

II. Zechariah in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel According to Zechariah
“Repent”

Zechariah 1:1-6

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This is our second first study in our series on Zechariah and we will be looking not directly at the message but the burden of Zechariah in the writing of this particular book. This book is written in 520 B.C. and I will show you how we get to 520 B.C.

Zechariah 1:1-6 says [1] *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.’”*

This background material is going to be going to be very important as we move further into our study of Zachariah. I’m going to review just a little here. Zechariah has a father named Berechiah and a grandfather named Iddo. Some texts don’t mention his father but only his grandfather and I think that is probably because, number one Zechariah was probably born in Babylonian captivity. In other words, his father was a priest who is listed with the priests in another text of Scripture and his grandfather Iddo a priest, and they were likely taken into captivity. When they returned, Berechiah had a son, Zechariah. Zechariah is not only a priest, but he is also a prophet. He is not a king because there's no royal line in him. He is, though, a prophet that God has called and comes from a priestly family. Most people feel like the Berechiah either died in Babylon or later died when he returned and therefore his father's name, Iddo, becomes predominant.

We also know that Zachariah died later and he died of a martyr's death. There are 29 Zechariah in the Old Testament, some count a few more and some a few less. There is one who died a very similar death and that is martyred at the Temple Mount of the Solomon Temple. The Zechariah who wrote this book will also be martyred, not in the Solomonic Temple, but was killed in a similar fashion in the garden courtyard of what is known as the second temple, the Zerubbabel temple, although we don’t know the date he was killed.

This Zerubbabel temple is going to have some ‘add mores’ to it throughout the year but Now, as you know, this is going to be very interesting for you as we work our way through, but it's going to be seen by a king who is going to take over prior to the birth of Jesus, named Herod the Great who loves to build. Herod is going to take this second temple that is unimpressive and seemingly small and turn it into what many have called the eighth wonder of the world, which would have been the temple that Jesus would have been found in during His childhood, adolescence and in His public ministry.

So they have now returned from exile and Zechariah has been called to do ministry. His message has this introduction in Zechariah 1:1-6 and then from Zechariah 1:7 through chapter 6

he has eight visions that God gives him. Honestly, these visions or dreams are somewhat clear, somewhat confusing, somewhat common, and some very outlandish. I dream all the time and my wife never dreams. All eight of Zechariah's dreams/visions will come in one night. Sometimes my dreams make sense and sometimes they don't. I have gotten entire sermon outlines at night and that were much better than the ones I had written out before I went to bed, but sometimes dreams can be the most outlandish and nonsensical things, so this just sounds very common to me. We will start looking at Zechariah's dreams/vision in the next study.

As we study the dreams and visions of Zechariah you are going to see a very clear pattern. The visions are presented by meaning in couplets. In other words, one and eight are a couplet with a similar meaning and thrusts. Two and seven are a couplet. Three and six are a couplet. Four and five are a couplet. And so thus the first part of his message. Then the second part is when Zechariah brings in Zechariah 7 and 8, two words that God has given him to proclaim. When I say a word, I'm not talking about a single word, I'm talking about a message. Then in Zechariah 9 through 14 are the oracles of the Prophet, a series of prophetic oracles that are given and then we come to the conclusion of the book of Zechariah.

We do know when Zechariah's ministry as a priest and prophet begins but we don't know when it ends. It begins in the second year of Darius. A note of interest here, is all the way up to the Babylonian exile, you will see the dating of books according to the kings of Israel, but into the exile and after the exile they're now being dated by the pagan kings of the world. Darius is a pagan king, one of the kings of the Medo-Persian Empire, which had defeated the Babylonian Empire, which had taken the two Southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the southern kingdom, into captivity in 605 B.C. So we see that this Darius is the one by which this book is named.

Then you go to Haggai and you find out that Haggai also does his ministry at the same time as Zechariah, but he begins it two months earlier. They both begin their public ministry and the writing of these prophetic words in 520 B.C. That means they began their ministries 18 years after Israel had begun to return from Babylon and the Medo-Persian Empire that now ruled over the old Babylon empire. They began to return by the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. and in two years, they had rebuilt the foundation of the Zerubbabel temple, but had stopped and basically had been stopped for 18 years. Putting the Hebrew calendar into ours Zechariah wrote in October 20 520 B.C. August of 520 B.C. is when Haggai began to write. A third prophet will follow them and will be the last prophet before the 400 years of silence and that is Malachi. So there is his prophetic ministry that he has been called to, even though he was actually in the line of the priesthood and a Levite.

Having said that I want to take it a step further to help you some more on the chronology and all the issues happening around this time. To give you the broad scope, the patriarchs that is from Abraham to Joseph through Jacob, that's from 2100 B.C. to 1800 B.C. This is where God establishes a covenant with Abraham, from which he is going to expand this family into a nation through which he is going to give a seed and to which he is going to give land. The seed will be the Messiah and God will also make Abraham a great nation and He will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him.

Then we move roughly to the time period of 1800 B.C. to 1400 B.C. Then the family of Abraham after Jacob and his 12 sons is now taken into exile as God had said it would happen in Genesis 15. God would take them into slavery underneath a nation that does not know Him and use that nation to mobilize, mature, and multiply His people into a nation and bring them back to the land of promise. That land is Canaan. When the iniquity of the Canaanites had come to the point that God was going to bring judgment on them by bringing His people out of Egypt back to

the promised land and bring judgment on the six Canaanite nations. Then God brings judgment on Egypt because of what they were doing to His people, which God sovereignly was using to prepare His people to take them back to the land of promise.

Then from 1400 B.C. to 1000 B.C. is the rule of Joshua and the judges in the land of Canaan, occupying the Promised land during that period of time with God being their King. It was a theocracy. God was the King and He ruled and reigned through Joshua. Then later during that time came the judges, some of which are recorded for you in the book of Judges.

Then to be more specific, in 1080 B.C. or 1060 B.C. they are now given a kingdom. First, they are given a united kingdom through three kings, Saul, followed by David, followed by Solomon, and through this time comes the expansion of the Kingdom of Israel. It will last approximately 400 years, and under these first three kings is expansion. Then comes the division of the kingdom – Jeroboam and Rehoboam. There are the ten northern tribes who begin to walk away from obedience to God's Word and then comes the two Southern tribes that not perfectly, but more pointedly remain faithful. The two Southern tribes being Benjamin and Judah, mostly in the area of Judea around Jerusalem. After Solomon, in the division of the kingdoms comes the diminishment of the kingdom. From then on, the kingdom begins to shrink through penetrating wars and captives of various nations, most notably the following.

In 722 B.C., the Northern Kingdom is basically obliterated and taken into slavery or is amalgamated by the Gentiles under the Kingdom of Assyria, the Assyrian Empire, a very fierce empire that comes in judgment by the hand of God, bringing judgment upon the ten Northern Tribes. A little over 100 years later, the same thing happens to the Southern tribes due to their apostasy and unfaithfulness in 605 B.C. Then Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar comes in and Babylon makes three incursions to take Israel away into slavery. Somewhere between 1 to 2 million Israelites are taken into slavery through three penetrating initiatives. The last one was in 586 B.C., in which Jerusalem – its walls, its gate and the Solomonic temple are completely destroyed, as God had prophetically warned that it would happen. Jerusalem becomes a byword and all of the leadership has been taken into slavery. The three penetrating initiatives took place in 605 B.C., 597 B.C. and 588 or 586 B.C.

There are two prophets that have written about this. One is Jeremiah and one is Isaiah. Jeremiah informs everyone that this captivity, this incursion of Babylon, unlike Assyria where it has no expiration date, this one will last 70 years. Two times Jeremiah affirms this is going to last for 70 years. In the book of Daniel, we that Daniel reads that and takes it to heart, as Daniel himself will be there from 605 B.C. all the way through two empires – Babylon and Medo-Persian – and he will serve in five dynasties. While there is no evidence that Daniel returns back to Israel, it does happen within his lifetime. Isaiah adds even some more information for us. Isaiah says that there will be an empire that will bring judgment upon those who have brought Israel into captivity.

So that means there will be a nation that comes upon Babylon, who took them into captivity and that nation that comes upon them will then have a different policy and its policy will be to return Israel. The Medo-Persian Empire destroys the Babylonian empire, which had destroyed the Assyrian empire. It's interesting to note that whether it's Egypt or Assyria or Babylon or Medo-Persian, God uses these people to discipline His people, and then He brings judgment upon them using the people He's going to use to bring discipline upon His people. He then brings judgment upon them with those that He's going to use after them. It's really a glorious statement that highlights the Psalmist statement that the Lord holds the kings of this

earth in derision {Psalm 2:4). He turns the heart of the kings where so ever he wills as he does the rivers to the ocean (Proverbs 21:1).

King Cyrus is brought in and Isaiah even gives us his name. Cyrus is prophetically given and when he comes into power, he immediately reverses the policies initiated by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Cyrus will not only send Israel back, he's going to send the artifacts of their temple with them, and he's going to give them a series of stimulus packages to rebuild the temple, the gates and the walls of Jerusalem. He probably didn't call it a stimulus package but that's something I've learned about over the last ten years. That will be furthered under Nehemiah at a later date and a later king by the name of Artaxerxes.

Zechariah is going to give us these eight visions. He's going to give us the two sermons that God laid on his heart in Zechariah 7 and 8. Then he will give us the series of oracles that God gave him to deliver in Zechariah 9 to the end of the book. All of this is underlined in Zechariah 1:1-6.

Before we get to the text for this study in post exile leadership there are three 3's for you to remember. One is you have to know the players. In post exile leadership when they go back in 638 B.C. there are three names to remember. There is Zerubbabel who will be appointed governor and later replaced by Nehemiah who will become governor. Zerubbabel is of the line of David. So while he's not a king, he is a governor underneath Cyrus, appointed by Cyrus as governor over Israel. This is why this second temple will be called the Zerubbabel temple, because he is ruling over Israel underneath Cyrus the way we called the first temple that was built, the Solomonic temple under the leadership of Solomon. Secondly, there is Joshua and you will hear his name repeatedly in our study of Zechariah. He is a high priest. Now, this is not the Joshua that Moses had trained. This is another Joshua and also known as Yeshua which in the New Testament is the name Jesus. That name is going to be imported and thirdly the teacher of Israel when they return is named Ezra. The book of Ezra is very important to be juxtaposed with the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Secondly, is the post exilic Prophets. They are three in number also. There is Haggai, who begins his ministry two months before Zechariah who is the second and then the third and later is Malachi. Malachi will be the last prophet of what we call the minor prophets, but the last prophet and the last word from God until Jesus. After Malachi, who will be the last word in the Old Testament, will be 400 years of silence that God does not speak. That is pretty much a lot longer than this country has even existed. In fact, it's pretty much longer than almost any other country has ever existed.

The third are the post exilic kings. First there is Cyrus, who initiated the return from the exile in 538 B.C., and then comes Darius, who will continue the work of Cyrus and call them to finish the temple. Under Darius will come the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. Then the third king that comes after Darius will be Artaxerxes. In fact, there will be two of them, Artaxerxes the first and Artaxerxes and that will carry us into Nehemiah and Malachi.

So, to finish out this study I want you to go back to Zechariah and pick up at the terms of the burden of Zachariah starting in Zechariah 1:2 which says [2] *"The LORD was very angry with your fathers."* This is a discussion I have with many of my colleagues and compatriots. They say that when we preach of the grace of God that we never ought to introduce the notion that God can be angry with His people in the New Covenant and I disagree with that.

When we use human emotions to describe God we have a special name for this; it's called anthropopathism. When we use human body parts to help us understand God; it's called anthropomorphism. You see, God doesn't have a hand. God is a spirit, but the Bible says 'the

right hand of the Lord,' not because He's got one, but because they want you to understand something about God and we don't think in abstraction, we think concretely. When we think of power and engagement, we would normally think of the right hand of someone. The eye of the Lord moves about to and fro throughout all the earth (II Chronicles 16:9). That is not a 1,000-pound eye rolling around the circumference. That's just telling you God is omnipresent, God is omniscient, God is omnipotent, God is omni, He is beyond us. Therefore, we use something in body parts to describe Him and we do the same thing with emotions.

That doesn't mean that God is trapped with our human emotions, but it does mean our emotions in some way are a reflection of God's character. His are perfected in the eternality of His attributes. In other words, God's anger is not man's anger, but our anger is a reflection of God's anger and anger is not a sin. The Bible says, 'be angry, yet do not sin' (Psalm 4:4, Ephesians 4:26). In other words, you can have an anger that's not sin. You can also ever sinful anger but we're not supposed to have that for that is called the anger of man. Another thing God does is laughs. All of those things are given to us to take human like emotions that we have being made in God's image, for us to consider the perfections of them in the character of our thrice holy God – holy, holy, holy is His name.

When the Bible says God has anger, using that human like emotion that has been created in us to bear the image of God, it is in the perfections of God and now we want to understand when that anger is manifested with His people. Can that anger be manifested to someone that God loves? Yes. Can that anger actually be an instrument for the purposes of God's love? Yes. Every father and mother reading this today is challenged with that. Let me just say the notion of parenting, that you raise children and somehow you're never supposed to be angry when they do something wrong is wrong. What we don't show is the anger of man, but what we do is try to understand how it is to be displayed so our children know this is wrong, it's displeasing, and there are things that we can do.

As I tried to explain to a man who said 'I would never tell a Christian that God is angry with them because I don't think God can be for all of His anger was poured out upon Jesus when He redeemed us.' I said, 'I believed His wrath was satisfied, but I believe that God with His children, when we do that which is displeasing, can bring forth that emotion of anger in its perfections in God and it's not displayed in condemnation. It is displayed for the purpose of sanctification. It is displayed to get our attention for us to understand the sobriety of the matter.'

I don't mean to be flippant about this, but I'll try to explain it to you this way. There may be a man who, for whatever reason, is a believer and for some reason does something despicable, such as physical abuse or a virulent emotional abuse upon his wife. I don't think God says that's okay. I believe God is angry about those things and out of that anger He is now going to discipline His child not for condemnation, but for repentance and sanctification that he might confess and repent. It is that anger that is being referred to by Zechariah. You know that in the past the Prophets preached the truth and warned the people of God, that the anger of God was there and therefore the discipline of God was coming not to punish, but to correct for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines and discipline is not joyful, but sorrowful (Hebrews 12:6-11). Part of the sorrow is I have displeased the Lord. Instead of a life that reflects the power of His grace to bring a smile to the Lord, I have brought the frown and I know I haven't lost my salvation. I know He's not dangling me over hell for I know Jesus has satisfied the wrath of God, but I also know I have displeased Him.

What do I want to do? I want to confess and I want to repent, not simply because what I did has bad consequences, but because I, His child, have offended the Almighty. That message

came to Israel through the Prophets. As it came Zechariah says the Lord was very angry with your fathers and what else does he says?

Zechariah 1:3 says [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.* I want to take a moment here and do some theological reconnaissance. He is not saying, if you return to Me, I'll return to you. He is saying if you return to Me, I'll return to you, but the reason you're returning to Me is I've already come to you to show you why you need to turn, to show you how to turn. And when you return to Me, you don't get saved all over again, but our intimacy is restored. Our intimacy that is assaulted by what you have done as My children in rebellion against Me is now returned and it has been returned appropriately.

I'm going to use parenting again. Perhaps the best illustration I have for this in my life was my father. I knew when I had done something to displease my father. Now, if I did something too big, there was no doubt because of what the consequences would be, but I knew when I had done or said something that displeased my father. But I never once thought in his displeasure I was not his child, that he didn't love me. He was able to communicate that and by the way, I knew it. My father had a look. In fact, I have a picture of my father on my wall with that look I have seen on numerous occasions in my life. I've got a picture at home in my study of my dad throwing Pete Rose out of a baseball game with his fingers right in Pete Rose's face and people said, 'Man, that's something.' I would say, That's nothing, do you want to know how many times I saw that growing up? Pete Rose only had to see it one time. I grew up with it.' I knew it was there, but I also knew he was my father and I also knew why he was pointing this out to me.

That's what God is doing. He comes and points out to us what we're doing that's wrong and He doesn't do it flippantly, serendipitously or arbitrarily. He does it to communicate so that you see it, then you confess it and you repent of it. Why? He is breaking you, but he's not breaking you for you to live in brokenness. Brokenness is not the objective of God's breaking us. He breaks us to make us turn from sin, to repentance, and not turn from sin to do better, but to turn from sin to turn to Him for us to come back into the relationship of walking dependent upon Him, with Him, and upon Him.

God said 'I sent the prophets. I was angry at your bail worship.' Do you know what He is talking here? He's talking about at times where they were doing child sacrifice. I have been to the archeological dig in Israel, where the kings of Israel had erected Molech and the remains of baby bones were there in the archeology. God's anger was displayed to His covenant people when they did that, that they might confess it, repent of it and be broken, not to stay broken, but to turn back to Him, to walk with Him and for Him.

For some reason we have gotten into this notion that God breaks us so that we live in brokenness. No, He breaks us so that we come to Him, live in Him, and walk in the Spirit in the newness of life and in the triumph of Christ, instead of the vanity of our flesh. Put no confidence in the flesh, it is the Spirit who gives life (Philippians 3:1, John 6:63). Notice He does so, so that the reciprocal nature is established. I love James 4:8 that says [8] *Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.* That's not teaching works salvation, because you will never draw near to God unless He draws you so He is sovereignly drawing you, but He wants you to know that you have a real relationship with Him for He wants you to know when I draw you and you draw near to Me, I'm going to draw near to you. We're going to go deeper. That's what He's teaching us and that's what He was calling Israel to in this context.

Then it finishes this way in Zechariah 1:4-6 that says [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.*

In other words, not only don't put your hope in yourself, don't put your hope in any man, not even your father's. They can't bear that weight. The Prophets, the preachers of the day, the teaching of the day – don't put your hope there. Make use of the teaching and preaching, appreciate it, appreciate those preaching and teaching, be encouraged by it, but don't put your hope. Where are your father's? They are buried. Where are the prophets? They're not still speaking. Where is God? I am that I am. Return to Me. Come to Me. He is where you put your hope, your trust and everything in life.

We will see what Zechariah is saying and we'll find out that for 70 years, God has brought redemptive discipline out of His anger with what the kings in the Southern Kingdom were doing following 100 years behind the timeline of what the kings in the Northern Kingdom had done. Now God has fulfilled His Word in 70 years for He has brought them back, but they haven't repented. They may say they have, but they haven't. That's why 18 years later, no temple yet. The gates are down. We're going to find out people are just walking in and out of Jerusalem like it's the place to loot, where people just take whatever they want, when they want. They will be vandalizing Jerusalem every day, in and out, in and out.

This came home to me personally in the first church I pastored. We had 50 something people and I got a call every day that our church was being vandalized. Everything from lights out to graffiti to other things. They were thinking that 'yes 50 people show up here on Sunday but the rest of the time it's nothing.' We need to repent. We don't just need police protection. Why has this come upon us? God, would You do something that the evil one wouldn't dare touch a lamp, stand like that? Give us repentance lest the lamp stand be taken away. I purposefully use that because Zechariah is going to talk about the church has a lampstand for us.

We have some great studies ahead of us in the book of Zechariah and he's calling them to repentance. He's calling them to come and return back to the Lord. Why? Think of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon – why did all that happen? Here's why it happened. They were given blessings and cursings from Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal and here are part of the cursings that were read from a stone on Mt. Ebal.

Deuteronomy 28:45-51 says [45] *"All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you. [46] They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. [47] Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, [48] therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you (enemies will invade and take them captive as slaves), in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. [49] The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, [50] a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. [51] It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain,*

wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish.

Did that happen to Israel under Assyria? Yes. What were they supposed to do? They had already been told by Solomon what they were they supposed to do. II Chronicles 7:14 says [14] *If my people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.* But they did not. The ten tribes are gone.

Did this happen to the two Southern tribes? Yes. Two million who came back, at most 50,000. Will they repent? We already know what they're going to do with Zechariah's message. No, they will not repent. Therefore, 500 years from now, Jesus will tell them a nation like an eagle, referring to the Roman Empire which has an eagle on its standard, will come bring a judgment upon them that Jesus says, will be like nothing they have ever experienced before – a tribulation beyond anything in your imagination shall fall upon you. In 66 to 70 A.D the temple is destroyed, along with Jerusalem and the people for God's judgment had fallen.

So as we go through Zechariah and we begin to see how it applies to us today in confidence of God's grace, let us freely confess our sins. I was in Chattanooga last week. In my 20s I went part time to attend an independent seminary there before I went to Westminster Seminary as I stayed in Chattanooga, after I graduated to help a little church as a student pastor. I stayed there four years and took some classes and I got to know the pastor. His name was Lee Roberson. I got to know the church and it was called Highland Park Baptist. I got to know their ministry. We had many discussions theologically that were pretty intense, but boy, did that man love Jesus and sacrificially he wanted people to come to Christ. He gave his whole life.

As I went over this past week, the college is now closed. My wife and I saw the church being dismantled brick by brick. Ichabod – the glory of the Lord has departed and at his death the ordained leadership as it is identified within a Baptist church government, began to consume the church for themselves. I know the God's church isn't a building, but I looked at that building being torn down with the last thing being the tower and I thought of the thousands of people that had come to Christ in that building and now it's not there.

By God's grace, I praise God that we and others build buildings of substance, that they may stay, but they will not stay and be used, unless we are ready to confess and turn from sin and put our trust in Him. I am not saying repentance is a group therapy – repentance deals with sin. We confess sin and we turn from it to the Lord not to do better, but to the Lord. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the time we have been together in Your Word. Thank You for this glorious Gospel message from Zechariah as we walk our way through it. Continue to gather us around this book gathering our hearts and our minds around it. Lord, I don't know what all You are going to do, but sometimes I think it's in these kind of gatherings that You begin to gather people around Your Word who want to hear You, who follow You, who want to kill sin, love and obey Jesus that we might be a church on mission, on message, and in ministry, in Jesus' Name, Amen.