

ZECHARIAH

Chapter 1

A Call to Return to the Lord

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, 2 “The LORD was very angry with your fathers. 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. 4 Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. 5 Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? 6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, ‘As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.’”

1:1 *eighth month of the second year.* October–November, 520 B.C. Haggai also began his prophetic ministry in Darius’s second year, on the first day of the sixth month, i.e., on Aug. 29, 520 (Hag 1:1). (CSB)

Oct/Nov 520 BC, two months after Haggai began to prophesy. (TLSB)

Darius. King of Persia (522–486 BC), Darius I Hystaspes (known as “the Great”); consolidated control of the country after two years of civil war following a rebellion against the previous king, Cambyses. (TLSB)

the word of the LORD. A technical phrase for the prophetic word of revelation (see 9:1; 12:1; Jer 1:2; Eze 1:3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jnh 1:1; 3:1; Mic 1:1; Zep 1:1; Hag 1:1; Mal 1:1). (CSB)

prophet. One called by God to be his spokesman. (CSB)

Zechariah – Zechariah means “Yahweh has remembered.” His grandfather Iddo, head of a prominent priestly family, was among the first Judeans to return from exile in Babylon. The description of Zechariah elsewhere as “son of Iddo” (Ezra 5:1; Neh 12:16) suggests his father (Berechiah) died young, and Zechariah succeeded his grandfather as head of the family. Zechariah, born a priest to intercede for God’s people, was called to be His spokesman to them. (TLSB)

1:2 *very angry with your fathers.* The Lord was angry because of the covenant-breaking sins of the Jews’ preexilic forefathers, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C., followed by exile to Babylonia. God’s anger should not be explained away, for to deny that God has genuine emotions is to deprive him of one of the clear marks of personality. (CSB)

Hard hearts, deaf ears, and evil deeds of generations of Israelites had brought about God’s “alien work” of anger toward them. This culminated the destruction of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon. People could realize the depth of His anger by glancing around at the war damage still evident almost 20 years after the exiles’ return. (TLSB)

1:3 *Lord of hosts.* This term occurs three times in this verse and often in Zechariah. God calls Himself the God of armies or of the hosts, that is, not only of the angels or of the spirits but of the entire creation,

which carries on warfare for Him and serves Him...God created all these creatures to be in active military service. (TLSB)

Return to me ... and I will return to you. Cf. 7:13. If the people of Zechariah's day would change their course and go in the opposite direction from that of their forefathers (v. 4), the Lord would return to them with blessing instead of with a curse (see v. 16; see also Jer 18:7–10). (CSB)

Personal return to the Lord is the precondition for properly receiving not only Zechariah's message, but every Word of God. This appeal must do its work in your heart and life before God will perform His "proper work" of returning in forgiving love. Chemnitz: "Just as the turning away from God's face demonstrates a hatred toward actions opposing Him, so His turning toward a person testifies to His benevolence in the way things are going." (TLSB)

1:4 *former prophets.* Such as Isaiah (see Isa 45:22), Jeremiah (see Jer 18:11) and Ezekiel (see Eze 33:11). See also 7:7, 12; Jer 25:4–5; 35:15. (CSB)

Preexilic prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah who had appealed, mainly in vain, for the repentance of the people of Israel. (TLSB)

1:5–6 Two ironic questions remind the hearers that though people pass away, God's inspired Word remains in force to bear fruit (1Pt 1:25). (TLSB)

1:5 *do they live forever?* No, but God's words through them live on to be fulfilled (see v. 6). (CSB)

The former members of Israel and Judah had perished, as God had threatened; and if the people should say that the prophets also were dead, the Lord would remind them of the fact that His words, as spoken through these prophets, are not dead, but had been abundantly fulfilled. (Kretzmann)

1:6 *did not my words ... overtake your forefathers?* Cf. Isa 40:6–8; 55:10–11. For the imagery of "overtake" see Dt 28:2 ("accompany" is lit. "overtake"), 15, 45. (CSB)

God's will, as revealed in the Law and the Prophets, has enduring authority and power. The moral relativism of our times makes our society similar to that of Israel and Judah, who paid such a high price for tuning out the prophets. (TLSB)

God was personally present in His Word, which chased, apprehended, and lashed Judah's ancestors, who despised it. (TLSB)

they repented. Apparently a reference to what happened to some of the preexilic forefathers and/or their offspring during the exile and immediately afterward (cf. Eze 9; 10:1–17; Da 9:1–19). (CSB)

After experiencing the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity in Babylon, the faithful remnant acknowledged their evil ways and deeds. (TLSB)

This was the state of mind which the Lord wanted to find in the midst of His people in making known to them the wonderful facts contained in the visions of Zechariah, The proper attitude for hearing and learning the Word of God is that of a humble acknowledgment of one's sinfulness. (Kretzmann)

1:1–6 When God's Word produces changes of heart and life, it bears beautiful fruit. The people of Judah have to learn that lesson from their tragic past lest their return from exile end in sorrow. When God's Word meets resistance and rejection, then there will be a repeat of the same shuddering outcome seen in

war-damaged Jerusalem. The good news is that God keeps returning with open arms, beckoning us to repent. He pities the guilty with a Father's heart. • Lord, rescue our hearts and minds from the prison of our wrong desires and actions. Connect us to the reality of Your grace that we may return to Your sweet embrace and remain in it forever. Amen. (TLSB)

A Vision of a Horseman

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, 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. 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.' 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.' 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?' 13 And the LORD answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. 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. 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. 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. 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.'"

1:7–17 The first vision. Although God's covenant people are troubled while the oppressing nations are at ease, God is jealous for his people and will restore them and their towns and the temple. The imagery of the first vision is reflected in that of the eighth and final vision (6:1–8). (CSB)

1:7 *twenty-fourth day of ... Shebat.* Feb. 15, 519 B.C., about three months after the date of v. 1. (CSB)

This was about five months after the building of the Temple had been resumed. (Kretzmann)

1:8 *in the night.* Zechariah had all eight visions (1:7–6:8) in one night. (CSB)

This was sometime between six o'clock in the evening and six o'clock in the morning. (Kretzmann)

This is first of a series of eight interconnected visions that Zechariah received at night. He learned of God's gracious purposes for His people, which were already taking effect at the time but would be fully realized in Christ and His kingdom. (TLSB)

I saw in the night. Not a dream (see 4:1). The visions were given to Zechariah while he was fully awake. (CSB)

man riding. The angel of the Lord (v. 11). He must not be confused with the interpreting angel, who is mentioned in vv. 9, 13–14, 19; 2:3; 4:1, 4–5; 5:5, 10; 6:4–5. (CSB)

horses. Perhaps angelic messengers (v. 10). (CSB)

This was an angelic figure on horseback with other angels on horseback behind him. Horses symbolize strength and motion. Revelation 6:1-8 suggests that the different colors of the horses allude to the various tasks assigned to their riders. (TLSB)

myrtle trees – These were evergreens usually c 8th tall and symbolized the holy people. (TLSB)

in the glen – This likely alludes to Judah's depressed fortunes at this time, much like a valley. (TLSB)

1:9 *angel who talked with me* – This interpreting angel remains with the prophet to explain new features of the revelation given to him.. Angels play a prominent role in Zechariah. (TLSB)

The Lord wanted Zechariah to know the meaning of the vision in order that he might reveal it to others. (Kretzmann)

1:10 *man was standing* – These angels are not simply collectors of information but are instrumental in God's government of the world. (TLSB)

1:11 *angel of the LORD*. This is the central figure of this living tableau, distinct from both the rider on the red horse and the interpreting angel. His dramatic appearance here indicates that God is once again accomplishing mighty saving works for His people. (TLSB)

This peculiar Uncreated Angel is the Son of God as He revealed Himself to the believers of the Old Testament. (Kretzmann)

at rest. Cf. 6:8. While the Persian empire as a whole was secure and at ease by this time (v. 15), the Jews in Judah were oppressed and still under foreign domination (v. 12). (CSB)

This was the great commotion among the nations, of which the prophet Haggai had spoken, chap. 2, 7, 8, had not yet begun, that is, the time for the Messiah to appear in the flesh had not yet come, a statement which naturally had a most depressing effect upon the Jews. But the Lord has a word of comfort ready for them. (Kretzmann)

1:12 *how long* – The angel of the Lord intercedes for His OT people, even a Jesus did in the Upper Room (John 17) and as He continues to do at the Father's right hand (Romans 8:34; Heb 7:25). (TLSB)

seventy years. Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years of desolation, beginning with the destruction of the first temple in 587 BC was now drawing to a close. (TLSB)

1:13 *comforting words*. These were words of salvation and blessing, which he, of course, was immediately to pass on to the congregation of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

These were in contrast to the dire threats that had resulted in the devastation of Jerusalem (Zep. 3:1-5). (TLSB)

1:14 *jealous*. See 8:2. Through the use of such language the Lord's love for Judah is shown. The key idea is that of God vindicating Judah for the violations against her (v. 15). (CSB)

God is fiercely protective of His people. His message, communicated through the interpreting angel to Zechariah, is wholehearted commitment to rebuild Jerusalem. (TLSB)

1:15 *disaster*. God was angry with Israel and used the Assyrians (Isa 10:5) and Babylonians (Isa 47:6; Jer 25:9) to punish her, but they went too far by trying to destroy the Jews as a people. (CSB)

Though they were God's agents in punishing His people, Israel's enemies relished their task too much, exercising an excess of cruelty. (TLSB)

1:16 *I will return*. This I's renewed favor to His people which has already begun and will flower in the rebuilding of the temple. (TLSB)

mercy. Or "motherly compassion" (also in v. 12). (CSB)

measuring line. A symbol of restoration (cf. Jer 31:38–40). (CSB)

This is string that builders use to mark where the walls of a house or the walls of a city should go. (TLSB)

1:17 *choose Jerusalem*. This is the communion of His saints. Thus the Lord, who occasionally has punished His Church with heavy stripes, ever again lies turned to His children with the wealth of His blessings in the Gospel. (Kretzmann)

God will again make Jerusalem the city of His earthly abode. This declaration brought comfort to the people who felt rejected by the Lord during the exile. (TLSB)

1:7–17 At a moment when God seems remote and uncaring, Zechariah sees that He is guiding events for good. The Angel of the Lord was among His people, interceding for them and preparing for the rebuilding of the temple and city. If you experience dismal moments, do not succumb to the despairing thought that God has forsaken His people in general or you in particular. God's angels watch over His own, and Christ effectually intercedes for you before His Father's throne. • Open my eyes, Lord, to the care of Your servants. Give me courage and endurance to trust that if Christ is for me, the hosts of hell cannot prevail against me. Amen. (TLSB)

A Vision of Horns and Craftsmen

18 And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four horns! 19 And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these?" And he said to me, "These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." 20 Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. 21 And I said, "What are these coming to do?" He said, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one raised his head. And these have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it."

1:18–21 The second vision. The nations that devastated Israel (v. 19) will in turn be destroyed by other nations. (CSB)

1:18 *four*. If the number is to be taken literally, the reference is probably to Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia and Medo-Persia. (CSB)

horns. Symbolic of strength in general (Ps 18:2), or the strength of a country, i.e., its king (Ps 89:17; Da 7:7–8; 8:20–21; Rev 17:12), or, as here (see v. 21), the power of a nation in general. (CSB)

These were symbolic of fearsome weapons. Here they signify massive strength and great pride. Four is a number of completeness (four winds, four corners of the earth), suggesting all the military might of the

world. We are reminded of Daniel's vision of four beasts (Dan. 7:1-8), but it is not possible to identify the world powers pictured in Zechariah's vision. (TLSB)

1:19 *scattered* – The people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were scattered by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:6), and those in Judah and Jerusalem by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:11). (TLSB)

1:20 *four craftsmen*. If the number is to be understood literally, probably the reference is to Egypt, Babylonia, Persia and Greece. What is clear is that all Judah's enemies will ultimately be defeated (v. 21). (CSB)

The Hebrew word refers specifically to blacksmiths or metalworkers, men who bend iron to their will by sheer force. They are divine agents "brutish men, skilled to destroy" (Ez. 21:31), appointed to cast down the four horns. (TLSB)

1:21 *cast down the horns* – Just as craftsmen wield power over horns, so God causes kingdoms like Assyrian and Babylon to cast down fall before powers like Persia and Rome. (TLSB)

It has ever been a characteristic of the enemies of the Lord that they rejoice over the misfortune of His people; but in the end the Church will triumph. (Kretzmann)

1:18–21 Zechariah's heart sinks and his soul wilts before the forces arrayed against the holy people from his own day to the end of time. But almighty God stiffens the prophet's backbone and restores his courage by the sight of even mightier powers fighting on the side of God's people. Do not despair over the strength of evil. Instead, lift your eyes to Christ, who sends His mighty warriors to defend Zion so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18). • O Jesus, King of angels, make me ever mindful of Your protecting care. Equip me to resist the hosts of hell, trusting in Your sure deliverance. Amen. (TLSB)