

Zechariah's First Prophetic Vision

Zechariah 1:1-17

Zechariah 1:1-6 - *"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, ² "The Lord has been very angry with your fathers. 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. 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. ⁵ "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ Yet surely My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? "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."*

Background Notes

Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi are the three post-exilic prophets. "Post-exilic" means "after the exile." The three post-exilic prophets prophesied in Israel after the people of Israel spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon. The captivity in Babylon was the judgment for their sin of forsaking the Lord and turning to idol worship. The Persian Empire, under King Cyrus, brought the Babylonian Empire to an end. Then Cyrus permitted about 50,000 Jews to return to their homeland under the leadership of Zerubbabel. (Read about this in the book of Ezra.) The royal edict of Cyrus in 538 BC that permitted the Jews to return home was inscribed on a clay cylinder. The "Cyrus Cylinder" can be seen today in the British Museum. It's archaeological support for the accuracy of the Bible!

Zechariah was a priest as well as a prophet. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel also had a priestly lineage. In the opening six verses of Zechariah's prophecy the returned captives were exhorted to repent and to obey the Lord. He exhorted them not to make the same mistakes their forefathers (those who were sent into exile) had made. The point of verses 5-6 is that the word of the Lord through the prophets predicting the captivity came true - so don't make the same mistakes! This was Zechariah's call to repentance to the new generation – the generation of the returned captives.

There was good response to this call to repentance: *"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" (v6).*

There are eight prophetic visions about the future of Israel in the book of Zechariah. All eight visions were meant to encourage this remnant of the captives who had returned from Babylon – but all eight visions have practical application for us today. Our two doctrinal points come from the first prophetic vision.

Doctrinal Points

1. The present status of Israel is in the valley of the times of the Gentiles.

Zechariah 1:7-17 - "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: 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. 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."

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." 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."

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?" ¹³ And the Lord answered the angel who talked to me, with good and comforting words.

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

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." 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.'"

The vision of the horses and riders is the first prophetic vision of Zechariah. Notice the many features of this prophetic vision. A man was sitting astride a red horse in a grove of myrtle trees, waiting for a report from riders who had gone out on a reconnaissance patrol throughout the earth.

The rider on the red horse was none other than the Angel of the Lord! In the Old Testament "the Angel of the Lord" was not just an ordinary angel. He was the Lord Himself - specifically **the pre-incarnate Son of God**. He's not called "the Angel of the Lord" because He's a higher class of angel. No! The word "angel" means messenger, so the word "angel" is used in that way to describe the Angel of the Lord.

In this vision the Angel of the Lord should not be confused with the angel of verses 9 and 14. That angel is the "interpreting angel" who gave Zechariah the meaning of the vision.

Notice that the Angel of the Lord was in the midst of a grove of myrtle trees that were in a hollow, or ravine, or valley. In this vision we believe that the myrtle trees represent the nation of Israel. Just as the “vine” and the “fig tree” are used to represent Israel in certain prophetic scriptures, so these fragrant myrtle trees in a valley represent Israel.

The report came back from the reconnaissance patrol that all the earth was resting quietly (v11). That sounds like good news, doesn't it? But it was actually bad news for Israel. It signified Gentile domination of the earth, while Israel was still in a “valley of affliction.” But God was exceedingly angry with the nations that were at ease (v15).

This vision represents the present status of Israel. Israel is suppressed and kept in the “valley of affliction” by the Gentile nations who are in power. We could call this valley of affliction the “times of the Gentiles.” In Luke 21 the Lord Jesus indicated that “the time of Gentiles” would extend right up until His return. So, in this first part of Zechariah's vision, the present status of Israel is in the “valley” of the times of the Gentiles.

2. The future status of Israel will be on the mountaintop of kingdom prosperity.

Now the good news! The Lord knows - and He still cares about Israel! He is only allowing the Gentile nations to afflict Israel at the present time. Why? Daniel 11:35 says: *“To refine them and purge them and make them pure until the end time, because it is still to come at the appointed time.”* The valley of affliction is intended to bring them to the point where they will look to the Lord and return to Him. And they will return!

In the second half of Zechariah's first prophetic vision, that appointed time had come. Notice in verse 12 that the good and comforting news came as an answer to the prayer of the Angel of the Lord to the Lord of Hosts. Here we see communication between two Persons of the Godhead! The Angel of the Lord - the pre-incarnate Son of God – was communicating with God the Father, the Lord of Hosts.

The good and comforting word for Israel is that the Lord will return to deliver the nation of Israel from the domination of Gentile nations. He was zealous or jealous for Jerusalem and Zion (v14) - jealous in a good sense. Although God used these Gentile nations to discipline His people, they had gone too far (v15). But the Lord will return to Jerusalem with mercy. The Lord's Temple will be rebuilt, and great blessing will come upon Israel. The Lord again will choose Jerusalem as His capital here on this earth.

Look at verses 16-17 one more time: *“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.”* 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.”*

These verses are not prophesying blessings upon the Church, as some Christians have wrongly interpreted this passage. These are **kingdom blessings** upon the **restored nation of Israel** - when the Lord returns to this earth and sets up His millennial kingdom. These are the future blessings of kingdom prosperity for the nation of Israel that will have returned to the Lord.

And they will return! Romans 11:25-26 makes this very clear: *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.”*

The “Israel” that is referenced in Romans 11 is clearly not the Church! Romans 11 is referring to the Jewish people, the nation of Israel. The future status of Israel will be on the mountaintop of kingdom prosperity!

Practical Application

Return to the Lord - and He will return to you!

Verse 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.”*

This is a great verse for Christians who have backslidden, because that’s exactly the context. God’s people Israel had turned away from the Lord. They had gone the wrong way and done the wrong thing. But God still loved them, and He longed for them to return. He promised them that if they would return to Him, He would return to them.

Are you a backslider? Are you out of fellowship with the Lord because of sin in your life? Perhaps you know in your heart that things are not right between you and the Lord. Perhaps you know that certain decisions you made or things you have done were wrong, and that your fellowship with the Lord is suffering as a result.

If so, this passage has good news for you! God still loves you! Do you want to experience the peace and joy and close fellowship with the Lord you once had? You can. This promise is as good for you as it was for ancient Israel.

Read 1 John 1:5-9. Confess your sin, and turn away from it in true repentance. God is faithful to forgive your sin – and your fellowship with Him will be restored.

Return to the Lord - and He will return to you!