

Zechariah 1-2 • The First Three Visions

Introduction

The first half of the book of Zechariah is dominated by eight visions. They combine to provide an overall picture of God's plan for the world at large and for Israel specifically. In these first three visions the emphasis is on the intentions of God the Father. In the two visions to follow in chapters 4 and 5 it will shift to the work of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in an overall teaching which speaks to the tri-unity of the Godhead. God's people at this time in history are being called out of Babylon to return to a new Jerusalem they are going to rebuild. It should be obvious that this very much parallels the Last Days when in Revelation it clearly states that God's people are being called out of spiritual Babylon, ultimately to dwell in a New Jerusalem to be built by God Himself. What happened before is happening again.

¹In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo saying, ²"The LORD was very angry with your fathers. ³Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Return to Me," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I may return to you," says the LORD of hosts. ⁴Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.'" But they did not listen or give heed to Me," declares the LORD. ⁵"Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶But did not My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your fathers? Then they repented and said, 'As the LORD of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us.'"

[Read 1:1-6]

Q: What is the spiritual problem characterized in v.1-2?

A: They are living in separation from God because they have chosen to live separate from His Word and ways. If they do not want to experience what happened to previous generations because of disobedience, they are going to have to change their ways.

Q: What is the lesson they should learn from their fathers as described in v.3-4?

A: To return from "evil ways" and "evil deeds". "Ways" probably refers to their history of idolatry while "deeds" refers to their history of immoralities. They have not simply forsaken God's Word or are temporarily stumbling, but are actively pursuing a lifestyle that is completely contrary to the will and desire of God.

"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

— John 14:21

Q: What were the consequences of disobedience provided in v.5-6?

A: Though they forsook the Word, it still eventually caught up with them and held them accountable.

Q: What is the significance in v.5 of the contrast that is made between the "fathers" and the "prophets"?

A: This shows the dual work of God's Word. Everyone dies and therefore everyone is judged, the "fathers" representing what happens in eternity to those rejecting God's Word and the "prophets" as those embracing it.

Application: God's Word will judge everyone as to whether they lived by it or ignored it. To not put it into practice does not make it go away, but ensures it will re-visit the consequences of that decision at the very end.

Q: What is the "cure"?

A: "Then they repented". (v.6)

Q: What is the promise in v.6 as to learning the right lesson from the past?

A: It is what God will "do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds".

The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, “Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand,

— Isaiah 14:24

Application: Zechariah begins with a call to obedience based on the past, both in the lessons we should learn from other people’s mistakes as well as our own. God’s Word will inevitably hold us accountable in the present and for the future just as it has assuredly held everyone and everything accountable in the past. Paul says that what happened to Israel serves as the same kind of reminder to the Church to remain faithful to His Word.

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

— 1 Corinthians 10:11–12

⁷On 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 prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, as follows: ⁸I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine, with red, sorrel and white horses behind him. ⁹Then I said, “My lord, what are these?”

And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, “I will show you what these are.”

¹⁰And the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, “These are those whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.”

¹¹So 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 is peaceful and quiet.”

[Read 1:7-11]

Q: What might be significant about the fact that this vision was given “at night”?

A: The night is an oft-repeated biblical metaphor for both tribulation and spiritual darkness. It probably signifies a very low point spiritually.

Q: Who do we understand the man on the red horse to be?

A: This is an Old Testament incarnation of Christ.

Q: Why is He “riding on a red horse”?

A: It probably represents many things, red being associated with blood. It could be speaking both to the blood of God’s judgment to come as well as the work of the cross to come. But we should keep in mind the most prominent example in Scripture given about a red horse in Revelation because it shows how things on earth are about to change as recorded in v.11.

And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

— Revelation 6:4

Q: What do the myrtle trees in the ravine represent?

A: Trees are often representative of nations and their spiritual state. This is most likely a picture of Israel at that time, portrayed as a very lowly tree settling in at the lowest point, a kind of representation of their being subject to the Medo-Persian Empire at this time.

Q: What do the different colored horses represent?

A: Frankly this topic could fill volumes with the myriad of different interpretations scholars have offered throughout history. Suffice it to say that whatever the ultimate explanation, it probably has to include the fact that horses are most often associated with judgment and war, and the colors with different aspects of the same thing where red and white are the extremes while “sorrel” (a mixture of the two) something in between. For instance, red for martyrdom, sorrel for persecution, white for righteousness.

Q: What might sound familiar about angelic beings who “patrol the earth”?

A: This is what we learned Satan does in the book of Job. Whereas Satan – “The Adversary” – patrols to work evil, here we see the other side of the coin, so to speak. Whereas Satan is said to “walk” around the earth (Job 1:7) and is only really capable of looking around, it is significant to note that Christ and His servants ride around it on horses symbolizing His greater authority to bring actual judgment on it. As in the book of Job, Satan had no power to do anything until it was granted to him.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

— Hebrews 1:14

Q: Why would the earth be characterized as “peaceful and quiet”?

A: It is important to understand that at this time Israel is still a subject of a foreign king and that both God’s Temple and City (Jerusalem) are destroyed. From the world’s point of view, everything is “peaceful and quiet” because it would appear that God has been defeated or at least His influence mitigated to the greatest degree possible.

Application: No matter how “good” things appear from either the world’s or Satan’s point of view – no matter how spiritually dark things get, God is still active and at work.

[Read 1:12-17]

¹²Then the angel of the LORD said, “O LORD of hosts, how long will You have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which You have been indignant these seventy years?”

¹³The LORD answered the angel who was speaking with me with gracious words, comforting words. ¹⁴So the angel who was speaking with me said to me, “Proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion. ¹⁵But I am very angry with the nations who are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster.” ¹⁶Therefore thus says the LORD, “I will return to Jerusalem with compassion; My house will be built in it,” declares the LORD of hosts, “and a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem.”’” ¹⁷Again, proclaim, saying, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, “My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.”’”

Q: What is the angel’s question to Christ?

A: Basically he is asking how long it will be until He again shows mercy on Israel. The implication is that since the 70 years of judgment are concluded, what is going to happen next?

Q: Why might it be significant that Scripture goes out of its way to point out that what Zechariah is hearing are “gracious words, comforting words”?

A: It provides both a transition from and contrast to the experience of God’s judgment which came before it leading now into the revelation of God’s grace and restoration.

Q: What is particularly significant about Christ’s statement that He is “exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion”?

A: It is the picture of a husband and wife. In biblical terms jealousy is a healthy emotion describing the husband’s work and desire to keep a faithful wife, intervening when necessary with both love and reproof as necessary.

Application: Christ’s first and foremost desire for His people is that they are spiritually faithful and committed exclusively to Him alone.

Q: What is the difference between “Jerusalem” and “Zion”?

A: “Jerusalem” always refers to the city still compromised by earthly living while “Zion” refers to the city in a spiritually faithful and pure state. Many scholars believe “Jerusalem” may refer to literal Israel and “Zion” to the literal Church in order to teach how both brides will ultimately be reconciled to Christ.

Q: Why does God disclose His displeasure with the rest of the nations of the world in v.15?

A: In v.11 they are described as “*peaceful and quiet*” and here as “*at ease*”. Instead of learning the right lesson themselves from God’s dealings with Israel and returning to His Word and ways in repentance, they see themselves as completely freed from His authority and independently pursuing their own ways. Therefore “*they furthered the disaster*” because, not having learned the right lesson from a “*little*” judgment mostly limited to Israel, now a much bigger judgment must be experienced by the whole world.

Q: What are the three things God promises to do?

1. “*...I will return to Jerusalem with compassion...*” (v.16) God’s work will be first and foremost marked by the quality of His grace and mercy.
2. “*...My house will be built in it [Jerusalem]...*” (v.16) The Temple will be rebuilt/restored. This was an especially powerful promise of the day since they had stopped construction after only laying the foundation at this point. (Do not forget, however, that the New Testament Temple is the Church.)
3. “*...a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem.*” (v.16) This not only references a literal building program, but the measuring of things in Scripture symbolizes the degree to which someone keeps God’s Word. In other words, physical restoration will mirror their spiritual restoration to God’s Word and ways.

Q: What is the Old Testament application of God’s promise in v.17?

A: The Law promised that a believer’s physical wealth and health would mirror the quality of their spiritual faithfulness and obedience to the Law. God would not grant physical prosperity without the existence of spiritual prosperity. To the people of this time, this would be a very vivid promise where spiritual reconciliation is concerned.

Q: Why would a promise concerning Jerusalem be received by the people of this time as something particularly extraordinary?

A: They were sent back by the command of Darius only to rebuild the Temple. In fact, the people of the land lied to the king claiming the Jews were actually rebuilding the city of Jerusalem at which point the king halted all work. God is promising not only to overcome the obstacles preventing the Temple from being rebuilt, but promising that in spite of the current situation and ruling to the contrary that Jerusalem would also be rebuilt.

Application: *God is active and in control not just of the local situation, but the whole world. His greater goals all have to do with the greater work of spiritual faithfulness and a return to His Word and ways more than just a return to a geographical location.*

[Read 1:18-21]

Q: What do the four horns represent?

A: Primarily the four world powers which Scripture designates as arising against and scattering the nation of Israel. This was particularly detailed in the visions provided through Daniel which actually occurred not that long before these given through Zechariah.

¹⁸Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, there were four horns. ¹⁹So I said to the angel who was speaking with me, “What are these?”

And he answered me, “These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem.”

²⁰Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. ²¹I said, “What are these coming to do?”

And he said, “These are the horns

which have scattered Judah so that no man lifts up his head; but these craftsmen have come to terrify them, to throw down the horns of the nations who have lifted up their horns against the land of Judah in order to scatter it.”

Q: Why might it be important that Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem are designated separately?

A: One of the many things is probably a reminder of how Israel was carried away in parts over a long period of time, the northern tribe of Israel going first under the Assyrians, and then Judah in pieces prior to the final fall of Jerusalem at the very end to the Babylonians. In spite of being dispersed over a couple hundred year period to many various locations in the known world by three different empires, God is bringing them back as one people.

Q: What does it mean in v.21 when it states that the horns have created a situation wherein “no man lifts up his head”?

A: The Hebrew term for “worship” is connected to prostrating one’s self before God. Not being able to lift one’s head is the Old Testament way of describing someone who is completely subject to another god. The physical captivity in Babylon is also a spiritual captivity.

Q: Who do the four craftsmen represent?

A: Just like the horses discussed in the previous section, scholars offer a myriad of suggestions ranging from an allusion to the four Gospels to being Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah who oversaw the work of rebuilding both the Temple and Jerusalem. However it is probably simplest to understand that they are showing how God is sovereign over every hostile power arising against Him and just as there are spiritual forces at work in this world (Eph. 6:12), so God is equally and even more effectively at work in opposition to them. The workers of Satan are described as beasts who consume, God’s workers as craftsmen who build.

Application: *God is not just in control and has a plan for the whole world, He is in control and has a plan for His enemies.*

¹Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a man with a measuring line in his hand. ²So I said, “Where are you going?”

And he said to me, “To measure Jerusalem, to see how wide it is and how long it is.”

³And behold, the angel who was speaking with me was going out, and another angel was coming out to meet him, ⁴and said to him, “Run, speak to that young man, saying, ‘Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle within it. ⁵For I,’ declares the LORD, ‘will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.’”

[Read 2:1-5]

Q: What does it mean “to measure Jerusalem”?

A: It is a way of evaluating the degree to which God’s Word and ways are being obeyed and put into practice. The literal is an allusion to the spiritual.

Q: Would it matter at all if the width was different than the height?

A: Perhaps it would indicate something since the measurements of the New Jerusalem – perfect both physically and spiritually – is identical in its height and width.

The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.

— Revelation 21:16

Q: How can we be sure that Jerusalem is here being spoken of in a greater, spiritual context?

A: At this time Jerusalem was not rebuilt, and when it is under Nehemiah we know that the literal wall around the city was erected and stood until destroyed by the Roman Emperor Vespian. When we combine these historical facts with the specific statements in verse 6 that “*I...will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst*”, we understand that this is speaking of a far greater spiritual context, most likely a

glimpse of what will come through Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,
— Ephesians 2:14–15

*As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the LORD surrounds His people
From this time forth and forever.*
— Psalm 125:2

then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy.
— Isaiah 4:5

*“No longer will you have the sun for light by day,
Nor for brightness will the moon give you light;
But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light,
And your God for your glory.*
— Isaiah 60:19

And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.
— Revelation 21:23

Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” And the LORD opened the servant’s eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.
— 2 Kings 6:17

⁶“Ho there! Flee from the land of the north,” declares the LORD, “for I have dispersed you as the four winds of the heavens,” declares the LORD. ⁷“Ho, Zion! Escape, you who are living with the daughter of Babylon.” ⁸For thus says the LORD of hosts, “After glory He has sent Me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye. ⁹For behold, I will wave My hand over them so that they will be plunder for their slaves. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me.

¹⁰“Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” declares the LORD. ¹¹Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. ¹²The LORD will possess Judah as His portion in

[Read 2:6-13]

Q: Why would v.6-9 be something quite startling to the people of Zechariah’s time?

A: Because it describes a situation that is exactly opposite of what has existed up to that time. Whereas Babylon was the master and Israel the slave, God describes judgment which will reverse the situation.

Point: Whereas this vision begins with God’s plan to measure Jerusalem, God now goes on to explain He has a plan to bless and magnify Jerusalem.

Q: What is the dual nature of the reason to flee Babylon?

A: On the one hand God is going to bless His people in their own land, and on the other the wrath of His judgment is going to fall on the land of their captivity. They are escaping wrath while at the same time attaining to His blessing.

Point: This one example of a repeated biblical precedent that while everyone may experience God’s judgment, His people do not experience God’s wrath. Whereas judgment can lead to repentance and reconciliation, wrath is executed for unaddressed sin.

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the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.

¹³“Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for He is aroused from His holy habitation.”

*O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one,
How blessed will be the one who repays you
With the recompense with which you have repaid us.
— Psalm 137:8*

Q: How is this work on Israel’s behalf going to be accomplished?

A: “I will wave My hand over them”. (v.9) This all comes about directly by Christ Himself and not through any human agency.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

— Revelation 19:15

Q: What is different in v.6-9 versus 10-12?

A: Whereas v.6-9 speak of the promise of salvation and blessing for Israel personally, v.10-12 speak of the promise of salvation and blessing to the whole world. “Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people”. (v.11)

Q: Why do we know that v.12 is not just speaking solely about a spiritual work to come but a literal one where the nation of Israel is concerned?

A: This is the repeated teaching throughout Scripture particularly highlighted by the Apostle Paul.

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

*“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”
“THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY
THEIR SINS.”*

— Romans 11:25–27

Q: How does this vision conclude?

A: With a call to both Jew and Gentile – to every nation – to submit to the sovereignty and authority of the One True God.

Application: *God the Father is not at work just to restore Israel, but to restore the entire world.*

Overall Application

God the Father begins with a reminder of the past as an incentive to strive for faithfulness to His Word and ways in order to be on the right side of the work He is going to do in the whole world. Although judgment is experienced by all, the right response leads to salvation and blessing while the incorrect response leads to experiencing God’s wrath. It is important to note that when God made these promises there was almost nothing in the people’s current situation which would make them believe such things could come true. As with nearly everything else, it is a not a test of knowledge but faith. God is watching, patrolling, and already has in place the power and resources to fulfill His promises. Whether in times of trial or blessing, the measure of our success is based on the quality of our faithfulness.