

ZECHARIAH

PARTICULARS OF THE CALL TO REPENTANCE

ZECHARIAH 1:2-6

BY MIKE BURNHAM

ZECHARIAH 1:2-6 (KJV) *THE LORD HATH BEEN SORE DISPLEASED WITH YOUR FATHERS. 3 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. 4 BE YE 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. 5 YOUR FATHERS, WHERE ARE THEY? AND THE PROPHETS, DO THEY LIVE FOR EVER? 6 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.*

This solemn warning not to repeat the errors of their fathers (cf. Paul's analogous warning in 1 Cor. 10:11) was intended to destroy any false security that Zechariah's contemporaries might develop in view of the great things God intended to do for Israel in the future. This warning for the present, which emphasized divine anger (Zech. 1:2) and extended divine grace (v. 3), drew its severity from a threefold lesson from the past—a warning against disobedience (v. 4), delay (v. 5), and doubt (v. 6).

1:2. Zechariah affirmed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile experienced by the previous generations were an expression of divine anger. In fact **the Lord was very angry** (lit., "angry with anger"), a phrase indicating extreme displeasure. The Lord ("Yahweh"), who had entered into personal covenant relationship with the nation Israel, was intensely angry

with their **forefathers**, especially the last generation before the Captivity (but cf. 2 Kings 21:14-15), because of their rebellion against Him.

1:3. Whereas the sins of their forefathers were responsible for the desolation of the temple, their own sins had resulted in delay in rebuilding the temple. Nevertheless **the LORD Almighty** now extended to them a gracious invitation to repent. The threefold repetition of the divine name stresses the divine imperative conveyed in this call to repentance. The condition for their receiving divine blessing was not simply to resume building the temple, but to **return to** Him—not just to the Lord’s Law or to His ways but to **the LORD** Himself. Their repentance two months before (cf. Hag. 1:12-15) apparently involved an incomplete commitment, resulting in delay in rebuilding the temple. Now a complete return to **the LORD** would bring divine blessing, expressed by the words, **I will return to you.**

1:4. The warning against disobedience features the bad example of their **forefathers** who not only rebelled against the Lord but also refused to respond to the preexilic prophets’ preaching. These **earlier prophets** were separated from Zechariah and his contemporaries by the years of Exile in Babylon. One major feature (but not the whole content) of the preexilic preaching was a call to repentance—**Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.** This illustrates the “*forthtelling*” aspect of a prophet’s message to his own generation (cf. Jer. 3:12-13; 18:11; 25:5-6; Ezek. 33:11; Hosea 14:1; Joel 2:12-13; Amos 5:4-6). Another aspect of prophecy (“*foretelling*”) is prominent in Zechariah’s own ministry (cf. Zech. 9-14). The negative response of the forefathers (**they would not listen or pay attention to Me**) was already apparent to the earlier prophets (e.g., Jer. 17:23; 29:19; 36:31).

1:5. The warning against delay was conveyed by two striking rhetorical questions which call attention to the brevity of human life. Zechariah asked, **Where are your forefathers now?** They were dead from sword, famine, pestilence, and natural causes, as predicted by the earlier prophets. Zechariah’s second question was, **The prophets, do they live**

forever? The implied answer was, no; their ministries were also brief, so the opportunity for repentance which they offered should not be ignored.

1:6. A warning against doubt was implied in Zechariah's affirming the effectiveness and certain fulfillment of God's message of judgment. This message consisted of **My words** (of threatened punishment; e.g., Jer. 39:16) **and My decrees** (i.e., judicial decisions; e.g., Zeph. 2:2; Isa. 10:1). Though **the prophets** died, God's words live on to be fulfilled. The certainty of fulfillment is indicated in that God's words and decrees did **overtake** their **forefathers**. The Hebrew word for "overtake" is a hunting term implying that the threatened judgment of God pursued and caught the evildoers. "Overtake" is used in Deuteronomy 28 of both judgment (Deut. 28:15, 45) and blessing (Deut. 28:2), and is illustrated in the action of the avenger of blood (Deut. 19:6). That the forefathers **repented** does not necessarily mean that they returned to God, but perhaps only that they came to their senses and recognized that they deserved punishment and that God had justly accomplished what He had purposed in sending them into Exile (Lam. 2:17). On the other hand many could have repented sincerely during the Exile, resulting in the forgiveness and restoration to the land that followed.

Thus the prerequisite for experiencing the spiritual blessings revealed in Zechariah's further visions and prophecies was a genuine and wholehearted turning to **the LORD**. They were not to be disobedient as were those of the former generation who were taken into Exile as a result of God's certain judgment.

2. PARTICULARS OF THE CALL TO REPENTANCE (1:2-6)

This solemn warning not to repeat the errors of their fathers (cf. Paul's analogous warning in 1 Cor. 10:11) was intended to destroy any false security that Zechariah's contemporaries might develop in view of the great things God intended to do for Israel in the future. This warning for the present, which emphasized divine anger (Zech. 1:2) and extended divine grace (v. 3), drew its severity from a threefold lesson from the past—a

warning against disobedience (v. 4), delay (v. 5), and doubt (v. 6).

1:2. Zechariah affirmed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile experienced by the previous generations were an expression of divine anger. In fact **the LORD was very angry** (lit., “angry with anger”), a phrase indicating extreme displeasure. The Lord (“Yahweh”), who had entered into personal covenant relationship with the nation Israel, was intensely angry **with their forefathers**, especially the last generation before the Captivity (but cf. 2 Kings 21:14-15), because of their rebellion against Him.

1:3. Whereas the sins of their forefathers were responsible for the desolation of the temple, their own sins had resulted in delay in rebuilding the temple. Nevertheless **the LORD Almighty** now extended to them a gracious invitation to repent. The threefold repetition of the divine name stresses the divine imperative conveyed in this call to repentance. The condition for their receiving divine blessing was not simply to resume building the temple, but to **return to** Him—not just to the Lord’s Law or to His ways but to **the LORD** Himself. Their repentance two months before (cf. Hag. 1:12-15) apparently involved an incomplete commitment, resulting in delay in rebuilding the temple. Now a complete return to **the LORD** would bring divine blessing, expressed by the words, **I will return to you.**

1:4. The warning against disobedience features the bad example of their **forefathers** who not only rebelled against the Lord but also refused to respond to the preexilic prophets’ preaching. These **earlier prophets** were separated from Zechariah and his contemporaries by the years of Exile in Babylon. One major feature (but not the whole content) of the preexilic preaching was a call to repentance—**Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.** This illustrates the “*forthtelling*” aspect of a prophet’s message to his own generation (cf. Jer. 3:12-13; 18:11; 25:5-6; Ezek. 33:11; Hosea 14:1; Joel 2:12-13; Amos 5:4-6). Another aspect of prophecy (“*foretelling*”) is prominent in Zechariah’s own ministry (cf. Zech. 9-14). The negative response of the forefathers (**they would not listen or pay attention to Me**) was already apparent to the earlier prophets (e.g., Jer.

17:23; 29:19; 36:31).

1:5. The warning against delay was conveyed by two striking rhetorical questions which call attention to the brevity of human life. Zechariah asked, **Where are your forefathers now?** They were dead from sword, famine, pestilence, and natural causes, as predicted by the earlier prophets. Zechariah's second question was, **The prophets, do they live forever?** The implied answer was, no; their ministries were also brief, so the opportunity for repentance which they offered should not be ignored.

1:6. A warning against doubt was implied in Zechariah's affirming the effectiveness and certain fulfillment of God's message of judgment. This message consisted of **My words** (of threatened punishment; e.g., Jer. 39:16) **and My decrees** (i.e., judicial decisions; e.g., Zeph. 2:2; Isa. 10:1). Though **the prophets** died, God's words live on to be fulfilled. The certainty of fulfillment is indicated in that God's words and decrees did **overtake** their **forefathers**. The Hebrew word for "overtake" is a hunting term implying that the threatened judgment of God pursued and caught the evildoers. "Overtake" is used in Deuteronomy 28 of both judgment (Deut. 28:15, 45) and blessing (Deut. 28:2), and is illustrated in the action of the avenger of blood (Deut. 19:6). That the forefathers **repented** does not necessarily mean that they returned to God, but perhaps only that they came to their senses and recognized that they deserved punishment and that God had justly accomplished what He had purposed in sending them into Exile (Lam. 2:17). On the other hand many could have repented sincerely during the Exile, resulting in the forgiveness and restoration to the land that followed.

Thus the prerequisite for experiencing the spiritual blessings revealed in Zechariah's further visions and prophecies was a genuine and wholehearted turning to **the LORD**. They were not to be disobedient as were those of the former generation who were taken into Exile as a result of God's certain judgment.

B. The communication of the visions (1:7-6:8)

In a single night Zechariah saw a series of eight visions which were interpreted by an angel and which described the future of the nation Israel. God's program of spiritual blessing set forth in the visions bridges the centuries from the rebuilding of the temple in Zechariah's day to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel under the Messiah (still future in Acts 1:6, to be fulfilled at Christ's Second Advent; cf. Acts 15:16). Joyce Baldwin has correctly observed a "standard pattern" in the record of Zechariah's visions: (a) introductory words, (b) a description of the things seen, (c) a question by Zechariah to the angel for the meaning, and (d) the explanation by the angel. She also notes that four of the visions are accompanied by summarizing oracles which usually follow the vision (Zech. 1:14-17; 2:6-13; 6:9-15), except for one oracle within a vision (4:6-10) (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, pp. 92-3).

Zechariah's Eight Night Visions		
Vision	Reference	Meaning
The Red-horse Rider among the Myrtles	1:7-17	God's anger against the nations and blessing on restored Israel
The Four Horns	1:18-	God's judgment on the

and the Four Craftsmen	21	nations that afflict Israel
The Surveyor with a Measuring Line	Chapter 2	God's future blessing on restored Israel
The Cleansing and Crowning of Joshua the High Priest	Chapter 3	Israel's future cleansing from sin and reinstatement as a priestly nation
The Golden Lampstand and Two Olive Trees	Chapter 4	Israel as the light to the nations under Messiah, the King-Priest
The Flying Scroll	5:1-4	The severity and totality of divine judgment on individual Israelites
The Woman in the Ephah	5:5-11	The removal of national Israel's sin of rebellion against God
The Four Chariots	6:1-5	Divine judgment on Gentile nations

1. THE VISION OF THE RED-HORSE RIDER AMONG THE MYRTLES (1:7-17)

This vision established the general theme of hope for dispersed and downtrodden Israel. Gentile oppression was offset by comforting promises of divine blessing.

1:7a. The day the visions came was **the 24th day of the 11th** (Jewish) **month** of Darius' **second** regnal **year** (February 15, 519 B.C.). **Shebat** was the Babylonian name of the 11th **month**, adopted by the Jews after the Exile. This date was five months after the building of the temple was resumed (Hag. 1:14-15; 2:15), three months after Zechariah's first prophecy (Zech. 1:1), and two months after Haggai's last prophecy (Hag. 2:20—a prophecy regarding the destruction of world powers before the millennial rule of the Messiah; cf. Hag. 2:21-23).

1:7b-8a. The source of Zechariah's visions is clearly denoted by the clause **the Word of the LORD came** (cf. v. 1), a kind of prophetic "formula" indicating divine revelation. The visions, with partial interpretations, were seen in the spirit, had the significance of verbal revelation, and were supplemented by additional words of God. The words **I had a vision** (KJV, "I saw") denote the means by which divine revelation was conveyed to **Zechariah**. The expression does not refer to a dream, much less to a mere literary form. Zechariah was awake, as is apparent from his questions (e.g., v. 9) and interruptions (e.g., 3:5).

1:8b. The vision included three things: (a) a description of what Zechariah saw (v. 8), (b) an explanation of the same (vv. 9-11), and (c) intercession by the Angel of the Lord (v. 12).

Throughout the vision the primary focus on the **man riding a red horse** suggests that he was the leader of the horsemen. **He was standing** (i.e., astride his horse) as though stationed to await the report of his reconnaissance patrol. He is identified in verse 11 as "the Angel of the LORD." This Messenger (cf. comments on v. 11) was located **among the myrtle trees in a ravine**, possibly in the Kidron Valley east or southeast of

Jerusalem where these fragrant evergreen shrubs were probably abundant. Riders sat on the horses **behind him** (because the riders were to report, v. 11), but the more important fact here is the colors of the horses: **red** (bay or reddish brown), **brown** (sorrel), **and white**. The significance of the colors is not stated, and this is complicated by the fact that the Hebrew word translated "brown" (NIV) or "speckled" (KJV) is found only here in the Old Testament, so that its meaning is not sure.

1:9-11. When Zechariah **asked** about the vision's meaning (**What are these?** cf. v. 19; 4:4, 11; 6:4; also cf. 5:6) an interpreting angel answered. In the fifth and sixth visions the angel asked Zechariah if he knew the meaning (4:2, 5, 13; 5:2). Apparently this was to rouse his curiosity. This angel referred to in the visions as **the angel who was talking with me** (1:11, 13-14, 19; 2:3; 4:1, 4-5; 5:10; 6:4), was not **the Angel of the LORD** (1:11-12; 3:1-6). The interpreting angel showed Zechariah the meaning of the vision by allowing its actors to speak. The first speaker was the central figure astride the red horse, who referred to the other riders as **the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth**. The phrase "to go throughout" seems to be used here in the military sense of patrolling or reconnoitering. Just as the Persian kings had mounted messengers to send throughout the empire, so the Angel of the Lord had sent out angelic horsemen to reconnoiter the world scene. The patrol reported to their Leader, now called "the Angel of the LORD." That this "Angel" (lit., "Messenger") is a manifestation of the preincarnate Christ is established in chapter 3 where He is specifically called "the LORD" who yet refers to "the LORD" as another Person (3:2). Also He is seen exercising the divine prerogative of forgiving sins (3:4). (Cf. comments on "the Angel of the LORD" in Gen. 16:7.) The patrol had completed its assignment of searching **throughout the earth, and had found** the earth peacefully inhabited, **at rest** from war, but Israel was not at **peace** and rest. Was this report good news or bad news? If the reference is to the peace that existed during the second year of Darius, it was the result of Persian oppression and injustice, so this was bad news to Israelites who were under Gentile domination.

Perhaps the vision has a more eschatological reference in anticipation of the worldwide kingdom of Messiah, since the patrol covered not only the vast Persian Empire, but also **the whole world**—though perhaps “the whole world” is a figure of speech (synecdoche) for the Persian Empire.

1:12. The intercession of **the Angel of the LORD** is unusual, for this divine Messenger is usually seen representing God to people rather than functioning in an intercessory role representing people to God. That the divine Messenger addressed the **LORD Almighty** in prayer supports a distinction of Persons in the Godhead, and contributes to the implicit doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament. The lament formula **How long?** expresses the deep need of Israel to have the Lord act on her behalf. The **70 years** of promised Captivity were over (cf. Jer. 25:12; 29:10), but the city was still not rebuilt.

1:13. The preceding vision unveiled God’s controlling activity in the world, but a verbal message was now added to convey comfort to Israel. This message from **the LORD** (this may or may not be “the Angel of the LORD” of v. 12) was communicated to and through the interpreting angel to Zechariah so that he might proclaim it to the people. The message conveys (a) God’s love for Israel (vv. 13-14), (b) God’s wrath on the nations (v. 15), and (c) God’s blessings on Israel (vv. 16-17).

The content of the **kind... words** which promised good and the **comforting** words which produced consolation is found in verses 14-17.

1:14. God’s love for His people (**Jerusalem and Zion**) is expressed in the words **very jealous** (lit., “jealous with great jealousy”). This speaks of His burning zeal (cf. 8:2) to protect His covenant love with Israel. This burning zeal was expressed against Judah for 70 years (1:12), but His anger now turned toward the nations, which is the theme of the second vision (vv. 18-21).

1:15. God’s anger with **the nations** was doubly emphatic (**very angry**; lit., “with great anger I am angry”; cf. v. 2) because of the false

security which they so precariously enjoyed. His extensive wrath on the nations resulted from their immoderate, prolonged, and intensified punishment of Israel when God **was only a little angry**, that is, when He desired moderate punishment of His people. The nations **added to the calamity** by overstepping the limits God had intended for Israel's punishment (cf. Isa. 47:6).

1:16-17. Because of (**therefore**) God's love for Israel and His anger toward the Gentiles, He now promised six blessings for Israel: (a) the presence of God in **Jerusalem (I will return... with mercy;** cf. Ezek. 43:5; 48:35) in contrast with the departure of the divine glory from the preexilic temple (Ezek. 10:18-19; 11:22-23); (b) the rebuilding of the temple (**My house will be rebuilt;** cf. Ezek. 40-48); (c) the rebuilding of the city (**the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem;** cf. Jer. 31:38-40); (d) Israel will be enriched (**towns will again overflow** with the wealth of divine blessings which the city walls will be unable to contain; cf. Isa. 60:4-9); (e) the inhabitants of Jerusalem (**Zion**) will be comforted by the fulfillment of God's gracious promises (cf. Deut. 13:17; 30:3; Isa. 14:1; 49:15); and (f) they will be chosen (cf. Zech. 2:12; 3:2), referring to God's focusing His sovereign love on them and perhaps also referring to God's inaugurating the New Covenant with Israel (Jer. 31:31-40; cf. Rom. 11:26-27).

The complete fulfillment of these blessings from a New Testament perspective relates to the Second Advent of Christ, the millennial temple, and the blessings of the millennial kingdom, as suggested in the parallel Scripture passages mentioned above. Though the restoration temple was completed about four years after this prophecy (Ezra 6:15) and a partial rebuilding of the city about 80 years later (Neh. 6:15), the passages noted from Ezekiel indicate that the divine glory will be absent from the temple until millennial times. Nevertheless the Jews of Zechariah's day may have felt that those promised blessings were imminent, and this probably encouraged them in rebuilding the temple.

Several salient features from this first vision are elaborated on in the next two visions, in which God's displeasure with the nations is visualized in the second vision and God's causing Israel to prosper with the blessing of His presence is pictured in the third vision.

2. THE VISION OF THE FOUR HORNS AND THE FOUR CRAFTSMEN (1:18-21)

The consolation and comfort spoken of in verses 13 and 17 are displayed panoramically in the contrasting features of the second and third visions. The second vision on the one hand shows God's judgment on the nations that afflict Israel (vv. 18-21). The third vision on the other hand shows God's blessing in prospering Israel (chap. 2). The vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen shows *how* God will execute His displeasure, mentioned in 1:15, on the Gentiles. The nations that scattered Israel will themselves be crushed.

a. **The four horns observed (1:18)**

1:18. Zechariah **looked up** to see a new scene portrayed **before** his eyes (cf. 2:1; 5:1, 9; 6:1; Dan. 8:3; 10:5). He observed **four horns** such as those of a ram or a goat (cf. Dan. 8:3-8). However, since no reference is made to any animals their presence should not be presumed.

b. **The four horns identified (1:19)**

1:19. Again Zechariah asked, **What are these?** (cf. v. 9; 4:4, 11; 6:4; also cf. 5:6) A horn when used symbolically indicates invincible strength (cf. Micah 4:13) or often a Gentile king who represents his kingdom (Dan. 7:24; Rev. 17:12). Here the four **horns** symbolize proud Gentile powers ("horns of the nations," Zech. 1:21) **that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem** (an all-inclusive designation to denote God's people in Exile).

Some writers understand these four horns to be the four Gentile empires envisioned in Daniel 2 and 7 (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome). In that view the four craftsmen are the empires that succeeded them, respectively, with the fourth craftsman being the messianic kingdom from heaven (Dan. 2:44). However, in Zechariah's vision the angel said the horns "scattered" Israel (past tense, Zech. 1:19) and that was before any craftsmen arrived on the scene. It seems better either to regard the number four as a number of completeness, the totality of Israel's opposition, or to refer the four horns to four nations that had scattered Israel before Zechariah saw the vision (perhaps Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia, and Medo-Persia).

c. The four craftsmen introduced (1:20)

1:20. The Hebrew word for **craftsmen** (h[a4ra4s]|<m) indicates workmen skilled in wood, stone, or metal. Since the material of which the horns are composed is not mentioned, the general translation "craftsmen" is appropriate. (The REVISED STANDARD VERSION translates the word "smiths," apparently assuming the horns were iron.)

d. The four craftsmen explained (1:21)

1:21. The identity of **the craftsmen** depends on the identity of **the horns**. If the **horns** are the succeeding kingdoms in Daniel's visions (Dan. 2; 7), then the craftsmen are Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the messianic kingdom. Otherwise they were probably **nations**, including Persia, which God used to overthrow Israel's past oppressors (see comments on Zech. 1:19). In any case, the vision shows that God raises up instruments of judgment to deliver His people Israel from all her enemies.