

Mid South Conference 1978-07 Zechariah's Visions

by Bob Clark

Zechariah's prophecy is a call to repentance, urging God's people to turn to Him and He will turn to them, and to learn from the failure of others and to have a personal relationship with God.

Duration: 28:17

Scripture: Zechariah 1:1-6, Zechariah 1:14-21

Topics: "Zechariah"

Description

In this sermon, Zechariah chapter 1, verses 1 to 6, the preacher introduces the book of Zechariah and its general theme. Zechariah preached for three months, overlapping with the ministry of Haggai, to call the people to repentance. He urged them to turn away from their unbecoming and inconsistent ways and turn to the Lord. After three months, Zechariah receives a vision of a man riding a red horse among myrtle trees, accompanied by red horses speckled in white. The vision represents messengers sent by the Lord to walk throughout the earth. Despite facing opposition and discouragement, the people continue to build for God. The chapter also includes the text of a letter sent to Artaxerxes, complaining about the building project, and the king's response, strengthening the authority of Zechariah's message. The message to the people is to not repeat the mistakes of their forefathers and to turn away from their evil ways and doings.

Transcript

...the earlier section of this particular book. So if you would turn to the book of Zechariah in chapter one, please. The book of Zechariah very easily divides itself into the first eight chapters, and chapters nine to fourteen.

And if the Lord allows, we would like to spend most of our time today and during this week, if the Lord has not yet returned, thinking about the first section of the book that constitutes, after the introduction, which is chapter one, verses one to six. Then verse seven commences a series on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, and on that particular evening, the prophet Zechariah received eight consecutive visions from God. These eight consecutive visions are designed to answer what Haggai has just prophesied two months earlier, and our fulfillment of that.

So, in order to fit this particular book into our thinking, I think it would be nice for us to just go back briefly, and we can read from the book of Ezra, and get all the historical background we need in just a few verses.

After the nation of Israel had been imprisoned, or under the discipline of God in Babylon for seventy years, God stirred up Darius, Osiris the king, to make an announcement. This is in the year 538 B.C. Now, at this particular time, God's people were very small in number.

They were scattered around. They had gone through a terrible trial, and what constituted this company of people coming back to Jerusalem from Babylon was actually a revival group, and this is something that we want to keep in our mind, that this group of people were actually under the exercise of God, were being blessed of God, and they were coming back as the seedling of a spiritual revival. Now, this is the background for us as we read in the book of Ezra.

Ezra and Nehemiah are the historians of this occasion. Ezra chapter 1. In the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia, the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Remember this figure now. The purpose is to build a house in Jerusalem in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel? He is the God which is in Jerusalem.

And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. Now here we have the Gentile king motivated by God, stirred by his spirit to free God's people, whomever will, and he promised us to underwrite all the financial burden and give them even political and military security, and they are journeying back. You'd think this would be a opportunity.

Chapter 2, verse 64, the whole congregation together was forty and two thousand, three hundred and three score. Forty-two thousand people decide to go back. That's not many out of a nation, is it? That's just about a good-sized city.

Those are the only ones that are concerned. With them are a few servants, cattle, material things. The whole company might amount to about sixty thousand people.

So you see, this is a little devout nucleus. They're wanting to go on for God. They're going to go back through this treacherous journey, go back to a city that has been totally destroyed, and in all their energetic efforts, the plan is to build something for God there.

Chapter 3, verse 1, when the seventh month was come and the children of Israel were in the cities and the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem, then stood up Jeshua. Remember these two names. They're going to appear in Zechariah's prophecy.

Then stood up Jeshua, the son of Josedek, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Sheolpeel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of God of Israel to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. They set the altar upon his bases for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries, and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening. Now we see a company of people, sixty thousand, no military power, no king.

All they have is a governor named Zerubbabel and a high priest named Joshua. There are a handful of priests. Their first action is to build an altar and offer sacrifices to God.

Their purpose is to worship God. One of the marks of spiritual revival is the worship of God. One of the marks that initially characterized the company of God's people, who meet in the name of the Lord, which is a revival company about two hundred years ago on the continent, the Spirit of God stirred up people to worship God.

I wonder if that's your mark of your local church. Energetic, zealous, devout worship of God. Priestly exercises, a concern to give to God.

Are we preoccupied with other facets of service? Very valid. All have their place, but we've been called to worship God and from our worship their spring service. They've gathered for fear now, fear of the Gentile powers.

They have no military defense. They have no army. There's not a weapon in the whole citizenry.

They're filled with fear and apprehension, but they're there to do something for God. Just a small company of people. Chapter four.

Now, when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel. Firstly, they came to Zerubbabel and said, let us build with you. The first offered was to amalgamate the unbelievers.

We'll come along with you. Their purpose subtly was to dilute the work and destroy the work. They rejected this.

The account is given to us in these next few verses. Then the people of the land in verse four weakened the hands of the people and troubled them in building. They hired counselors to frustrate them.

Now they turned against them and they're meeting opposition. That's a difficult trial to try to maintain something for God. And they're very prone to discouragement.

Everything seems to be against this small little company of believers. Now, in the rest of this particular chapter, there is given to us the actual text of the letter that they send to Artaxerxes complaining about what is going on. And the King sends an answer in return.

You can read this at your leisure from 17 to 22, and he threatens them and tells them they have to stop the work. Now notice in verse 23 of chapter four. Now, when the copy of the King Artaxerxes letter was read before Raham and Shimshi, the scribe and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews and made them to cease by force and power.

Then ceased the work of God or the work of the house of God, which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius, King of Persia. Now that's where we are.

There's a span of 14 years when nothing's been going on. The Jewish people have been building their homes. They've been trying to sow seed.

They've been trying to get something secure. Perfectly logical that you should have a good home and a business and prosperity and wellbeing. But the work of God has stopped for 14 years on the basis of a

threatening letter from a Gentile King.

We become very easily intimidated in any kind of opposition. And the first thing we do is to give up the work of God to be sure and stabilize our own personal securities. That's not an indictment.

That's just characteristic of us all. The Jews are only a swatch out of the cloth of humanity. And you and I are the same thing.

A little bit of opposition, a little difficulty, and we're quick to be discouraged, disheartened and detach ourselves. And the work of God stands still. But God has not forgotten his people.

And the Lord is going to raise up a man named Haggai, who for three months is going to be used of God to stir God's people. After his ministry of three months, he is only preparatory for a young priest who was born in Babylon, come back with his grandfather with whom he is living, started the priestly services, has got spiritual exercises of heart, and in the vitality of his youth, old Haggai, who had actually seen the original temple, and is now there in the city watching the struggling, rebuilding, and watching the heartache and the failure and the weakness, this aged man rises up and urges God's people after 14 long years. And his word is, today God wants, consider this, take a look at what you're doing, see your own houses and your prosperity and well-being and your preoccupation with the things around you.

Now let's wake up and do the work of God. And for three months, he ministers to God's people in this way. This is still in the second year of Darius the king.

Along with Haggai is a very young man named Zechariah. Ezra the historian gives this one statement in chapter 6 in verse 14. The elders of the Jews builded and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Adu.

So now we're introduced to the prophecy of Zechariah. Fourteen years, the work of the Lord has been just treading water. Inactive, there's been coolness of heart, fretting and worrying about physical external things.

Old Haggai comes along and challenges God's people. And now it's left to the vigorous ministrations of Zechariah. Zechariah is going to make a call and he's going to beseech God's people.

And we pick up our reading now, the book that we'd like to study together, in Zechariah 1 and verse 1. In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Adu, the prophet, saying, The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts. Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.

Be not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts. Turn ye now from your evil ways and from your evil doings. But they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord.

Your fathers will, are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? And they returned and said, Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us. Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is in this month Sebad, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zachariah, the son of Berechiah, the

son of Adu, the prophet, saying, And then he enters on his vision. So now the reason why we read verse seven is to cause us to see that between the eighth month and the eleventh month is a short span of time, just three month period of time.

It would appear that the introduction of this book, Zachariah chapter one, verses one to six, the introduction is excerpts of the general theme that Zachariah preached for three months in an effort to overlap the ministry of Haggai, identify himself with Haggai's efforts, and now God is commencing a new outreach to his people. It's a call to repentance, and for three months he moves amongst God's people, personal encounters, public preaching, exercises of heart, and his message is, Turn unto the Lord and he will turn unto you. Fourteen years we've delayed the work of God on the basis of a threatening letter.

Now we have to trust in God and begin to do the work of God. Let's be exercised of soul. Now this is the basic message, the introduction to the book.

Beloved of God, there are lessons to learn. I would like to share with you thoughts from this prophecy. Hopefully we'd have two or three thoughts in mind.

One, that we get a little bit of an insight into the first part of the book of Zachariah. You might be encouraged then to go home and read and study on your own. Secondly, that we might see that God has a deep pressing concern for his people, and is deeply interested in the details of their life and what they're going through, and wants them to integrate their own personal lives with the work of God.

And thirdly, there are principles introduced to us here in the book of Zachariah which I'd like to suggest are advice. They're not given in the form of advice, but it is advice on how to live in a troubled age. You and I live in a very difficult troubled time ourselves.

The work of God, although it's broadcast on television and radio and in newsprint, and there are many people heralding tremendous blessing, yet the actual work of God, that is turning out worshipers for himself, deepening lives in personal intimate communion with God, that is not going on. Do not think that you are living in a time of revival. We are not living in a time of revival.

We are living in a time of contradiction to the word of God, willful disobedience to the word of God, rejection to the basic principles of God's word, and we can thank God for whatever the case is. And he says, I have been sore displeased with your fathers. The word sore displeased is a very intensified form of the Hebrew word, and it means angry.

I have been angry with anger at your fathers. They had to be disciplined and had to go into captivity. Now, what is he saying? Is he just reminding them of their sin and trying to grieve them? No, he's teaching them a lesson.

He's saying there's some advice in this that we need to learn, and the simple lesson is, we need to learn from the failure of others. That's the message for the 60,000 in Jerusalem. Learn from the failure of your fathers.

Never mind attacking your fathers, never mind disparaging them, never mind depreciating them, just learn from their experience. And your fathers went through an experience because of a disposition of heart. Now, we need to learn from the experience of others.

That's exactly why our Old Testament has been written. Paul told us that, didn't he? He said these things were written for our learning, but more important than that, it happened to them that it might be written. God carefully has preserved the Old Testament scriptures that you and I might not just have some interesting stories to tell children.

That's not the point of it. It's not history lesson for Israel. These things have been forced upon them, and in the sovereign prerogatives of a holy great God, he has controlled a nation in order that they would be going through experiences, in order that those very experiences could be written and recorded, that you and I can learn and read and understand and bear the weight of the problems of the end of the age.

That comes in 1 Corinthians 10 and Romans 15, the two verses that clearly state it happened to them and it was written that we could learn. Learn from the failure of others. As we peruse the problems, then we learn from the failure of other persons, but just as important, we learn from the faithfulness of God.

Say unto them, saith the Lord of hosts, Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. Be not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts. Now, can you see that Zechariah is buttressing his argument here and strengthening his position, not by saying, Dear Jewish friends, the way I see this is, no.

He says, Thus saith the Lord of hosts. Five times in these three verses we have him saying, Jehovah the God of the multitudinous armies of heaven and all the armies of the world, Jehovah of armies, the Lord of hosts. He is speaking to you and me and he is strengthening the authority of his message.

This is a good lesson for any of us who want to teach. No matter how little the children are, they need to know that they are not hearing from Dear Grandma so-and-so or Mrs. Somebody else or Mr. Such-and-such. They are hearing the word of the Lord.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts. And what is the message? Said the same one that came to our forebearers, Don't be as our fathers. The Lord said to them, Turn ye now from your evil ways and from your evil doings.

Two words, ways and doings. The ways means a course of action, a pattern of life, the general style, the pathway in which we take. And the word doings has to do with individual actions.

And so God conceives that we are a by-part in such a sense that we have things in our mind and style our life in a certain way. And they can be very evil concepts that ultimately issue an action. Says now turn away from these things that are inconsistent with me.

This is the source of blessing. Now, if the Spirit of God ever touches your heart from a general style of thinking, a manner of life, and he reaches out and convinces you that this is inconsistent with the Lord, turn away. And the moment you do that, the Lord will turn to you.

This is a strong affirmation. It's a strong, blessed promise to his people that God is always waiting to move back and to deal with us the moment we're ready to have a right relationship with himself. Your fathers, where are they? Now he's not disparaging the fathers nor the prophets, but he is making an analogy or a comparison between, in verse five, he is saying, look at the brevity of the life of your fathers.

Look at the brevity of the ministry of the prophets. The prophets, where are they? Do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, you see the emphasis? All that you have listened to, learn from your fathers and learn from the prophets, but remember it's the words of God. God does not urge us to say, turn back

to principles.

He does not say, turn back to assembly concepts. He does not say, turn back to the covenant and turn back. No, he says, turn to me.

Make this a personal thing between you and God and in the quiet sanctuary of your own soul, write your soul with the Lord. We can talk very directly and openly. You would not be here if you did not enjoy God's word.

You would not want to take your one week's vacation and get away from all the other activities and whatever expense and inconvenience is concurred with all of this. You wouldn't be here if you weren't interested in hearing the word and the mind of God. And we thank God for such companies of yourself and earnestly in prayer, not only here, but the dear company of believers from which I have come in my own family.

I know we're praying that you will receive from his word, that which will stir your heart, feed your soul, center your minds and thoughts and devotion to our blessed God. And you will leave here with a thought. It's going to spill over and be a blessing to those with whom I meet and serve.

We are praying that God will touch your heart, and you too will be sensitive. And remember, it's turning to him, which obviously implies that he has turned away from us. And the distance you feel in your spiritual life, the coolness you feel oftentimes in your activities and services, a Lord's Supper becomes cold and dread.

Your devotional times become uninteresting and unprofitable. Witnessing has gone long by the board. Giving becomes mechanical and routine without any exercise of heart or proportionate to how God has blessed us.

And all these things are token. We have fallen into a formality and the Lord has long turned from us. He says, turn to me personally, me, enjoy my fellowship, get to know me, bring yourself back into a relationship with me and I will turn to you.

Take a look at your fathers. They're long gone. Look at the prophets.

They've gone. But my word and my statutes, they go on and they linger and more forceful than that. Did they not take hold of your fathers? The word take hold here of the fathers has to do with a sort of pursuit and catching up to it's the word of Nassag, to reach out and to catch up with.

I have a dog at home and it's quite an affliction. I'm not an appreciator of animals and a shaggy little monster. You come back and visit him and he jumps around and wags his tail.

He's very excited and he likes to see people and enjoys, but he only enjoys the people he can see. And if somebody walks out of the room, he'll follow along, particularly my good wife. He's very attached to her and apparently she enjoys his company sitting on a chair next to him or something of the kind.

So he's very drawn to her and she'll leave the room and he'll scrape along and paddle along behind her, wherever she is, right at her feet, walking along right behind. But if she goes out of the house, he's forgotten her. But that's the difference between my dog and a hound dog.

A hound dog smells and sniffs and pursues and there's no end until he finally gets to his ultimate goal. And a hound dog will watch and watch. My little dog will watch a cat go by and growl and growl and bark at it.

When it's out of sight, he's forgotten about it. But a hound dog will go after the animal and sniff it out and pursue until it finally gets there and it'll point and claw and try to just persist. That's the thought that's conveyed here.

God's words take hold. They pursue and follow and ultimately God's words shall be accomplished. And there's no hiding place from his words.

And he says, did not my words take hold of your fathers? Through Jeremiah's ministry, I warned of the judgment to come and they would not repent and my words took hold of them. And the nation went into judgment. It is now the message is to you.

Let us learn from our forefathers. Let us learn from the house of God and from holy scripture and from the faithfulness of God. His words will pursue us and they will ultimately catch up to us.

And we'll have to acknowledge, as we have many times in our lives, we'll have to see exactly what God says here. My words, did they not take hold of your fathers? And they, that is the fathers, returned and said, like as the Lord of hosts sought to do unto us, according to our ways and according to our doings, so he has dealt with us. God promised to deal with us in a way and that's exactly what he's done.

It's a simple prerequisite to spiritual blessing. Learn from the failure of others and learn from the faithfulness of God. Are you growing spiritually and learning? Do we see God giving us simple counsel for today's problem? And the first difficulty that you and I have to see in our lives and in our local assembly and in the work of God is that the assembly itself and the body of Christ, our work will never be any better or richer or deeper than we are ourselves.

And God is saying, turn unto me, come turn away from whatever ways and doings that characterize us that are unbecoming and inconsistent. Come turn to me and I will turn to you. For three months he ministers this way and then on the fourth and twentieth day on the eleventh month in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord comes to the man Zechariah.

And I saw by night and behold a man riding upon a red horse and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom and behind him were red horses speckled and white. Then said I, O my Lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these be. The man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro through the earth.

They answered the angel of the Lord that stood among the myrtle trees and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and behold, all the earth sitters still and is at rest. The angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. For the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great jealousy, and I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease, for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.

Therefore, thus saith the Lord, I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies. My house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, my cities through prosperity shall be spread abroad, and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem." This first vision is a vision of God's personal care, His interest in these people that are being offered the opportunity to repent.

There's going to be a series of eight consecutive visions. I see my time is away from me, so that'll be a good reading, and for this evening, we'll pick up the vision here and start with the visions, and we'll develop these thoughts. Just a little bit of a resume now.

The first six verses are the introduction to the book. Then, through chapter six, is the eight visions that we want to give consideration to. The first prerequisite for spiritual blessing, the first advice that we are to get, repentance of sins.

The value of, secondly, the second thought is, learn from the experience and the failures of other people, and secondly, learn from the faithfulness of God. The exercise of heart. After God draws this exhortation in this three-month ministry, He speaks carefully to Zechariah in these eight consecutive visions, given one night, and none of these visions have been fulfilled.

They are all pictures of a great future time at the end of the times of the Gentiles when the Son of God comes, but they are meant and designed to be encouragement to God's people. Don't have apprehension and think, oh boy, visions, Zechariah, picture language, we'll never get this. No, that's not true.

There's charming, simple, warm pictures here of God's loving care and rich promises for each and every one of us to enter into. Not the fulfillment, but in application to our soul. But the primary message is, get our lives right before God.

Repent of any impediment, and then wait and say, Lord, now start working in our heart. And this is a promise that God shall bring to us in the afternoon.

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