two leaders had his vote of confidence; they were called, cleansed, and empowered to undertake their tasks.

Leaders in today's church and parachurch organizations face tremendous pressure. Leadership books create an expectation for them to master time management, vision casting, self-analysis, motivation, delegation, innovation, and countless other abilities. Leaders live under a microscope: every accomplishment is analyzed; every failure, exposed. If they do not change their organizational culture or build the bottom line fast enough, they are questioned or replaced. We prefer effective leaders over faithful elders, dynamic speakers over dutiful shepherds. This section suggests that God's approval of a leader matters more than man's opinion. Indeed, God can powerfully use imperfect leaders.

Zechariah 5:1–11

EXEGETICAL IDEA

God's curse would fall on all sinners (those who steal and swear falsely), then God would remove the wickedness of idolatry from the land.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Before there can be spiritual restoration with God, all forms of evil must end.

PREACHING IDEA

Evil has a divine expiration date.

PREACHING POINTERS

Zechariah observed God's intention to put an end to evil in two visions. First, the prophet saw a flying scroll whereby God cursed upon the people for theft and misuse of his name, and he called out their transgressions. Next, there appeared a covered basket containing a woman who symbolized idolatry; God would rid the land of her wickedness. For both visions an angel provided the prophet with an interpretation. The original audience would have understood the need for God to stamp evil with its expiration date. In fact, they would have welcomed it, knowing that the blessings of the covenant cannot coexist with human rebellion.

Evil lingers yet today. Endless news cycles harp on the misdeeds of sinful men and women, corrupt nations and institutions: child trafficking and sexual harassment, bullying and mass shootings, insider trading and corporate deceit, racial and sexual inequality. Much of the evil that plagues us today is the product of misguided human efforts. Our attempts to eradicate evil through education, politics, activism, finances, and religion may be well-intentioned but are often as unrealistic as Hollywood's endless line of superhero films. Until God puts an end to evil, we will experience its effects. Fortunately, this passage assures us that evil has a divine expiration date.

Zechariah 6:1–8

EXEGETICAL IDEA

God's angelic forces were everywhere, doing his will and appeasing his wrath.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God's sovereign presence everywhere enables him to carry out his desires everywhere.

PREACHING IDEA

God has every square inch of the earth under his watch.

PREACHING POINTERS

Despite the ever-expanding borders of the Persian Empire, secured by the efforts of King Darius, God's rule remained a reality. This is the meaning of Zechariah's eighth and final vision: horses marching in every direction, sent by God on patrol. Although the original audience lived under the umbrella of Persian rule, marked by instability and uncertainty, Zechariah assured them that they lived under God's watch. He was in control. He would prevail over the nations. The picture of patrolling chariots and horses assured them that the divine reign has no borders.

Today God's people doubt his control of local and global events. We doubt his power when our prayers remain answered. We doubt his sovereignty when tragedy strikes or suffering persists. The complex of global problems proves especially troublesome to our faith: the advance of Islam and secular humanism; widespread malnutrition and inequality for females; terrorism and mass shootings; drug abuse and overdose fatalities; kidnappings and human

trafficking. People can cherry-pick evidence from across the planet that God is capricious or impotent. This passage curbs such fallacious thinking, affirming that God has every square inch of the earth under his watch.

Zechariah 6:9–15

EXEGETICAL IDEA

The placing of a crown on the head of Joshua the high priest elevated his status, encouraged people to return to Jerusalem, and was a sign that in the future God would raise up a messianic Branch/Sprout who would serve as both priest and king.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God's promise of a future Davidic King reinforces and underscores God's plans for his people now and in the future.

PREACHING IDEA

Only God can give an absolute guarantee.

PREACHING POINTERS

God returned his focus to the restoration of the temple and role of the high priest. In a previous vision, Joshua received God's vote of confidence; now Joshua received an ornate crown. Fashioned from the offerings of three men returning from exile, the decorative headpiece signaled God's favor. More importantly, God bestowed on Joshua a symbolic name: Branch. The crown and title assured the original audience of God's current support of the temple restoration and his future installment of a royal-priestly leader. Such assurance intended to inspire their faithful work.

In an age of uncertainty, people crave guarantees. We look for guarantees as we face a major surgery, purchase a new car, or invest for retirement. We want guarantees that our marriage will last, ministry programs will impact lives, and medication will relieve chronic pain. Sadly, many guarantees cannot hold weight, leading us to disappointment, doubt, and cynicism. We can project this on God. It is not enough that he has promised to remain present in our lives; we want constant reassurance that his word proves true. We want writing on the wall, lucid dreams, prophetic words, or symbols in our soup to reaffirm his promises. This passage reminds us that only God can give an absolute guarantee.

Zechariah 7:1–14

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Some people wondered if they still needed to keep the fasts that commemorated the defeat of Jerusalem, but Zechariah exhorted the audience to focus on what God wanted them to do (execute justice, show kindness, and show compassion) and to remember God's eschatological promises, for in the future they would feast and not fast over their past failures.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God does not accept worship from insincere people who refuse to follow his ethical standards.

PREACHING IDEA

Real remorse provokes positive change.

PREACHING POINTERS

Two years had passed since Zechariah's first vision, but the people remained reluctant to declare God's victory. A group of folks living outside Jerusalem came to the priests to inquire about the need to continue their memorial fasts. Rather than answer their questions, God raised a few of his own through Zechariah to expose their false remorse and insincere worship. Then he stressed the need for acts of love—justice, mercy, and compassion—rather than acts of penance. For the original audience this was not a new message but an echo of Moses and other prophets. The encounter reiterated their need to dispense with their solemn rituals and return to showing justice.

It's embarrassing when God's people today prefer showing a gloomy face to doing good deeds. Evangelicals lament their loss of political influence, legal protections, and opportunities to speak freely about their faith in public. We bemoan today's loose sexual ethic, consumer impulse, and vulgarity. We groan about diminishing loyalties to church activities and flighty tendencies of younger generations. Sadly, our remorse neither accepts personal responsibility nor motivates positive change. Inauthentic remorse looks inward and acts pathetic. Real remorse looks outward and acts positive. This passage reminds us that real remorse provokes positive change.

Zechariah 8:1–23

EXEGETICAL IDEA

God's great zeal for his covenant people would result in God saving them, returning them to their land, giving them peace, and blessing them, so God's people should practice justice in all their relationships and turn their fasting days into days of feasting and rejoicing.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

In the future, God's people will be restored and transformed, so they will celebrate rather than mourn.

PREACHING IDEA

"Save the date" for an upcoming party with God.

PREACHING POINTERS

God had something great in store for his people. He had planned a series of feasts with his restored people and their neighbors. Zechariah shared this news in his answer to the question of fasting raised in the previous chapter. The exile had ended. Rebuilding had begun. Renewal was on the horizon. To the original audience, this news was meant to breathe fresh hope into their labors and curb any defeatist (or nationalistic) leanings. The Lord of Hosts had scheduled a feast (several, actually) and invited all who obey him to indulge.

Overview of All Preaching Passages

The church today could benefit from a second glance at God's festive side. The Lord Almighty has infused his creation with wonders galore: teeming animals, rushing waters, succulent greenery, savory flavors, and glorious image-bearers. Too many people settle for a gloomy God bent on enforcing rules and inflicting punishments. While we cannot whitewash his jealousy, anger, and wrath, neither should we minimize his joy. The present abounds with a million little gifts from the Father of lights. The future will abound with parties and peoples beyond counting. This passage instructs us to "Save the date" for an upcoming party with God.

Zechariah 9:1–17

EXEGETICAL IDEA

After God had consumed the nations on the northern (Syria and Phoenicia) and western (Philistia) borders, he would raise up a righteous and humble messianic Savior-King who would restore a time of peace, joy, and freedom from foreign domination.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God will restore his people by eliminating his enemies, installing a humble King, and defending his people.

PREACHING IDEA

God has a grand plan for lasting peace.

PREACHING POINTERS

While the first eight chapters of Zechariah centered around visions, the closing five chapters recounted God's words verbalized (i.e., oracles) by the prophet. Each oracle cycled through key themes of God's protection, justice, mercy, and Messiah. They looked beyond immediate circumstances to far-off realities. The first of these speeches predicted an era of peace, following the defeat of local and distant opponents. Zechariah spoke of deliverance and peace coming through a divinely appointed King to inspire his original audience to maintain their trust in God.

We do not live in peaceful times. Unrest defines Western politics, the global arms race, civil rights, economic inequality, climate change, gun violence, and the spread of disease. Two minutes of nightly news and social media may quicken our pulse and cloud our willingness to think critically. Our growing anxiety has led to myriad attempts to foster inner peace. Yoga, meditation, mindfulness, massage, daily affirmations, salt caves, and kombucha teas head the list. As effective as these interventions might feel in the short term, they cannot secure long-term peace. Global and spiritual unrest require divine intervention. This passage teaches us that God has a grand plan for lasting peace.

Zechariah 10:1–11:3

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Although problems abound all around, God's people must depend on him (not false gods or godless leaders), follow God's leader, and believe God's promises to restore his people and defeat their enemies.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Trust God in difficult times, for he will strengthen his people as he has promised.

PREACHING IDEA

It's best to bank on God in bad circumstances.

PREACHING POINTERS

Circumstances did not look promising in Zechariah's day. Lack of rain led to poor vegetation. Lack of leadership led to religious confusion, vulnerability to enemies, and geographical displacement. But in this passage, God helped Zechariah look beyond bad circumstances. The prophet spoke of God—mighty and compassionate, jealous and angry—gathering his people and empowering them against their enemies. Neither dead idols nor empty rituals could guarantee them victory; God would win their battles. This message was meant to restore the joy and confidence of Zechariah's original audience.

Bad circumstances plague God's people today. Messages about global poverty, political strife, untreatable diseases, unhealthy foods, economic disparity, and racial tensions abound. Personal struggles with mental illness, high blood pressure, career disappointment, theological confusion, and family dysfunction disrupt our lives. And churches are hindered by untrustworthy leaders, biblical illiteracy, laws affecting religious freedom, and rising tides of disaffecting believers. Rather than trusting God to remedy bad circumstances, we have learned to bank on common sense, slick marketing, church programs, technical savvy, political strategy, social networks, and personal abilities. In other words, we trust our flawed systems and limited resources to turn our bad circumstances into bright outcomes. This passage reminds us that it's best to bank on God in bad circumstances.

Zechariah 11:4–17

EXEGETICAL IDEA

Evil shepherds would be removed and a good shepherd would restore God's covenant between Judah and Israel, but the people would reject this good shepherd, so unity and delight would be lost and a foolish shepherd would come and destroy the flock.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The rejection of the good leaders will lead to destruction, for many will follow worthless leaders.

PREACHING IDEA

Let's cut loose from bad leaders.

PREACHING POINTERS

God gave Zechariah a new role in this section of the text. The prophet was to act *like* a shepherd to God's people. As the narrative unfolds, Zechariah gripped a staff in each hand and sent uncaring leaders packing. Sadly, the people showed preference for their godless figureheads,

resulting in a series of prophetic signs—two broken staffs, thirty shekels tossed aside—capped off by an oracle of woe. Shepherding imagery struck a familiar note with Zechariah’s original audience, for they had known both God and Israel’s kings as their shepherds. The intense language and evocative gestures intended to fill his hearers with dread if they remained in the shadow of uncaring shepherds.

Bad leaders in any context threaten the well-being of people under their care. This is true today. An arrogant pastor can belittle his congregation. A stubborn coach can sabotage his team’s chance of victory. Distant parents can undermine the security of their children. An ambitious CEO can create a culture of restlessness and fear in the workplace. Leaders set the tone and standard in which their followers rise and fall. Unfortunately, we allow careless leaders to remain in their post because we are more comfortable with the status quo. Instead, as the passage suggests, we should cut loose from bad leaders.

Zechariah 12:1–9

EXEGETICAL IDEA

In the future, the nations would gather together against Jerusalem, but God would watch over his people, save the people of Jerusalem, and pour out his grace on them.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

God’s people know that God will watch over and rescue them from their enemies.

PREACHING IDEA

God’s strength is our secret weapon.

PREACHING POINTERS

Zechariah’s preaching remained focused on what would happen in days ahead. He delivered another speech from God predicting future battles and firm victory for his people. The Lord would come to Jerusalem’s defense. He would empower his people to fight, transforming the weakest of men into warriors. Vivid imagery—a colossal stone and fiery pot—and allusions to Israel’s past—exodus, covenant, David and Goliath—grab the listener’s ear. For the original audience, “that day” Zechariah spoke of could not come too soon. While they may not have looked forward to facing enemies, they certainly longed to see God’s strength at full force.

God’s people need to remember the greatness of his strength yet today. The Western world has trained us to be radically self-reliant. We have learned to harness science and technology, consult data and research, amass wealth and weapons, and practice medicine and mindfulness techniques to increase human potency. At our fingertips, we have more power than any people before us. Our glowing screens are a “portkey” to global knowledge and networks. Who needs God’s wisdom when Google gives us our information? Who needs a community of faith when Facebook provides us unlimited social connectivity? But no amount of human progress can rival God’s power. This passage reminds us that God’s strength is our secret weapon.