

Zechariah Chapter 1 — A Call to Return and Visions of Hope

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

The Book of Zechariah begins with a simple but powerful message:

Return to God.

The people of Judah had returned from Babylonian captivity, but returning to their homeland was not enough. God wanted their hearts.

Jerusalem had been devastated. The temple had been destroyed. The people had experienced the consequences of generations of rebellion. Yet God had not abandoned them.

Through Zechariah, God called His people to repentance and then gave them visions of hope.

The chapter contains three major sections:

1. **A Call to Return to the Lord — verses 1–6**
2. **The Vision of the Horses Among the Myrtle Trees — verses 7–17**
3. **The Vision of the Four Horns and Four Craftsmen — verses 18–21**

The message is clear:

God disciplines His people, but He does not forget them.

He calls them back.

He comforts them.

He restores them.

And He deals with those who oppose them.

I. A CALL TO RETURN TO THE LORD

Zechariah 1:1

“In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, the grandson of Iddo the prophet.”

Zechariah's ministry began during the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

Judah was no longer an independent kingdom. The people had returned from Babylon, but they remained under Persian authority.

Politically, Israel appeared weak.

Spiritually, however, God was still speaking.

The phrase “**the word of the Lord came**” reminds us that Zechariah's message originated with God.

Zechariah was not presenting his personal opinions.

He was delivering God's Word.

Cross References in Simple American English

Ezra 5:1 — The prophets Haggai and Zechariah spoke God's message to the Jews living in Judah and Jerusalem.

Haggai 1:1 — During the second year of King Darius, the Lord gave His message through the prophet Haggai.

Nehemiah 12:16 — Zechariah was associated with the priestly family of Iddo.

Spiritual Lesson

God's people may find themselves in difficult circumstances, but God has not stopped speaking through His Word.

Application

Do not measure God's presence by your circumstances.

When life seems uncertain, return to what God has spoken.

Zechariah 1:2

“The Lord was very angry with your ancestors.”

God immediately reminded the new generation of what had happened to their ancestors.

Their ancestors had rebelled against God repeatedly.

God sent prophets.

He warned them.

He called them to repentance.

They refused to listen.

Eventually, judgment came.

Jerusalem was destroyed.

The temple was burned.

Many people were carried into captivity.

God's anger was not irrational or unjust.

It was His righteous response to persistent rebellion.

Cross References in Simple American English

2 Chronicles 36:16 — The people mocked God's messengers, rejected His words, and laughed at His prophets until God's judgment could no longer be delayed.

Isaiah 47:6 — God allowed His people to experience judgment because of their sin.

Lamentations 2:2 — In judgment, the Lord allowed the strongholds of Judah to be brought down.

Principle

God is loving, but His love does not mean that He ignores sin.

Application

Never confuse God's patience with God's approval.

The fact that judgment has not come immediately does not mean rebellion is acceptable.

Zechariah 1:3

“Therefore tell the people: ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: Return to Me, and I will return to you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.”

This is the central command of the opening section.

Return to Me.

God was calling for repentance.

Biblical repentance is more than feeling sorry.

It means turning.

Turning away from sin.

Turning away from rebellion.

Turning away from self-rule.

And turning back to God.

Notice the promise:

“I will return to you.”

God was ready to restore fellowship with His people.

Cross References in Simple American English

Malachi 3:7 — God said, “Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

Joel 2:12 — God calls His people to return to Him with all their heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

James 4:8 — Come near to God, and He will come near to you.

Key Truth

Repentance is not merely turning away from something.

It is turning toward Someone.

Application

Ask yourself:

Is there anything in my life that has caused me to drift away from God?

God's invitation remains:

Return to Me.

Zechariah 1:4

“Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed, ‘Turn from your evil ways and your evil deeds.’ But they would not listen or pay attention to Me,” declares the Lord.

The new generation faced a decision.

Would they repeat the sins of the previous generation?

Their ancestors had received repeated warnings.

The problem was not lack of information.

They knew what God had said.

The problem was refusal to listen.

Hearing God's Word without obeying God's Word accomplishes nothing.

Cross References in Simple American English

Jeremiah 25:5 — God's prophets repeatedly told the people to turn away from their evil ways and sinful actions.

2 Kings 17:14 — The people refused to listen and became stubborn like their ancestors.

Ezekiel 18:31 — God told His people to throw away their sins and receive a new heart and spirit.

Principle

Every generation must decide whether it will obey God.

Faithfulness cannot simply be inherited.

Application

You cannot live on someone else's faith.

Your parents' faith cannot replace your faith.

Your pastor's faith cannot replace your faith.

You must personally respond to God.

Zechariah 1:5

“Where are your ancestors now? And the prophets—do they live forever?”

God asked two sobering questions.

The ancestors were gone.

The prophets were gone.

Human life is temporary.

Generations come and go.

Leaders come and go.

Preachers come and go.

Kings come and go.

But God's Word remains.

Cross References in Simple American English

Psalms 90:10 — Human life is brief, and the years quickly pass away.

Job 14:1 — Human beings live only a short time and experience many troubles.

Hebrews 11:13 — The faithful people of earlier generations eventually died, still trusting God's promises.

Spiritual Lesson

Human beings are temporary.

God's truth is permanent.

Application

Build your life on something that will outlive you.

Build your life on God's Word.

Zechariah 1:6

“But My words and decrees, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtook your ancestors. And they repented and said, ‘The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and deeds deserved, just as He determined to do.’”

The people died.

The prophets died.

But God's Word was fulfilled.

Everything God had warned would happen eventually happened.

Babylon came.

Jerusalem fell.

The temple was destroyed.

The nation experienced captivity.

God's Word **“overtook”** them.

They could not escape what God had declared.

Eventually, the people admitted that God's judgment was deserved.

Cross References in Simple American English

Deuteronomy 30:2 — God promised restoration when His people returned to Him and obeyed His voice.

Nehemiah 9:33 — The people confessed that God had been righteous in everything He allowed to happen because they had acted wickedly.

Lamentations 1:18 — Jerusalem acknowledged that the Lord was right because the people had rebelled against His commands.

Key Principle

God always keeps His Word.

His promises are certain.

His warnings are also certain.

Application

Never treat God's warnings lightly.

If God says sin destroys, believe Him.

If God says obedience brings blessing, believe Him.

If God promises forgiveness to the repentant, believe Him.

II. THE VISION OF THE HORSES AMONG THE MYRTLE TREES

Zechariah 1:7

“On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah, the grandson of Iddo.”

Approximately three months after Zechariah's opening message, God spoke again.

What follows is the first of several visions God gave Zechariah.

These visions were intended to encourage a discouraged people.

Jerusalem still looked broken.

The temple was unfinished.

The surrounding nations appeared powerful.

But God wanted His people to understand something:

What they could see was not the whole story.

God was working behind the scenes.

Cross References in Simple American English

Haggai 1:15 — The people had begun rebuilding the temple during the reign of Darius.

Daniel 10:1 — God sometimes revealed future events through visions given during the reigns of earthly kings.

Ezra 6:15 — The rebuilding of the temple would eventually be completed.

Application

Do not assume that God is inactive simply because you cannot see everything He is doing.

Zechariah 1:8

“During the night I had a vision, and there before me was a man riding a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown, and white horses.”

Zechariah saw a mysterious scene.

A man was riding a red horse.

Other horses stood behind him.

They were among myrtle trees in a low place.

The horses would soon be identified as agents sent throughout the earth.

Throughout Scripture, horses can symbolize strength, movement, warfare, or divine activity.

The myrtle tree may suggest restoration and blessing.

Cross References in Simple American English

Revelation 6:4 — John saw a red horse associated with judgment and conflict.

Isaiah 55:13 — The myrtle tree is used as a picture of God's restoration and blessing.

Revelation 19:11 — John saw heaven opened and Christ riding a white horse in righteousness and victory.

Spiritual Lesson

God's activity is not limited to what human beings can see.

There is a spiritual dimension to history.

Zechariah 1:9

“I asked, ‘My lord, what are these?’ The angel who was talking with me answered, ‘I will show you what they are.’”

Zechariah did not understand what he saw.

So he asked.

That is important.

There is nothing wrong with admitting that we do not understand something in Scripture.

Zechariah asked for understanding.

The angel explained.

Cross References in Simple American English

Daniel 7:16 — Daniel asked for the meaning of the vision he had received.

Ezekiel 40:4 — Ezekiel was told to pay close attention to everything God showed him.

Revelation 7:13 — John was asked about the meaning of something he saw in his vision.

Principle

Spiritual maturity includes humility.

Sometimes the wisest thing we can say is:

“I do not understand. Lord, teach me.”

Zechariah 1:10

“The man standing among the myrtle trees explained, ‘These are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth.’”

The horses represented messengers sent by God to survey the earth.

God knew what was happening among the nations.

Nothing escaped His attention.

Kings may think they rule independently.

Armies may think they control history.

Empires may think they are secure.

But God sees all of them.

Cross References in Simple American English

Job 1:7 — Satan reported that he had been moving throughout the earth.

2 Chronicles 16:9 — The eyes of the Lord search throughout the entire earth.

Revelation 5:6 — God's Spirit is pictured as going throughout all the earth.

Key Truth

God sees everything.

Nothing is hidden from Him.

Zechariah 1:11

“And they reported to the angel of the Lord, who was standing among the myrtle trees: ‘We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace.’”

The nations were peaceful.

At first, that sounds positive.

But there was a troubling contrast.

The pagan nations were comfortable.

Jerusalem was still devastated.

God's people were struggling while the nations that had oppressed them appeared secure.

That raised the question:

How long would God allow this situation to continue?

Cross References in Simple American English

1 Chronicles 4:40 — Some lands were described as peaceful and secure.

Psalms 46:9 — God has the power to end wars throughout the earth.

Habakkuk 1:3 — Habakkuk also struggled with seeing violence and injustice continue around him.

Application

Sometimes evil appears comfortable while God's people suffer.

Do not mistake temporary peace for God's final verdict.

Zechariah 1:12

“Then the angel of the Lord said, ‘Lord Almighty, how long will You withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, which You have been angry with these seventy years?’”

Here we hear intercession.

The angel of the Lord asked:

“How long?”

That question appears repeatedly in Scripture.

It is the cry of people waiting for God to act.

The seventy years refer to Judah's period of judgment connected with Babylonian domination and exile.

The question is not whether God will restore Jerusalem.

The question is when.

Cross References in Simple American English

Psalms 79:5 — God's people cried, “How long, Lord? Will Your anger continue forever?”

Daniel 9:2 — Daniel understood from Jeremiah that Jerusalem's desolation would last seventy years.

Revelation 6:10 — Martyrs in heaven cry out, asking how long God will wait before judging evil.

Spiritual Lesson

It is not wrong to ask God, **“How long?”**

Faith sometimes waits.

Faith sometimes cries.

But faith continues trusting.

Zechariah 1:13

“So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.”

What a beautiful verse.

God's answer was not harsh.

It was comforting.

Judgment was not God's final word to His people.

Comfort was coming.

Restoration was coming.

Jerusalem's story was not over.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 40:1 — God told His messengers to comfort His people.

Isaiah 57:18 — God promised to heal, guide, and restore comfort.

Hosea 2:14 — God spoke tenderly to His people as He drew them back to Himself.

Key Truth

God knows how to speak comfort to discouraged hearts.

Application

When God's discipline has accomplished its purpose, His desire is restoration rather than destruction.

Zechariah 1:14

“Then the angel said to me, ‘Proclaim this message: This is what the Lord Almighty says: I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.’”

God described Himself as jealous for Jerusalem.

Divine jealousy is not sinful envy.

It is God's holy commitment to what belongs to Him.

Israel belonged to God.

Jerusalem had been chosen for His purposes.

God would not permanently abandon His covenant people.

Cross References in Simple American English

Exodus 20:5 — God describes Himself as a jealous God who demands exclusive worship.

2 Corinthians 11:2 — Paul spoke of a godly jealousy for believers because they belonged to Christ.

Joel 2:18 — The Lord was jealous for His land and showed compassion toward His people.

Principle

God desires the undivided devotion of His people.

Application

Ask yourself:

Does God have first place in my heart?

Zechariah 1:15

“And I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity.”

God had allowed foreign nations to discipline Judah.

But those nations went beyond what God intended.

They acted cruelly.

They became arrogant.

They enjoyed Judah's suffering.

They assumed their power came from themselves.

God held them accountable.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 10:7 — Assyria did not understand that God was using it; its own heart desired destruction.

Obadiah 1:12 — Edom was condemned for rejoicing over Judah's disaster.

Amos 6:1 — God warned those who were comfortable and secure while ignoring spiritual danger.

Important Truth

God may use human rulers and nations to accomplish His purposes, but that does not excuse their wickedness.

God remains sovereign.

Human beings remain responsible.

Zechariah 1:16

“Therefore this is what the Lord says: I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy, and My house will be rebuilt there. The measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,” declares the Lord Almighty.

Here comes the promise of restoration.

God says:

“I have returned.”

The same God who called the people to return to Him now promised to return to them with mercy.

The temple would be rebuilt.

Jerusalem would be measured for reconstruction.

Destruction would give way to restoration.

Cross References in Simple American English

Jeremiah 31:39 — Jerusalem would once again be measured and rebuilt.

Haggai 1:8 — God commanded the people to rebuild His house so that He would be honored.

Ezekiel 40:3 — Ezekiel saw a heavenly figure holding measuring instruments in a vision of restoration.

Key Phrase

“I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy.”

Spiritual Lesson

God's discipline has a purpose.

For the repentant, discipline can lead to restoration.

Zechariah 1:17

“Proclaim further: This is what the Lord Almighty says: My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.”

God promised more than survival.

He promised abundance.

The cities that had been devastated would again prosper.

Zion would again experience comfort.

Jerusalem would again experience God's favor.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 51:3 — God promised to comfort Zion and turn her devastated places into something like Eden.

Psalms 132:13 — The Lord chose Zion as the place He desired for His dwelling.

Jeremiah 33:13 — The towns of Judah would once again be inhabited and experience normal life.

Spiritual Lesson

God is able to rebuild what judgment, failure, and tragedy have broken.

Application

Never assume that your present condition must become your permanent condition.

God specializes in restoration.

III. THE VISION OF THE FOUR HORNS AND FOUR CRAFTSMEN

Zechariah 1:18

“Then I looked up, and there before me were four horns.”

Zechariah now saw another vision.

In biblical symbolism, a horn often represents strength, political power, or military authority.

The four horns represented powers that had oppressed God's people.

Cross References in Simple American English

Daniel 7:24 — The horns in Daniel's vision represented kings or kingdoms.

Daniel 8:20 — Daniel was specifically told that horns represented political powers.

Revelation 17:12 — The ten horns in John's vision represented ten kings.

Principle

Human power can appear enormous.

But no earthly power is greater than God.

Zechariah 1:19

“I asked the angel who was speaking to me, ‘What are these?’ He answered, ‘These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.’”

The horns represented powers responsible for scattering God's people.

Various empires had attacked Israel and Judah.

Assyria conquered the northern kingdom.

Babylon destroyed Jerusalem.

Other surrounding nations also participated in Israel's suffering.

The four horns likely symbolize the totality of hostile powers surrounding and oppressing God's people.

Cross References in Simple American English

Jeremiah 52:27 — Judah was carried away from its land into captivity.

Ezekiel 36:19 — God scattered His people among the nations because of their sins.

Daniel 8:22 — Horns can represent kingdoms that rise and exercise political power.

Spiritual Lesson

God knew exactly who had harmed His people.

Their suffering had not gone unnoticed.

Zechariah 1:20

“Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen.”

Now the vision changes.

There were four horns.

But there were also four craftsmen.

For every hostile power that arose, God had an instrument capable of bringing it down.

The word translated **craftsmen** can refer to skilled workers, artisans, smiths, or builders.

The picture is of people equipped to break the power represented by the horns.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 54:16 — God declared that He created the craftsman who works with fire and produces weapons.

Ezekiel 21:31 — God can deliver wicked nations into the hands of people who carry out judgment.

1 Kings 22:19 — Heaven's armies stand before the Lord, ready to carry out His purposes.

Key Truth

For every enemy, God has an answer.

For every proud power, God has the means to bring it down.

Zechariah 1:21

“I asked, ‘What are they coming to do?’ He answered, ‘These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise their head. But the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted themselves up against the land of Judah to scatter its people.’”

The meaning becomes clear.

The horns had humiliated Judah.

They had scattered the people so severely that no one could even **“raise their head.”**

That expression pictures defeat, shame, helplessness, and despair.

But God was sending craftsmen against the horns.

The powers that had crushed Judah would themselves be crushed.

The oppressors would not have the final word.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 41:15 — God promised to make His people like a powerful instrument that could crush mountains.

Jeremiah 51:20 — God described an instrument He would use to break nations and kingdoms.

Micah 4:13 — God promised to give Zion strength to crush the power of hostile nations.

Key Principle

No enemy of God remains powerful forever.

Application

When evil appears unstoppable, remember:

God has already prepared the instrument capable of bringing it down.

IV. MAJOR THEMES OF ZECHARIAH 1

1. Repentance

The first message in Zechariah is not about prophecy charts or future kingdoms.

It is about repentance.

Before God revealed His plans for the future, He addressed the spiritual condition of His people.

“Return to Me.”

That remains God's call.

2. The Permanence of God's Word

People die.

Generations disappear.

Governments collapse.

Cultures change.

God's Word remains.

What God says will happen will happen.

3. God's Sovereignty Over the Nations

The horses traveled throughout the earth.

God knew exactly what was happening among the nations.

Nothing was outside His control.

4. God's Compassion for His People

God had disciplined Judah.

Yet discipline was not abandonment.

He spoke **“kind and comforting words.”**

God's heart was moving toward restoration.

5. God's Jealous Love

God was jealous for Jerusalem.

He had not forgotten His covenant.

His jealousy demonstrates His commitment to His people.

6. God's Judgment of Oppressors

The nations had gone too far.

They believed they could abuse God's people without consequences.

They were wrong.

God saw.

God remembered.

God would act.

7. God's Promise of Restoration

The temple would be rebuilt.

Jerusalem would be restored.

The towns would again prosper.

Judgment would not be the final chapter.

V. KEY LESSONS FROM ZECHARIAH 1

1. Return to God, and He will draw near to you.

God calls wandering people back into fellowship with Himself.

2. Learn from previous generations.

We do not have to repeat the spiritual failures of those who came before us.

3. God's Word always stands.

People pass away, but God's truth remains.

4. God sees the whole earth.

Nothing occurring among nations, governments, or individuals escapes His knowledge.

5. God hears the cry, “How long?”

Waiting is difficult, but God's delays never mean that He has forgotten.

6. God comforts His people.

He knows when His children are discouraged and speaks words of hope.

7. God desires exclusive devotion.

He is jealous for the hearts of His people.

8. God holds nations accountable.

No ruler or government is beyond His authority.

9. God can rebuild what has been destroyed.

Jerusalem's ruins were not the end of Jerusalem's story.

10. God has an answer for every enemy.

The four horns were met by four craftsmen.

God was already prepared to deal with those who opposed His purposes.

VI. CHRIST IN ZECHARIAH 1

The Book of Zechariah contains many important Messianic prophecies that become clearer as the book progresses.

Even in Chapter 1, several themes prepare us for Christ.

1. The Angel of the Lord Intercedes

The angel of the Lord asks:

“How long will You withhold mercy from Jerusalem?”

This picture of intercession points us toward the New Testament truth that Jesus Christ intercedes for His people.

Christ is our Advocate with the Father.

2. God Returns in Mercy

God declares:

“I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy.”

The greatest demonstration of God's mercy came when Jesus Christ entered the world.

God did not leave humanity in sin.

He came to save.

3. God Brings Restoration

The restoration of Jerusalem points toward the greater restoration God accomplishes through Christ.

Sin destroys.

Christ restores.

Sin separates.

Christ reconciles.

Sin brings death.

Christ gives life.

VII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Zechariah 1 forces us to ask several personal questions.

Have I drifted from God?

Am I repeating the mistakes of those who came before me?

Am I listening to God's Word without obeying it?

Do I believe God's Word will actually be fulfilled?

Am I discouraged because evil appears comfortable?

Have I mistaken God's delay for God's absence?

Do I believe God can restore what has been broken?

Am I trusting God when circumstances seem beyond my control?

VIII. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What was God's first major command to the people through Zechariah?

Answer

God commanded them to return to Him. Their greatest need was not political independence or economic prosperity but spiritual restoration.

Question 2

Why did God remind Judah about their ancestors?

Answer

He wanted the new generation to learn from the failures of the previous generation rather than repeat the same rebellion.

Question 3

What does Zechariah 1:6 teach us about God's Word?

Answer

Human beings pass away, but God's Word remains and is always fulfilled.

Question 4

What did the horses among the myrtle trees represent?

Answer

They represented agents sent by God throughout the earth, showing that God knew what was happening among all the nations.

Question 5

Why was the earth's peace troubling?

Answer

The nations that had oppressed Judah were living comfortably while Jerusalem still suffered the consequences of destruction.

Question 6

What does the question “How long?” teach us about prayer?

Answer

Believers may honestly express their pain and longing while continuing to trust God's timing.

Question 7

How did God respond to the request for mercy?

Answer

He answered with kind and comforting words and promised restoration.

Question 8

What does God's jealousy for Jerusalem mean?

Answer

It refers to His holy, covenant love and His determination that His people belong exclusively to Him.

Question 9

Why was God angry with the surrounding nations?

Answer

Although God had allowed them to discipline Judah, they acted with cruelty and arrogance and went beyond what God intended.

Question 10

What did the measuring line over Jerusalem signify?

Answer

It showed that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored.

Question 11

What do the four horns represent?

Answer

They symbolize the hostile powers that scattered and oppressed Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

Question 12

What do the four craftsmen represent?

Answer

They represent God's appointed instruments for overthrowing the powers that had oppressed His people.

Question 13

What encouragement does the vision of the craftsmen give believers today?

Answer

No enemy is beyond God's ability to defeat. God always has the power and means necessary to accomplish His purposes.

Question 14

What is the central message of Zechariah 1?

Answer

God calls His people to return to Him, assures them that He has not forgotten them, promises restoration, and declares that He will deal with their enemies.

IX. FINAL THOUGHT

Zechariah Chapter 1 begins with ruins.

A ruined city.

A ruined temple.

A nation that had experienced judgment.

A people surrounded by stronger nations.

But God did not begin by telling them to look at the ruins.

He told them:

“Return to Me.”

Then He showed them that He was still watching.

Still ruling.

Still listening.

Still comforting.

Still judging evil.

Still rebuilding.

Still keeping His promises.

The message of Zechariah 1 is therefore a message of both repentance and hope.

If you have wandered from God:

Return.

If you are discouraged:

Remember that God sees.

If you are waiting:

Remember that God hears.

If something has been broken:

Remember that God restores.

If enemies seem powerful:

Remember the four craftsmen.

No opposition is greater than the God who rules over all.

Key Verse

“Return to Me, and I will return to you,” declares the Lord Almighty. — Zechariah 1:3

Key Phrase

Return to God and trust Him to restore what has been broken.