



2019 Q4 Ezra and Nehemiah: Lesson 1 Making Sense of History: Zerubbabel & Ezra

by Lori Atkins

SABBATH

Full disclosure...I did have to brush up on my minor prophet knowledge this week, and still have a long way to go, so hopefully we have some Old Testament scholars and experts here in class with us today to help us dig into Zerubbabel and Ezra and the Isrealite's return from Babylonian captivity and the process of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. We are also going to spend a bunch of time today in the book *Prophets and Kings*, which discusses all these events in detail and offers what I found to be some remarkable and noteworthy insights...starting in chapter 45-ish and continuing on through about chapter 50. If we have any folks watching who have to teach this lesson in 2 weeks, I highly recommend studying those chapters. I also a bunch of quotes at the end of my notes, so if I end up without enough material to fill the hour I will probably just end up reading those to you because they are so profound.

The quarterly's introduction says this about the 2 subjects of this study:

“Ezra and Nehemiah were exceptional, God-centered, Word-oriented, and Spirit-led leaders who deeply desired that God’s people prosper and that His name be uplifted and proclaimed worldwide. Their lives modeled what God can do through dedicated, faithful servant leaders.”

Wow...what incredible legacies and don't we all hope and pray that the same can be said about each of us them?!

“Life’s discouragements are opportunities for change. Disappointments may help us focus on essentials and accelerate our spiritual growth, as we obtain victory in each crisis through God’s empowerment.”

“Ezra correctly understood that the only power to change comes through diligently searching, comprehending, and internalizing the Scriptures.”

Why is that the only way we get the power to change?

“The key theological themes of these two books are God’s providence, faithfulness, and covenant. God fulfilled His promises, even though His people were narrow-minded, disoriented, distracted, and stubborn. Through His servants, He called them from their state of



lethargy to revival and reformation. The work of restoration and reform carried on by the returned exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, presents a picture of a work of spiritual restoration that is to be wrought in the closing days of this earth's history. The remnant of Israel were a feeble people, exposed to the ravages of their enemies; but through them God purposed to preserve in the earth a knowledge of Himself and of His law. They were the guardians of the true worship, the keepers of the holy oracles."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 677.

The introduction also rightly points out that several parts of these 2 Old Testament books are written thematically rather than chronologically, which can sometimes be confusing...so we are going to start out by just laying out the event highlights and chronology of both books to hopefully provide a good foundation for moving forward in our study.

Simplified Literary Structure of Ezra:

1. Cyrus' decree leads to Return #1 from Babylon to Jerusalem.
 - a. In 537/536 BC, Zerubbabel and Joshua, at God's leading, bring back to Judah the 1st group of Israelites (Ezra 1:1 - 4:5).
 - b. God's temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt under the reign of several different foreign kings (Ezra 4:6 - 6:22).
2. 2nd Return from Babylon to Jerusalem following the decree of Artaxerxes.
 - a. In 457 BC, Ezra, at God's leading, brings back to Judah the 2nd group of Israelites (Ezra 7:1 - 8:36).
 - b. Ezra's Reforms (Ezra 9:1 - 10:44).

Simplified Literary Structure of Nehemiah:

1. Letters of endorsement from King Artaxerxes lead to 3rd Return
 - a. 444 BC, at God's leading, Nehemiah brings the 3rd group of Israelites back from Babylon (Neh 1:1 - 2:10).
 - b. The wall of Jerusalem is rebuilt (Neh 2:11 - 7:3)
2. Study of God's Word, as well as revival and reformation in Israel.
 - a. Returnees are enumerated. They dedicate themselves to God, the study of His Scriptures, and doing His will. Returnees celebrate the dedication of Jerusalem's new wall and regain national autonomy (Neh 7:4 - 12:47).
 - b. Nehemiah's final reforms (Neh 13:1 - 13:31).



Hopefully that brief outline of the basic historical highlights and timelines can help give us a bit of a framework and avoid some confusion we study these two Old Testament prophets this quarter. As the lesson title suggests, how do we “make sense of this history”...this story of the Israelites falling into Babylonian captivity and their subsequent return and revival?

Have you heard the familiar quote, “Those who cannot remember the past...or learn from history...are destined (some say condemned) to repeat it”?

What does that mean...that we should have paid more attention and done better in our high school history classes?

What about for these Israelites...what was their “history”...how did they get here...and what should they be learning from it?

- Idol worship
- Heathen/pagan practices/human sacrifice
- Intermarrying/fertility cults
- Adultery/covenant betrayal

Apostasy (def: the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief) - many times associated with more relaxed/liberal/less “conservative” or a move away from rigid religious practices/beliefs...but is this actually true?

Were the Jews in the OT given a rigid set of guidelines to abide by?

What happened to them? Did they suffer with apostasy?

What about in the days of Christ? Did the Jews have a rigid set of guidelines to abide by?

What happened, did it result in apostasy?

What about the Apostolic church - did they have a rigid set of rules and doctrines, or was there great love and acceptance of a wide variety of theologies and practices?

What about during the Dark Ages, rigid rules?

Was there apostasy? Are you seeing any correlations?

So how did apostasy enter the apostolic church...how did they go from “the Way” to the church we see in the Dark Ages?

The greatest divergence of the church occurred in the 4th century when Constantine converted and called for the counsel of Nicaea. This counsel did not occur at a religious organization - why? Because up to this point in church history *there were no church buildings*. This counsel occurred at Constantine’s Palace and Constantine seduced church leaders and a huge list of problems began:



- Distorted ideas of God as God came to be viewed through the lens of paganism
- The church began to model itself structurally after Rome with an authoritarian head, thus misrepresenting God's character as authoritarian in nature
- Creeds were developed as tests of fellowship, orthodoxy of thought began and thought police were established, thus misrepresenting God as dictatorial, petty, and arbitrary
- Church buildings began to be built to model after Rome, designed to undermine thinking and reasoning and instead overwhelm with a sense of awe and the mystical
- A division between royalty and commoners, which was part of the Roman culture, entered the church with clergy and laity, undermining the priesthood of believers
- The church building elevated the clergy, modeled after the emperor of Rome, on an elevated platform, an elevated seat and pulpit – all designed to communicate a separation of rank, and instill a top down, authoritarian idea regarding church and God
- The church authority became more rigid, establishing rules, requirements for behavior and tests of fellowship
- Membership in the church became the new political party and only those in right standing with the church could wield political power or even be crowned king

Then, once these practices became entrenched over hundreds of years, they became accepted as holy and orthodox. (“And he said to them: ‘You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!’” MK 7:9)

Do we still struggle with such problems today?

Has the reformation really freed us from all the infection and these distorted ideas about God and the way He runs His universe?

Which direction do we see our own church denomination moving in?

Don't forget what we are talking about here...learning from history or being doomed to repeat it...

So while the Israelites were moving further and further into paganism and away from God...what was God doing?

How did they end up being conquered and exiled to Babylon?

Wooing, warning, reproving, disciplining, thundering, threatening

- Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.
- Divorce, removing his hand of protection



SUNDAY

The First Return of the Exiles

We are following the daily breakdown very loosely today, but this section is more of a combination of Sunday and Monday's lessons that discuss the first and largest group of exiles who Cyrus allows to return to Jerusalem following their 70 years of captivity. Not only does he allow and encourage them to go, he makes sure that they return with gifts and offerings and the original treasured vessels from the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen. But he didn't stop there - Cyrus also appointed Zerubbabel (as governor) and Joshua (as high priest) to lead them home, and he instructed them to rebuild the temple of the Lord.

Well of course this first group was super excited about finally being back home and almost at once set themselves to the task of rebuilding the temple. Some close neighbors, made up of mixed race Samaritans, claimed to worship the true God and offered to "help - let us build with you, for we seek your God as ye do"...but in their hearts and practices were idolaters, prone to reverence graven images. But the Israelite leaders refused them the privilege.

Zerubbabel and his associates were familiar with God and Moses' instruction, "thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: neither shalt thou make marriages with them...". And now, having repented of the evils that had brought on them and their fathers the judgments foretold so plainly through Moses; having turned with all their hearts to God, and renewed their covenant relationship with Him, they had been permitted to return to Judea, that they might restore that which had been destroyed.

Should they, at the very beginning of their undertaking, enter into a covenant with idolaters? Those who had recently rededicated themselves to the Lord realized that the line of demarcation between His people and the world is ever to be kept unmistakably distinct. They refused to enter into alliance with those who, though familiar with the requirements of God's law, would not yield to its claims (which law? what are its claims?).

The same principles set forth in Deuteronomy for the instruction of Israel are to be followed by God's people to the end of time. (again, it sounds like we should be learning from history?)

This is also from Prophets and Kings, talking about the duplicitous deceitful behavior of the Samaritans who were trying to "help".

"It is not the open and avowed enemies of the cause of God that are most to be feared. Those who, like the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, come with smooth words and fair speeches,



apparently seeking for friendly alliance with God’s children, have greater power to deceive. Against such every soul should be on the alert, lest some carefully concealed and masterly snare take him unaware. And especially today, while earth’s history is closing, the Lord requires of His children a vigilance that knows no relaxation. But though the conflict is a ceaseless one, none are left to struggle alone. Angels help and protect those who walk humbly before God. Never will our Lord betray one who trusts in Him. As His children draw near to Him for protection from evil, in pity and love He lifts up for them a standard against the enemy. Touch them not, He says; for they are Mine. I have graven them upon the palms of My hands.” – {PK 570.4}

Well, after this gung-ho start on the temple rebuilding project, much opposition arose and over several years the work started and stopped a number of times. Ultimately, God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the settlers to complete the work on the temple. Any ideas on why they had so much trouble maintaining enthusiasm for this rebuilding project?

- Life - they were rebuilding their homes, gardens, neighborhoods, schools, etc. along with the temple. However, all their attempts at success in everyday life came to naught as long as they were ignoring and not prioritizing God’s will and obedience to His commands
- Opposition and interference from those who profess to want to “help”, but hinder instead
- Discouragement, comparisons, and misunderstanding the temple’s true significance

I want to talk a bit more about each of these to see if we can glean some practical application and object lessons from what the Israelites experienced...and hopefully learn enough from their history to avoid some repetition, right?

How many of you knew that the Israelites were opposed and hindered and obstructed in their efforts to rebuild the temple?

“Untiring in their opposition, the Samaritans ‘weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius.’ By false reports they aroused suspicion in minds easily led to suspect. But for many years the powers of evil were held in check, and the people in Judea had liberty to continue their work.”

Are you starting to get the idea that this is about much more than just a construction project or erecting a building?



Ms. White continues,

“While Satan was striving to influence the highest powers in the Medo-Persian kingdom to show disfavor to God’s people, angels worked in behalf of the exiles. ***The controversy was one in which all heaven was interested.*** We are given a glimpse of this mighty struggle between the forces of good and evil through the prophet of Daniel. For three weeks Gabriel wrestled with the powers of darkness, seeking to counteract the influences at work on the mind of Cyrus; and before the contest closed, Christ Himself came to Gabriel’s aid. All that heaven could do on behalf of the people of God was done.”

What an amazing insight into the lengths the God of the universe goes to on our behalf! Well this was a time of wonderful opportunity for the Jews - the highest agencies of heaven were working on the hearts of kings, and they should have spared no effort to restore the temple and its services, and to reestablish themselves in their Judean homes, but even in the day of God’s power many proved unwilling...the opposition of their enemies was strong and determined, and gradually the builders lost heart.

Many of the workmen, discouraged and disheartened, returned to their homes to take up the ordinary pursuits of life. For over a year the temple rebuild was neglected and well-nigh forsaken...but work as they might they did not prosper. The very elements of nature seemed to conspire against them. (has anyone ever felt like that?) Because they had let the temple lie waste, the Lord sent upon their substance a wasting drought...because they had used His bountiful gifts and favor so selfishly, the blessings were removed. God reveals this to His people in Haggai 1:5-12...but what does it mean?

Does it mean that if you don’t do what God wants, He will ruin your plans and prevent you from prospering? Or is this an object lesson?

What does the Temple symbolize? It represents you and me...so then what would the lesson be?

What happens when we spend our energies trying to gain riches, power, have a good time, or whatever, while we neglect the care of our spirit temple?

Can we grow healthier, can we experience God’s blessings in our lives if the spirit temple is neglected? Why?

Is it because God refuses to bless or is it because we, by abusing the spirit temple, close the channel to receive His blessing?

Can we have healing of our spirit temple outside the law of love?

Thus when we focus on selfish advancement we simply cannot prosper!



What about the discouragement caused by comparisons with the previous temple...and were there still some deep misunderstandings about the what the temple really symbolized?

“The house that was about to be rebuilt had been the subject of many prophecies concerning the favor that God desired to show Zion, and all who were present at the laying of the cornerstone should have entered heartily into the spirit of the occasion. Yet mingled with the music and the shouts of praise that were heard on that glad day, was a discordant note. ‘Many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice.’”
(Ezra 3:12)

Some of that sadness was natural and appropriate for all the unheeded warnings and missed opportunities to fulfill God’s purpose...but sadness because of past mistakes should have given way to feelings of great joy. However, some failed to discern God’s opening providences, and instead of rejoicing they cherished thoughts of discontent and discouragement. They had seen the glory of Solomon’s temple, and they lamented because of the inferiority of the building now to be erected. The murmuring and complaining, and the unfavorable comparisons had a depressing influence on the minds of many (doesn’t it always?!) and weakened the hands of the builders.

But here’s the real problem...

the magnificence of the first temple, and the imposing rites of its religious services, had been a **source of pride** to Israel before their captivity (why was it a source of pride and is that good or bad?); but their worship had oftentimes been lacking in those qualities which God regards as most essential. The glory of the first temple, the splendor of its service, could not recommend them to God; for that which is alone of value in His sight, they did not offer. They did not bring Him the sacrifice of a humble and contrite spirit. – {PK 565.2}

Really listen to this...

It is when the vital principles of the kingdom of God are lost sight of, that ceremonies become multitudinous and extravagant. **It is when the character building is neglected**, when the **adornment of the soul is lacking** (is that what we are typically concerned about adorning when we go to church?), when the simplicity of godliness is despised, that pride and love of display demand magnificent church edifices, splendid adornings, and imposing ceremonials. But in all this God is not honored. He values His church, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguishes it from the world. **He estimates it according to the growth of its members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual**



experience. He looks for the principles of love and goodness. Not all the beauty of art can bear comparison with the beauty of temper and character to be revealed in those who are Christ's representatives. – {PK 565.3}

A congregation may be the poorest in the land. It may be without the attractions of any outward show; but **if the members possess the principles of the character of Christ, angels will unite with them in their worship.** The praise and thanksgiving from grateful hearts will ascend to God as a sweet oblation. As soon as Israel decided to obey, the words of reproof in Haggai 1 were followed by a message of encouragement. "Then spake Haggai ... unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel" and of Joshua, and "of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." Verses 13, 14. – {PK 575.3}

In less than a month after the work on the temple was resumed, the builders received another comforting message. "Be strong, O Zerubbabel," the Lord Himself urged through His prophet; "be strong, O Joshua; ... and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts."

"But the steady advancement made by the builders of the temple greatly discomfited and alarmed the hosts of evil. Satan determined to put forth still further effort to weaken and discourage God's people by holding before them their imperfections of character."

Now...does that ever sound familiar? And do you think even if the Israelites didn't, that Satan fully understood the significance and symbolism of the temple as the God's dwelling place, and why this temple would be even more glorious than the first?

"Because Israel had been chosen to preserve the knowledge of God in the earth, they had ever been the special objects of Satan's enmity; he was determined to cause their destruction."

Why?

In another book, *Desire of Ages*, Ms. White says this,

"What does the Temple at Jerusalem symbolize? In the cleansing of the temple, Jesus was announcing His mission as the Messiah, and entering upon His work. That temple, erected for the abode of the divine Presence, was designed to be an object lesson for Israel and for the world. From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator. Because of sin,



humanity ceased to be a temple for God...God designed that the temple at Jerusalem should be a continual witness to the high destiny open to every soul.” DA 161

So back to Satan being determined to destroy Israel...and boy didn't he come awfully close a few times?

“While they were obedient, he could do them no harm; therefore he had bent all his power and cunning to entice them into sin.” Chapter 47 of Prophets and Kings goes into glorious detail about Joshua's vision of him standing before the Angel of the Lord, entreating God's mercy on behalf of His afflicted people.” Ms. White says, “Through an impressive illustration of the work of Satan and the work of Christ, He showed the power of their Mediator to vanquish the accuser of His people.” PK 583.1

The details of that story are also in the notes, but going along with our theme of making sense and learning from history, she concludes the chapter this way:

“As Satan accused Joshua and his people, so in all ages he accuses those who seek the mercy and favor of God. He is “the accuser of our brethren, ... which accused them before our God day and night.” Revelation 12:10. Over every soul that is rescued from the power of evil, and whose name is registered in the Lamb's book of life, the controversy is repeated. Never is one received into the family of God without exciting the determined resistance of the enemy. But He who was the hope of Israel then, their defense, their justification and redemption, is the hope of the church today. **Satan's accusations against those who seek the Lord are not prompted by displeasure at their sins. He exults in their defective characters; for he knows that only through their transgression of God's law can he obtain power over them.** His accusations arise solely from his enmity to Christ. Through the plan of salvation, Jesus is breaking Satan's hold upon the human family and rescuing souls from his power. All the hatred and malignity of the archrebel is stirred as he beholds the evidences of Christ's supremacy; and with fiendish power and cunning he works to wrest from Him the children of men who have accepted salvation. He leads men into skepticism, causing them to lose confidence in God and to separate from His love; he tempts them to break the law and then claims them as his captives, contesting Christ's right to take them from him. Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation. In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an



effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause (who is He pleading to?), and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser (what are the mighty arguments of Calvary, and how do they vanquish Satan?). His perfect obedience to God's law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning." And to those who rely on Him in faith, He gives the assurance, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Zechariah 3:4. All who have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true (what does it mean to put on the robe of Christ's righteousness?). Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. The promise given to Joshua is given to all: Angels of God will walk on either side of them, even in this world, and they will stand at last among the angels that surround the throne of God. today.

In vision the prophet beholds "Joshua the high priest," "clothed with filthy garments" (Zechariah 3:1, 3), standing before the Angel of the Lord, entreating God's mercy in behalf of His afflicted people. As he pleads for the fulfillment of God's promises, Satan stands up boldly to resist him. He points to the transgressions of Israel as a reason why they should not be restored to the favor of God. He claims them as his prey, and demands that they be given into his hands. – {PK 583.2}

The high priest cannot defend himself or his people from Satan's accusations. He does not claim that Israel is free from fault. In filthy garments, symbolizing the sins of the people, which he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt, yet pointing to their repentance and humiliation, and relying upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer. In faith he claims the promises of God. – {PK 583.3}

Then the Angel, who is Christ Himself, the Saviour of sinners, puts to silence the accuser of His people, declaring, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Verse 2. Long had Israel remained in the furnace of affliction. Because of their sins they had been well-nigh consumed in the flame kindled by Satan and his agents for their destruction, but God had now set His hand to bring them forth. – {PK 584.1}

As the intercession of Joshua is accepted, the command is given, "Take away the filthy garments from him;" and to Joshua the Angel says, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to



pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.” “So they set a fair miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments.” Verses 4, 5. His own sins and those of his people were pardoned. Israel was clothed with “change of raiment”—the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. The miter placed upon Joshua’s head was such as was worn by the priests, and bore the inscription, “Holiness to the Lord” (Exodus 28:36), signifying that notwithstanding his former transgressions, he was now qualified to minister before God in His sanctuary. – {PK 584.2}

The Angel now declared to Joshua: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.” Zechariah 3:7. If obedient, he should be honored as the judge, or ruler, over the temple and all its services; he should walk among attending angels, even in this life; and at last he should join the glorified throng around the throne of God. – {PK 584.3} “Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth My Servant the Branch.” Verse 8. In the Branch, the Deliverer to come, lay the hope of Israel. It was by faith in the coming Saviour that Joshua and his people had received pardon. Through faith in Christ they had been restored to God’s favor. By virtue of His merits, if they walked in His ways and kept His statutes, they would be “men wondered at,” honored as the chosen of Heaven among the nations of the earth. – {PK 585.1}

As Satan accused Joshua and his people, so in all ages he accuses those who seek the mercy and favor of God. He is “the accuser of our brethren, ... which accused them before our God day and night.” Revelation 12:10. Over every soul that is rescued from the power of evil, and whose name is registered in the Lamb’s book of life, the controversy is repeated. Never is one received into the family of God without exciting the determined resistance of the enemy. But He who was the hope of Israel then, their defense, their justification and redemption, is the hope of the church today. – {PK 585.2}

Satan’s accusations against those who seek the Lord are not prompted by displeasure at their sins. He exults in their defective characters; for he knows that only through their transgression of God’s law can he obtain power over them. His accusations arise solely from his enmity to Christ. Through the plan of salvation, Jesus is breaking Satan’s hold upon the human family and rescuing souls from his power. All the hatred and malignity of the archrebel is stirred as he beholds the evidences of Christ’s supremacy; and with fiendish power and cunning he works to wrest from Him the children of men who have accepted salvation. He leads men into skepticism, causing them to lose confidence in God and to separate from His love; he tempts



them to break the law and then claims them as his captives, contesting Christ's right to take them from him. – {PK 585.3}

Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation. – {PK 586.1}

In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God's law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning." And to those who rely on Him in faith, He gives the assurance, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Zechariah 3:4. – {PK 586.2}

All who have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. His word is pledged: "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." Isaiah 27:5. The promise given to Joshua is given to all: "If thou wilt keep My charge, ... I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." Zechariah 3:7. Angels of God will walk on either side of them, even in this world, and they will stand at last among the angels that surround the throne of God. – {PK 587.1}

Zechariah's vision of Joshua and the Angel applies with peculiar force to the experience of God's people in the closing scenes of the great day of atonement. The remnant church will then be brought into great trial and distress. Those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus will feel the ire of the dragon and his hosts. Satan numbers the world as his subjects; he has gained control even of many professing Christians. But here is a little company who are resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete. As he influenced the heathen nations to destroy Israel, so in the near future he will stir up the wicked powers of earth to destroy the people of God. Men will be required to render obedience to human edicts in violation of the divine law. – {PK 587.2}



Those who are true to God will be menaced, denounced, proscribed. They will be “betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends,” even unto death. Luke 21:16. Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer. As Joshua pleaded before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and unfaltering faith, will plead for pardon and deliverance through Jesus, their Advocate. They are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives, they see their weakness and unworthiness; and they are ready to despair. – {PK 588.1}

The tempter stands by to accuse them, as he stood by to resist Joshua. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. He presents their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer. He endeavors to affright them with the thought that their case is hopeless, that the stain of their defilement will never be washed away. He hopes so to destroy their faith that they will yield to his temptations, and turn from their allegiance to God. – {PK 588.2}

Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins that he has tempted God’s people to commit, and he urges his accusations against them, declaring, that by their sins they have forfeited divine protection, and claiming that he has the right to destroy them. He pronounces them just as deserving as himself of exclusion from the favor of God. “Are these,” he says, “the people who are to take my place in heaven, and the place of the angels who united with me? They profess to obey the law of God; but have they kept its precepts? Have they not been lovers of self more than lovers of God? Have they not placed their own interests above His service? Have they not loved the things of the world? Look at the sins that have marked their lives. Behold their selfishness, their malice, their hatred of one another. Will God banish me and my angels from His presence, and yet reward those who have been guilty of the same sins? Thou canst not do this, O Lord, in justice. Justice demands that sentence be pronounced against them.” – {PK 588.3}

But while the followers of Christ have sinned, they have not given themselves up to be controlled by the satanic agencies. They have repented of their sins and have sought the Lord in humility and contrition, and the divine Advocate pleads in their behalf. He who has been most abused by their ingratitude, who knows their sin and also their penitence, declares: “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. I gave My life for these souls. They are graven upon the palms of My hands. They may have imperfections of character; they may have failed in their endeavors; but they have repented, and I have forgiven and accepted them.” – {PK 589.1}



The assaults of Satan are strong, his delusions are subtle; but the Lord's eye is upon His people. Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but Jesus will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. Their earthliness will be removed, that through them the image of Christ may be perfectly revealed. – {PK 589.2}

At times the Lord may seem to have forgotten the perils of His church and the injury done her by her enemies. But God has not forgotten. Nothing in this world is so dear to the heart of God as His church. It is not His will that worldly policy shall corrupt her record. He does not leave His people to be overcome by Satan's temptations. He will punish those who misrepresent Him, but He will be gracious to all who sincerely repent. To those who call upon Him for strength for the development of Christian character, He will give all needed help. – {PK 590.1}

In the time of the end the people of God will sigh and cry for the abominations done in the land. With tears they will warn the wicked of their danger in trampling upon the divine law, and with unutterable sorrow they will humble themselves before the Lord in penitence. The wicked will mock their sorrow and ridicule their solemn appeals. But the anguish and humiliation of God's people is unmistakable evidence that they are regaining the strength and nobility of character lost in consequence of sin. It is because they are drawing nearer to Christ, because their eyes are fixed on His perfect purity, that they discern so clearly the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Meekness and lowliness are the conditions of success and victory. A crown of glory awaits those who bow at the foot of the cross. – {PK 590.2}

God's faithful, praying ones are, as it were, shut in with Him. They themselves know not how securely they are shielded. Urged on by Satan, the rulers of this world are seeking to destroy them; but could the eyes of God's children be opened as were the eyes of Elisha's servant at Dothan, they would see angels of God encamped about them, holding in check the hosts of darkness. – {PK 590.3}

As the people of God afflict their souls before Him, pleading for purity of heart, the command is given, "Take away the filthy garments," and the encouraging words are spoken, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Zechariah 3:4. The spotless robe of Christ's righteousness is placed upon the tried, tempted, faithful children of God. The despised remnant are clothed in glorious apparel, nevermore to be defiled by the corruptions of the world. Their names are retained in the Lamb's book of life, enrolled among the faithful of all ages. They have resisted the wiles of the deceiver; they have not been turned from their loyalty by the dragon's roar. Now they are eternally secure from the tempter's devices. Their sins are transferred to the originator of sin. A "fair miter" is set upon their heads. – {PK 591.1}



While Satan has been urging his accusations, holy angels, unseen, have been passing to and fro, placing upon the faithful ones the seal of the living God. These are they that stand upon Mount Zion with the Lamb, having the Father's name written in their foreheads. They sing the new song before the throne, that song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." Revelation 14:4, 5. – {PK 591.2}

Now is reached the complete fulfillment of the words of the Angel: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth My Servant the Branch." Zechariah 3:8. Christ is revealed as the Redeemer and Deliverer of His people. Now indeed are the remnant "men wondered at," as the tears and humiliation of their pilgrimage give place to joy and honor in the presence of God and the Lamb. "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even everyone that is written among the living in Jerusalem."