

Zechariah saw a series of eight visions over a period of three and a half months. These are not dreams but something like watching a movie. Prophets were sometimes referred to as seers because God would show them their message in the form of a vision. We will look at the first vision today. But let us consider first what was happening at the time.

Some of the exiles had returned to Jerusalem with great hopes, but their temple and capital was in ruins. The enemies of Israel had rejoiced over its fall. Some of these nations relished Babylon's defeat of Israel and piled on by taking advantage of the defeat and the weakness of those left behind in the land. Those who had returned were facing the harsh reality of the enormity of what lay before them. Would Israel ever return to its former glory? Would the God of Israel ever be seen as the Creator of all things, the only true God? For those who truly loved the Lord, the failure of their forefathers to demonstrate to the surrounding countries the greatness of YHWH was heartache (2 Chronicles 32:19-20¹). But now what could be done? Was there hope of any kind of restoration for the sake of the name of the Lord? With Israel under the heavy taxation of Persia, could the surrounding nations see YHWH as the one true God?

We sometimes feel the same way when our example of Christ likeness to our neighbor has been tainted by our words or actions. Our hearts ache when people who claim to be Christians fail to demonstrate God's love and the media portrays that as normal Christianity. Our most worthy Savior whom we desire for the world to see in us is often misrepresented. Is there hope for any kind of restoration of their perception of the greatness and power of Jesus?

God's answer came through His prophets. ⁷ *On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying,* Zechariah 1:7 It was Feb 15, 519 B.C. The Word of the Lord came to Zechariah in a vision. The verb here is saying, not seeing. The most important part of the vision is what is said. What is seen is the setting for those words.

⁸ *"I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.*

Zechariah 1:8 To understand the vision we should see the words in the way those first recipients of the vision would have understood them. Red would represent war. White would represent peace. Sorrel would be mixed perhaps implying a time of tension, not quite peace or war. The language does not say one of each and can be read to mean many of each color. At the time, Persia sent out riders throughout the empire to check on the condition of the lands they conquered. These horses were doing the same. The only rider mentioned is the one on the red horse. They go out like the Persian riders and check on the condition of the world and report back.

The myrtle grows throughout Israel and sometimes was used as a substitute word for the nation. The word "glen" in Hebrew is most often used for a deep place, whether land or ocean or lake. Depths implied humility, to be low (Judges 6:6ⁱⁱ).

*⁹ Then I said, 'What are these, my lord?' The angel who talked with me said to me, 'I will show you what they are.'*¹⁰ *So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, 'These are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.'* Zechariah 1: 9-10 So we see the picture of angelic beings reporting back to the LORD on the condition of the world. There are two angels in this verse. There is the interpreting angel to whom Zechariah asked the question, and there is the rider of the red horse who has dismounted and is standing in that deep place among the myrtle trees. The next verse identifies Him further.

¹¹ And they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, 'We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.' Zechariah 1:11 Darius had defeated his rivals and the nations of the world were all at peace. That was unusual considering the history of nations. The Persian conquest had no more rivals at the time and so peace prevailed. Of course, the nations had to pay tribute to Persia, but as long as they did so they would remain at peace. That seemed unfair to Israel. Their deep humiliation stood in contrast with those who tormented and mocked them while being at ease. Israel knew that they had only received justice for their rebellion against God (Nehemiah 9:35ⁱⁱⁱ), but they wondered why these nations were seemingly escaping justice.

¹² Then the angel of the LORD said, 'O LORD of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?' Zechariah 1:12 The angel of the LORD is the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus (Genesis 16:10-13^{iv}; Exodus 3:2-6^v; 23:20^{vi}; Judges 6:12-18^{vii}). Theologians refer to Him as the pre-incarnate Christ. They came to that conclusion because He is worshiped and referred to as the Lord, and yet unlike God the Father, He is visible, the visible manifestation of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15^{viii}).

Jesus intercedes for the nation to the "LORD of hosts." This is the Hebrew way of saying the God of the armies of heaven. The term is used three times in verse three of this chapter. This is a bit complex because it is referring God the Father, while sometimes the title seems to be referring to Jesus (Joshua 5:15^{ix}; Isaiah 6:5^x). But since they are three in one, we can reconcile the seeming difference. Jesus is our intercessor at the right hand of God (Romans 8:34^{xi}).

Seventy years was the length of captivity predicted by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:11)^{xii}. It had passed, but the road ahead still appeared not only long, but nearly impossible. To make matters worse their enemies were at ease. Jesus interceded for them asking the question on their hearts, "How long?" We see that expression over and over in the psalms (Psalm 6:3^{xiii}; 74:10^{xiv}), sometimes it is the cry of the nation and at other times of an individual harassed by evil persons, such as when David had to flee from Saul though he had done nothing wrong.

We sometimes find ourselves with the same cry upon our hearts. In the depths of humiliation and despair it appears that we have either done nothing wrong like David in the psalms, or like Israel here in this passage we have served our time of discipline and yet our enemies prosper and liars and abusers seem to escape justice. But there in our depths stands among us (the myrtles – God’s chosen ones) is He who is fully informed of our situation, the angel of the LORD, and He is interceding to the Father for us, “How long?” (Psalm 94:3^{xv}; Habakkuk 1:2^{xvi})

Hear the wonderful answer. ¹³ *And the LORD answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.* Zechariah 1:13 God the Father or the angel of the LORD, we can’t tell for sure which, spoke to the interpreting angel gracious and comforting words. Please understand the imagery here because it is not just of Israel in the mid-fifth century B.C. They had served their seventy years of captivity and returned, and yet the consequences of their past rebellion were staring them in the face. The humiliation and shame brought upon the name of the LORD was a heavy burden. To these weary souls who were losing hope, and to us today when the trial seems to go on forever, the LORD answers with gracious and comforting words.

Let’s look at those gracious and comforting words for them and for us. ¹⁴ *So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.* Zechariah 1:14 The first words of grace and comfort are that He has great jealousy for Jerusalem and Zion. God’s jealousy is not the human kind of selfishness that is completely self-centered. “The jealousy of God, as the Bible describes it, is something utterly untainted by any mean-spiritedness. It is his intense, protective concern for what is rightly his own: his name, his land, his city (Jerusalem), his house (temple) and his people. They are his, and he will defend and protect them against all assailants, and avenge every wrong committed against them. He is utterly, even fiercely, committed to their welfare. Note the way he refers here to *my house* (16), and *my towns* (17)—which includes their inhabitants. Jealousy, in this sense, is another name for love: the kind of love a deeply devoted, honorable man has for his wife. And there is great security in knowing that you are the object of such love; indeed, to be so loved—especially by God—is the true comfort we all need and long for.”^{xvii} Isaiah 40:1-2^{xviii}

“Here we meet the first great truth that undergirds the good news of this first vision. *Comforting words* are of no value whatever if the one who speaks them has no power to put them into effect. But Zechariah is shown that that is not the case here. The God who promises to restore Jerusalem is the Lord of the whole earth and it is he, not the Persian emperor, who will ultimately determine what happens in it. His horsemen patrol the entire world. Nothing happens without his knowledge, and nothing will finally escape his righteous judgment. The horses we see here will appear again a few chapters later, this time pulling chariots (military vehicles) and going out from between mountains of bronze. In other words, the reconnaissance taking place here is in preparation for war. The nations, in their pride, think it is they who rule the world. But it is not so, and in due course they will learn this to their cost. The judgment

foreshadowed in this first vision is put into effect in the last one. Though judgment may be delayed, it will certainly come, for the Lord—the God of Israel—is the sovereign Lord of the whole earth, and nothing can withstand his purposes. His kingdom will come, and his will will be done. His promises are not idle, and neither are his threats.”^{xix} God’s wheels of justice may at times seem to grind exceedingly slow, but they grind exceedingly fine. Whatever a man sows, he will indeed reap in time (Galatians 6:7^{xx}).

¹⁵ And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster. Zechariah 1:15 Just as God was exceedingly jealous over His people, He is exceedingly angry over the nations that were excessively cruel in their treatment of them. If God’s little anger with the Jews’ idolatry sent them into exile, what would His exceeding anger do to those nations who were overly harsh with those God loves? This was reassurance that God can defend His own name. Remember that the next time you fail and the enemy of your soul tells you that you have ruined God’s reputation. God can defend Himself.

That means there is a day coming when He will judge the world. The resurrection of Jesus was the warning siren. But how few pay any attention at all. Most people live as if they will never be held accountable for their sins against their fellow man and most of all for their rebellion against the goodness of God. The injustice that grieves you grieves God even more. He will deal with it. I’ve seen it happen. Most of the time the recipient refuses to acknowledge it was the hand of God dealing with them for their actions and trying to turn them around.

¹⁶ Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Zechariah 1:16 Not only will God defend His name by judging those who abused His chosen ones, but He will again dwell in Jerusalem with mercy. Ezekiel had seen the Spirit of God depart from the temple (Ezekiel 10:18-19^{xxi}), but here God promises to return (Ezekiel 43:4-5^{xxii}). His presence in the temple was the greatest importance to the Jews. Is His presence in the temple of your body?

Jesus of Nazareth was the manifest presence of God returned to Jerusalem in mercy. The temple never had the Shekinah in the Holy of Holies after the Babylonian captivity. We don’t read of the glory of God filling the temple as the Jews had seen when the tabernacle and temple were completed (Exodus 40:34^{xxiii}; 1 Kings 8:10-11^{xxiv}). When Antiochus Epiphanes came into the Holy of Holies he reported there was nothing there.

The Lord returning to Jerusalem in mercy is the coming of Jesus. That is the fulfillment of this prophecy. And as we will see as we go through the book, many of the predictions of Zechariah are ultimately about Jesus. The anticipation of the Messiah was to stir the people to repentance to live holy lives in preparation for His coming. Just as the third verse promised, if we return to Him, He will return to us (1:3^{xxv}).

God promised the temple would be rebuilt. What looked impossible would be accomplished. We can read about it in the book of Ezra, which declares that it was accomplished under the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah (6:14-15^{xxvi}). Sometimes

the task God puts before us seems impossible, whether it is for our lives to exalt Jesus, or accomplish a mission He puts in our hearts. Remember that with God nothing is impossible. If God is in it, no one can stop it.

The measuring line stretched out over Jerusalem means that the ruins of the city would take form again and be completely restored. This was also predicted by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:38-40^{xxvii}). Ultimately it may look forward to the measuring line predicted by Ezekiel regarding the New Jerusalem. (See Ezekiel 40-48.) All the frustration and doubts that were before them were answered by the promises of God. In reading Nehemiah you will find that God raised up Zechariah to inspire the people to bring the immediate physical part to pass.

We have the same task before us. We look at the broken lives around us and wonder how God could ever restore such sin sick souls. Can they become living stones that make up New Jerusalem? But then we remember how God is changing us. God is still the same miracle working God. He sends pastors and teachers to inspire us with the promises of God from His Word that tell us that New Jerusalem will be completed and descend from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2^{xxviii}).

17 Cry out again, Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem."

Zechariah 1:17 "The ultimate fulfillment of these promises to Israel will only be realized with the second coming, the millennial temple, and the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth (Lindsey, "Zechariah," 1551). Even so, the anticipation of God's fullest expression of His mercy to Jerusalem would have invigorated the people of Israel to continue rebuilding the temple in Zechariah's day. Understanding the hope and encouragement of God's mercy also spurs us on when our situation seems bleak and hopeless.

God shows His people mercy. His words to Jerusalem centuries ago have never changed: "In mercy, I have returned." He loves us so much that He overflows with mercy for us. His mercy moves Him to love us deeply. Because of His mercy, God is compassionate toward us with a kindness that we could never deserve. Whoever you are, wherever you have been, and whatever you have done, God longs to be merciful to you."^{xxix} He promises, "Return to me and I will return to you."

Questions

- 1 What were those who returned faced with?
- 2 Can we relate to their trials?
- 3 What were the symbols in the vision?
- 4 Why were the Jews upset that their enemies were at ease?
- 5 Who interceded then and now?
- 6 What does God's jealousy over us show us?
- 7 How is it different from man's jealousy?
- 8 What angers God? Why is that good?
- 9 What encouraging promises did God give them?
- 10 Which one points to Jesus coming to save us?

i 2 Chronicles 32:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ And they spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men's hands.

²⁰ Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven.

ii Judges 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD.

iii Nehemiah 9:35 (NIV)

³⁵ Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways.

iv Genesis 16:10-13 (NIV)

¹⁰ The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."

¹¹ The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery."

¹² He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

¹³ She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

v Exodus 3:2-6 (NIV)

² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight--why the bush does not burn up." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." ⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

vi Exodus 23:20 (NIV)

²⁰ "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.

vii Judges 6:12-18 (NIV)

¹² When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

¹³ "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." ¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" ¹⁵ "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." ¹⁶ The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together." ¹⁷ Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. ¹⁸ Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you." And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return."

viii Colossians 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

ix Joshua 5:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

x Isaiah 6:5 (NIV)

⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

xi Romans 8:34 (ESV)

³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

xii **Jeremiah 25:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

xiii **Psalms 6:3 (ESV)**

³ My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD—how long?

xiv **Psalms 74:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?

xv **Psalms 94:3 (ESV)**

³ O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?

xvi **Habakkuk 1:2 (ESV)**

² O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?

xvii Stott, John - The Bible Speaks Today – The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come.

xviii **Isaiah 40:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

xix Stott, John - The Bible Speaks Today – The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come.

xx **Galatians 6:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

xxi **Ezekiel 10:18-19 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim.

¹⁹ And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.

xxii **Ezekiel 43:4-5 (ESV)**

⁴ As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east,

⁵ the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

xxiii **Exodus 40:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

xxiv **1 Kings 8:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, ¹¹ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

xxv **Zechariah 1:3 (ESV)**

³ Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

xxvi **Ezra 6:14-15 (NIV)**

¹⁴ So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. ¹⁵ The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

xxvii **Jeremiah 31:38-39 (ESV)**

³⁸ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹ And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah.

xxviii **Revelation 21:2 (ESV)**

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

xxix Fries, Micah- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary – Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.