

ZECHARIAH

Chapter One

Introduction

God's people had **returned**:

1. They had returned to Jerusalem. After seventy years of captivity and exile in Babylon, the Persian king Cyrus the Great had given them leave to return to their homeland. Close to fifty thousand Jews had returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest.
2. They had returned to the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. After a few years back in their land, difficulties with their Samaritan neighbors and directives from the new Persian king had caused them to stop work on the Temple. Sixteen years passed, then the prophet Haggai ignited a new passion to rebuild the Temple.

God's people had returned to Jerusalem and to they had returned to the rebuilding of the Temple...

Yet the Lord said to them in verse three, "Return to Me," says the LORD of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts."

They had returned to the *land*, but not to the *Lord*; they had returned to the *work* of God, but not to the *Word* of God. Zechariah wrote to inspire their full return.

All of this becomes more meaningful to you when you see that there is a similar exhortation given to Christians in the New Testament. In James 4:8 you read,

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...

Draw near, return, turn to God; He will draw near and return to you. While we're on the subject of returning, look at verse sixteen:

Zechariah 1:16 'Therefore thus says the LORD: "I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy..."

This is a reference to the future, physical returning of Jesus to the earth in His Second Coming. Return to the Lord; He is returning for you!

We'll organize our thoughts around these two points: #1 Return To The Lord And You Will Experience His Return To You, and #2 Return To The Lord And You Will Be Expecting His Return For You.

#1 Return To The Lord And You
Will Experience His Return To You
(v1-11)

God had raised-up Haggai to exhort and encourage the Jews to return to the rebuilding of the Temple. Two months after Haggai delivered his first message, Zechariah came on the scene to compliment and complete the prophetic ministry. Both were God's prophets; but where Haggai was more pragmatic, Zechariah was more poetic. On the night of February 15, 519BC, Zechariah received a series of waking visions from the Lord. Some count seven or eight or ten visions, depending on how you divide them. We'll say there were ten. These were not dreams; they were visions given to the conscious prophet to share with the people. The first three are here in chapter one.

Before we get to the visions, Zechariah is introduced.

Zechariah 1:1 In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,

Commentators like to put the Hebrew meanings of the three names together to form a word of encouragement. Zechariah means *the Lord remembers*; Berechiah means *the Lord blesses*; Iddo means *the appointed time*. **God remembers and blesses at the appointed time!**

The Jews had returned to the land, and – after sixteen years - to the work. They were one month into the rebuilding of the Temple when Zechariah said,

Zechariah 1:2 "The LORD has been very angry with your fathers.

Zechariah 1:3 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Return to Me," says the LORD of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 1:4 “Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds.”’ But they did not hear nor heed Me,” says the LORD.”

Their “fathers” had the Temple – Solomon’s grand Temple. The Temple with all its rites and rituals did not prevent God from disciplining them for their sin. Now the Jews were rebuilding the Temple – Zerubbabel’s less-than-grand Temple. While it was the focus of their religious life, God wanted something more. He wanted their hearts. Rules and religion are no substitute for real relationship!

Zechariah 1:5 “Your fathers, where *are* they? And the prophets, do they live forever?
Zechariah 1:6 Yet surely My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers?”

Their “fathers” were those who had been killed and taken captive. The prophets did not “live forever” was a phrase that reminded them their messages of warning were brief windows of opportunity to repent. Their fathers ought to have heeded them... But they did not. The people at work rebuilding the Temple should learn from past experience.

Experience is a great teacher – *especially when it’s someone else’s experience!* You don’t need to experience sin to understand its consequences. You can read about it in the Bible. Sadly, you can see it is the ruin and shipwreck of lives all around you.

Zechariah 1:6 “...So they returned and said: ‘Just as the LORD of hosts determined to do to us, according to our ways and according to our deeds, so He has dealt with us.’”

They “returned.” Some Bibles say, “they repented,” or “they turned.” They recognized that they had not fully returned to the Lord. They were where they were supposed to be... They were doing what they were supposed to be doing... But in their hearts they were far from being right with God.

Do you understand that they were not involved in any heinous sin? This was a subtle matter of the heart. So often we survey our lives and are confident we are not involved in any terrible sin. Still our hearts can deceive us.

The series of visions begins. The first one is an illustration, a picture, to encourage them that the Lord has indeed returned to them. It is the vision of the Man among the myrtles, in verses seven through eleven.

Zechariah 1:7 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet:

Zechariah 1:8 I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him *were* horses: red, sorrel, and white.

Zechariah 1:9 Then I said, "My lord, what *are* these?" So the angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they *are*."

Zechariah 1:10 And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These *are the ones* whom the LORD has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth."

Zechariah 1:11 So they answered the Angel of the LORD, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, "We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly."

Zechariah says, "I **saw** by night..." These were waking visions, not dreams. God did speak to His prophets in dreams; but He also showed them visions. I believe He still does this today – although everything must obviously agree with and be checked against the revealed Word of God in the Bible.

The "Angel of the Lord" is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. Whenever Jesus appears in the Old Testament, He is called the Angel of the Lord. We know it's the Second Person of the Trinity because, in other passages, He is worshipped and called God. The other riders are angels who carry-out God's will as His messengers. The various colors of the horses indicate various ministries during the course of human history.

The myrtle trees represent Israel. The myrtle is a small evergreen that never gets very tall. It has dark, green leaves and white, star-like clusters of fragrant flowers, the petals of which emit a rich fragrance when crushed. Being evergreen it represents Israel continuing through history against overwhelming oppression. Being small it represents the seeming insignificance of Israel compared to the great Gentile world powers. The blossoms that emit a sweet fragrance when crushed represent the grace of Israel in her centuries of affliction. The fact that the myrtles are down in a valley represents the low state of Israel at the time of the vision. They were back in their land, but as a subject people of the Persian Empire.

Here was the Lord on patrol among His people on earth. He had never really left them, but now they have the experience of His presence among them.

When the Angel of the Lord says “all the earth is resting quietly,” He was acknowledging the current state of human affairs. The Persian Empire had brought peace, but Israel was suffering under their domination. Still, don’t you get the idea that this supernatural patrol was way more powerful than any Gentile world empire? It’s a picture of God’s rule over history. History unfolds as He has determined. We’ll see this more clearly in the remaining verses of chapter one.

For now, let’s talk about returning, drawing near, turning to God and His returning and drawing near to us. This idea of returning to the Lord and having Him return to you might bother some of you. After all, God never really moves away from you at all; you are the only one who moves away. Still, it is God Himself Who uses this language.

Perhaps the best way of understanding what is meant is to remember the story of the prodigal son in the New Testament. He left his father and ruined his life. His father waited for him, even watched for him. When the prodigal son returned to his father, his father returned to him. His father ran to him, robed him, blessed him. That is the idea of returning to the Lord and having Him return to you. God never moves; you move out of the sphere within which He can favor you. When you return to God, He returns to you and you are able to **experience** the presence of God in your life.

You can be where you are supposed to be, doing what you are supposed to be doing... **But still be far from God.** It is a matter of the heart – the purpose, motive, focus, and direction of your heart.

How do you return? The only answer given is the observation of verse six when it says, “so they returned...” It’s not a series of steps; **it is one turn towards God!**

When someone has a problem, it is all too common for us to suggest a series of steps they must follow. A series of steps are only helpful if you are headed in the right direction to begin with! You must set the

direction of your heart by returning, turning, and drawing near to God. Once you do, each step you take is like each step the Prodigal Son took closer to home. Each step is lighter; each step is less burdened; until you are met by the waiting, watchful Father.

#2 Return To The Lord And You Will Be Expecting His Return For You (v12-21)

The vision of the Man among the myrtles acknowledged the low situation of Israel on the world scene. What would the future hold for the Jews? That is the subject of these remaining verses.

Zechariah 1:12 Then the Angel of the LORD answered and said, "O LORD of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?"

The Angel of the Lord, Who we know is Jesus, God the Son, intercedes with God the Father for Israel. Regardless their low situation, there was a plan for their future. The seventy-year captivity in Babylon was a part of that plan; so was their subjection to Persia. **Everything** was under God's sovereign control.

Zechariah 1:13 And the LORD answered the angel who talked to me, *with good and comforting words.*

Zechariah 1:14 So the angel who spoke with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal.

Zechariah 1:15 I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; for I was a little angry, and they helped - *but with evil intent.*"

There can be no greater comfort than to know God is present with you in your distress, *and* that your distress is under His sovereignty. The KJV says God was "jealous" for His people. In His jealousy, He used Gentile nations to discipline them when they wandered from Him. The Gentile nations "helped" God's people return. The Gentiles ignored the witness of God's dealings with His people and remained "evil." God would not overlook this in His scheme of history.

Zechariah 1:16 'Therefore thus says the LORD: "I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it," says the LORD of hosts, "And a *surveyor's* line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem."

Zechariah 1:17 "Again proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; the LORD will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem.'"

This is a *promise* and a *prophecy* that Jerusalem will remain the center of God's plan for human history. Regardless their low situation... Regardless centuries of dispersion... Regardless the problems in the region continuing even today... Jerusalem **will** one day be rebuilt as the capital city of the whole earth. It will be in the future – when the Lord Himself will be “returning.”

How will this occur? Two visions summarize the flow of history leading to the restoration of Jerusalem and the return of the Lord.

Zechariah 1:18 Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there *were* four horns.

Zechariah 1:19 And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What *are* these?”

So he answered me, “These *are* the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.”

Horns are symbols of national power and pride. Four horns are four world empires that “[scatter] Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.” We can identify them in biblical history because the prophet Daniel uses similar imagery in his writings. The four nations were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

The point here is that the future of Israel was in the hands of God, Who was and is jealous over her with an everlasting love.

The vision of the four craftsmen gives a little more detail about future events:

Zechariah 1:20 Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen.

Zechariah 1:21 And I said, “What are these coming to do?”

So he said, “These *are* the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head; but the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up *their* horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.”

Some Bibles call these men “carpenters.” The word is better translated *craftsmen*; they are skilled workers with any material – metal, stone, or wood. The four craftsmen are the instruments God used and will use to destroy the four horns in the succession of human history.

The four horns were the four world empires – Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The four craftsmen are those that destroy each preceding world empire. Some of the horns are therefore also depicted by the craftsmen. Thus the first horn, Babylon, was

destroyed by the first craftsman – Medo-Persia. The second horn, Medo-Persia was destroyed by the second craftsman – Greece. The third horn, Greece, was destroyed by the third craftsman – Rome.

Rome was the fourth horn. What world empire destroyed Rome? Rome never was destroyed by an outside world power! In fact, if you study prophecy, you see that in the Last Days there will be a revived Roman Empire. There is one who is coming, the antichrist, who will rule over a revived Roman Empire.

A fourth Craftsman **will** destroy the future, revived Roman Empire. The fourth Craftsman is Jesus, the carpenter, Who will destroy antichrist and his empire in His Second Coming to earth.

The Jews to whom Zechariah was writing would not have realized all of this. But they would have understood that God was patrolling the earth, ruling over and overruling history in order to restore Jerusalem as the capital city of His kingdom on the earth.

Conclusion

God is jealous over His people. He was and is jealous over the Jews... And He is jealous over you **if you are a Christian.**

You may be in a very low situation. Still, Jesus patrols your life; Jesus intercedes for you. Real life is the life of the heart where you have the experience of the presence of God. The worst that life has for you, death, is the best thing that could happen to you because you would be immediately alive forever in eternity with your Lord and Savior. Be expecting His returning for you.

Unless you're not a Christian...