

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 27: God and His People
(Zechariah 1—2)

Introduction to Zechariah:

- **Date Written:** Chapters 1—8 were written approximately 520-518 BC. Chapters 9—14 were written around 480 BC.
- **Purpose:** To give hope to God's people by revealing God's future deliverance through the Messiah.
- **Author:** Zechariah. His name means, "Yahweh Remembers" or "Yahweh Has Remembered."
- **To whom written:** The Jews in Jerusalem who had returned from their captivity in Babylon and to God's people everywhere.
- **Setting:** The exiles had returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple, but the work had been thwarted and stalled. Haggai and Zechariah confronted the people with their task and encouraged them to complete it.
- **The Christ of Zechariah:** Very clear messianic passages abound in this book. Christ is portrayed in His two Advents as both Servant and King, Man and God. The following are a few of Zechariah's explicit anticipations of Christ: the Angel of the Lord (3:1, 2); the righteous Branch (3:8; 6:12, 13), the stone with seven eyes (3:9), the cornerstone, nail, and battle bow (10:4); the Good Shepherd who is rejected and sold for thirty shekels of silver, the price of a slave (11:4-13); the pierced One (12:10); the cleansing fountain (13:1); the smitten Shepherd who is abandoned (13:7); the coming Judge and righteous King (14).
- **The Key Verses:** Zechariah 8:3; 9:9.
- **Themes:** Rebuilding the Temple, restoration, the coming Messiah.

Zechariah was a young man (Zech. 2:4) when God called him to minister to the struggling Jewish remnant trying to rebuild their temple in the ruined city of Jerusalem. The elder prophet Haggai had delivered two of his messages before Zechariah joined him in ministry, and the two of them served God together for a short time. Haggai had gotten the building program going again after a sixteen-year hiatus, and now Zechariah would encourage the people to finish their work. God gave the young man "good and comforting words" (1:13, 17) to assure the people that, despite the hard times, God was with them and would see them through.

The prophet had two major emphases as he began his ministry to the remnant: God was calling them to repent, and God was assuring them of His personal concern. In a series of eight night visions, God explained His involvement with His people.

I. God Calls His People to Repent (1:1-6)

A preacher's first sermon is usually difficult to deliver, but in Zechariah's case, his first message was doubly difficult because of the theme—*repentance*. God commanded His young servant to call the discouraged remnant to turn from their wicked ways and obey His Word. Zechariah boldly proclaimed what God told him to say, for, after all, the Lord couldn't bless His chosen people until

they were clean in His sight. If Zechariah had wanted to quote a text for his sermon, it could have been 2 Chronicles 7:14 a verse the Jewish people knew well.

1. Zechariah invited the people to look back and recall what their forefathers had done to provoke the Lord to anger and judgment (Zech. 1:2, 4). The Jewish people who had returned to the land knew their history very well. They knew that God had sent prophet after prophet to plead with their forefathers to turn from idolatry and return to the Lord, but the nation had refused to listen.
 - a. Isaiah had warned the leaders that God would discipline the nation if they didn't change their ways. Jeremiah wept as he warned Judah and Jerusalem that judgment was coming from the north (Babylon) and that the Jews would be exiled for seventy years. See 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 NKJV.
 - b. Then, Zechariah shared God's promise with them: "Return to me ...and I will return to you" (Zech. 1:3 NIV). God had left His people to their own ways, and that was why they were experiencing so much trouble. Haggai had already told them this in his first message (Hag. 1), but it was worth repeating. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8 NKJV). The remnant had not put God first, so He couldn't bless them as He desired to do.
 - c. At this point Zechariah asked them two questions: "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?" (Zech. 1:5). Had the listeners answered honestly, they would have said, "Many of our fathers are dead because they were slain by the Babylonians, and some are still in exile in Babylon. Some of the prophets are dead because our ancestors killed them."
 - d. But the point Zechariah was making was that the death of the prophets indicated the loss of opportunity for the nation. God gave the Jews ample time to repent and escape punishment, but they wasted their opportunity, and now it was too late.
 - i. However, the Word of God, spoken and written by the prophets, can never die, and that Word eventually "catches up with" rebellious sinners (v. 6, "take hold of," "overtake" NIV).
 - ii. Once God's longsuffering runs out, His living words will track down the offenders and judge them.
 - e. Some of their forefathers did repent (v. 6), but their repentance came too late to prevent the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the people. Some Jews may have repented when Nebuchadnezzar and his army arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, while others turned to God while exiled in Babylon.

By calling the people to repent, Zechariah was preparing them for the messages he would give them, for unless our hearts are right with God, we can't hear His Word with true spiritual comprehension. "Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 3:7-8 NKJV).

We occasionally hear evangelists calling lost sinners to repent, and this is good and biblical. But we rarely hear preachers calling God's people to repent, even though this was the message of the prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus. "The last word of our Lord to the church is not the Great Commission," said Vance Havner. "The Great Commission is indeed our program to the end of the age, but our Lord's last word to the church is "Repent." It's one thing to ask God to bless us but quite another to be the kind of people He can bless!

II. God Comforts His People (1:7-17)

About three months later, during the night of February 15, 519 BC, Zechariah had a series of eight visions that God gave to encourage the remnant and motivate them to finish rebuilding the temple. These visions focus primarily on God's ministry to Israel and His judgment on the Gentile nations that have afflicted Israel.

a. The Army (vv. 7—11).

- In the first vision, the prophet saw a man on a red (bay) horse, leading an army astride red, brown, and white horses. This “man among the myrtle tree” was the Angel of the Lord (vv. 11-13), the second person of the Godhead, who in Old Testament times made temporary preincarnate appearances on earth (Hagar (Gen. 16:7-14), Abraham (18; 22:11-18), Jacob (31:11,13), Moses (Ex. 3), Gideon (Judg. 6:11-23), and Samson's parents (Judg. 13)).
- But there was also an “interpreting angel” there who explained various things to Zechariah. Ten times during these visions, Zechariah asked questions of this angel and received replies. (**Read James 1:5 and Ps. 25:14**).
- In this first vision, the Angel of the Lord taught Zechariah the meaning of the horsemen (Zech. 1:10): They are God's angelic army that patrols the earth and carries out the decrees of the Lord (v. 11; and see Deut. 33:2; 1 Kings 22:19; Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2; Dan. 7:10). Jehovah is “Lord of hosts,” the commander of the armies of heaven and earth.
- The messengers reported that the Gentile nations were “at rest and in peace.” After the upheaval of the empires and Persia's conquest of Babylon and other nations, this would appear to be an encouraging report, but it really wasn't. The Jewish remnant was in distress, while the Gentile powers were at ease.
- Haggai had promised that the Lord would shake the nations and redeem His people (Hag. 2:6-9, 20-23), but this important event hadn't occurred yet. The kingdom promised by the prophets seemed to be a dream that would never come true.

b. The appeal (v. 12).

- A remarkable thing happened: The Son of God interceded for the people of God who were in great affliction! For centuries, “How long?” has been the cry of suffering people, especially the people of Israel. “How long?” is even the cry of the martyred saints in heaven (Rev. 6:10). That the Son of God should so identify Himself with the cries of His people reveals His compassion and concern.
- Jeremiah had promised that God's blessing would come after the seventy years of captivity (Jer. 25:8-14; 29:10-11), but the nation was still suffering. Why? Because they forgot that God had attached conditions to that blessing: The people had to repent, call upon God, and seek Him with all their heart, the very thing Zechariah had preached.
- Intercession for Israel should still be a part of our prayers. Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul all prayed for Israel; good examples for us to follow.
- See Isa. 62:6-7 NIV and Ps. 122:6).

c. The answer (vv. 13—17).

- After interceding for Israel, the Lord gave “comforting words” to the angel to give to the prophet. He affirmed His jealous love and concern for Jerusalem (see Zech. 8:2). God is jealous over His chosen people as a husband is jealous over his wife and as parents

over their children. This explains why the Lord accused the Jews of adultery and unfaithfulness whenever they were guilty of worshipping heathen gods.

- Worldliness on the part of Christians is also pictured as “spiritual adultery” (James 4:4-10).
- The Lord was angry with the Gentile nations because they had been unnecessarily brutal toward the Jews. True, God had called Assyria and Babylon to punish His people, but these nations went beyond what God called them to do and tried to destroy the Jews. Other nations such as Moab, had also joined in the assault (Ps. 83; 137).
- But the Lord’s most heartening words had to do with Judah’s future, not her enemies, for God promised to return to His people and prosper their nation. He would comfort Zion and prove to the enemy nations that Jerusalem was indeed His chosen city. This promise is repeated and expanded in the rest of Zechariah’s prophecy.

When our situation appears to be hopeless, we must remind ourselves that God identifies with our sufferings and is in charge of the future. Our responsibility is to repent, confess our sins, and believe His “comforting words.” His responsibility is to respond to our faith and work out His perfect will for us.

III. God Vindicates His People (1:18-21)

Over the centuries, the Jews have suffered repeatedly at the hands of many nations, and yet they have survived. But every nation that has sought to destroy the Jews has discovered the truth of God’s promise to Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” (Gen. 12:3 NKJV).

- That’s the message of the second vision that God gave Zechariah: The nations that have scattered the Jews will be terrified and thrown down by God’s agents of judgment.
- In Scripture, a horn is a symbol of power, especially the power of a nation or a ruler.
- The four “smiths” (artisans, craftsmen) represent nations that God uses to defeat the enemies of the Jews. They would use their “tools” to cut off the horns and render them powerless.
- The concept of four horns (nations) reminds us of Daniel’s vision of the image (Dan. 2) and the beasts (Dan. 7), both of which speak of four empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.
- Note, in the history of the Jews, the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom, God raised up Babylon to defeat Assyria, Babylon eventually takes Judah into captivity, Cyrus of Persia defeats Babylon. The Persians were conquered by the Greeks and Greece was conquered by Rome.
- In the last days, when Antichrist, the “dreadful and terrible beast,” establishes his kingdom (Dan. 7:7-8, 15-28) and persecutes the Jews, he and his kingdom will be destroyed by the return of Jesus Christ in glory and power. Zechariah will have more to say about this in the last part of his book.

IV. God Will Restore His People (2:1-13)

The remnant that had returned to Judah was concerned about rebuilding the temple and restoring the city and the nation, but their work was extremely difficult. In his vision, God assured His people that

He planned future glory and honor for them and their city when He Himself would come to dwell with them.

a. Anticipation (vv. 1—3).

If a total stranger came into your house and began to measure the windows for curtains and floor for carpeting, you'd probably ask him to leave. After all, you measure property that belongs to you, over which you have authority. When the prophet saw a man measuring Jerusalem, it was evidence that Jerusalem was God's city and that one day He would claim it and restore it in glory.

- The man with the measuring line is evidently the Angel of the Lord, Israel's Messiah. Leaders and diplomats may debate over who shall control Jerusalem, but the Lord Jesus Christ has the final word.
- By measuring the city, He declares that it is His and he will accomplish His divine purposes for the city no matter what leaders and international assemblies may decide.
- But this symbolic act declares something else: Jerusalem will enjoy future expansion and glory such as the city has never experienced. The population will spill over the walls; in fact, there will be no need of walls because God will be a "wall of fire" around His people. The small remnant of Jews in ruined Jerusalem were helping to keep alive a city that would one day be greatly honored and blessed by Almighty God!

b. Admonition (vv. 6—9).

- The Lord admonished the Jews yet in Babylon to leave the city and join the remnant in Jerusalem. Why remain in the comfort and security of a pagan society when they were desperately needed in their own land? The day would come when Babylon, now under Persian rule would be judged for her sins and those who served her would plunder her. Get out while there is still opportunity.
- This admonition didn't imply that every Jew who remained in Babylon was out of the will of God. Just as God sent Joseph to Egypt to prepare the way for his family, so He had people like Esther and Mordecai, Daniel and his friends, and Nehemiah in places of authority in pagan cities where they could do the work, He planned for them to do. The Lord was summoning those that put comfort, vocation, and security ahead of doing God's work in their own sacred city.
- The Jews were very precious to God; He called them "the apple [pupil] of his eye". The pupil is the tiny opening in the iris that lets in light, and this is a very delicate and important area of this vital organ. Hence, anything dear and precious is like the pupil of the eye.

c. Acclamation (vv. 10-13).

Promises like these ought to make God's people "sing and rejoice" ("shout and be glad" NIV). Their Messiah will come and dwell with them, just as the glory of God had dwelt in the tabernacle and temple.

- Ezekiel describes the new city and temple in Ezekiel 40—48 and closes his book by naming the glorious new city "Jehovah Shammah," which means "the Lord is there" (48:35). In that day, many Gentiles will trust in the Lord and be joined with Israel in the

glorious kingdom over which Messiah will reign (Isa. 2:1-5; 19:23-25; 60:1-3; Zech. 8:20-23).

Zechariah 2:12 is the only place in Scripture where Palestine is called “the holy land.” That designation is often used today, but it really doesn’t apply. The land will not be holy until Messiah cleanses the people and the land when He returns to reign (3:9). A fountain will be opened to wash away sin and uncleanness (13:1), and then the Jews shall be called “the holy people.

As you review these three night visions, you can learn that God watches the nations and knows what they are doing; that he judges the nations for their sins, especially for their mistreatment of Israel; and that there is a glorious future planned for Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, when the Messiah will return to cleanse them and restore the glory of God in their midst.

No wonder we’re taught to pray, “Thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10), for when we pray that prayer, we are praying for the peace of Jerusalem. And there can be no true peace in Jerusalem until the Prince of Peace reigns in glory.

Questions for Personal Reflections Or Group Discussion

1. How did the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah differ from and complement one another?
2. Zechariah’s mission was to call the people to repent and to assure them of God’s personal concern. Why is it important that people receive both emphases?
3. What does this promise mean “Return to me... and I will return to you” (Zech. 1:3 NIV)?
4. Why is it important to call people to repentance? How can you do this?
5. In what way do you think the Lord is identifying Himself with the distress of His people today?
6. What were the comforting words the angel brought to Zechariah? How might truly believing these words make a difference in your life?
7. When your circumstances look hopeless, what do you need to be reminded of?
8. What is the significance of the four horns and four craftsmen in Zechariah’s second vision?

Homework: Read **Zechariah 3—4**. Study title, God And His Leaders