

Return to Me

Jeff Rogers / Lamplighter Bible Study

Zechariah 1:1-6

How do we start over? It is a question all of us will ask at some point in our lives. Perhaps we will ask it multiple times. There are always challenges. The returning exiles were few (**Ezra 2:64-65**). They returned to a city that was destroyed and laid waste (**Ezra 4:12-16; Hag 1:4; Neh 1:3**) The central place of worship was decimated (**Ezra 3:8-13; 5; Hag 1:4**) The enemy opposition was strong (**Ezra 4:1-24**)

There is a certain expectation, either spoken or unspoken, that when a decision is made to “return to God,” God would make it easy, and He does. However, there are always obstacles in our path. So much so that we question how to gain God’s favor (**Zech 7:3, 5**) and wonder if our efforts are worthwhile, especially when compared to the acts of previous generations (**Hag 2:3-4; Zech 8:9**).

Amid all this, Israel lost its way, and God raised up Zechariah and Haggai to confront the nation and charge them to reengage in building the Temple. Haggai rebuked Israel for faulty priorities (**Hag 1:1-15**). Zechariah directed the people to recognize what the Lord was planning to do for Israel both in their time and in the future.

I. The Word Comes (Zechariah 1:1)

- A. The Historical Context for the Book
 - 1. Solomon, the son of David and King of Israel, died in appx 931 BC.
 - 2. The Kingdom was divided into northern and southern Kingdoms at approximately the same time
 - 3. The northern Kingdom was overtaken and exiled to Assyria in 722 BC. Never returned.
 - 4. The southern Kingdom was overtaken and exiled to Babylon in three attacks (606, 597, 586 BC)
 - 5. Cyrus (Medes/Persians) takes Babylon in appx 539 BC.
 - 6. The Temple foundation is laid; however, the work stalls (536 BC).
 - 7. In 520 BC, Haggai begins his ministry in August, followed by Zechariah in October/November.
- B. The Pedigree and Life of Zechariah
 - 1. Zechariah was the son of Berechiah, and the grandson of Iddo (**Zech 1:1**)
 - a) He was born in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua the High Priest (**Neh 12:1, 16**).
 - b) It is likely that Zechariah’s father, Berechiah, died early in life.
 - 2. He was of priestly lineage, his grandfather Iddo being head of a priestly line.
 - 3. Zechariah’s life ended when he was murdered between the altar and the sanctuary (**Matthew 23:35**).
- C. The Omniscient (Never Forgetting) God.
 - 1. Zechariah’s name means, “Yahweh remembers.”
 - 2. This is the undergirding reality of the book.
 - a) In Zechariah’s day, and to the returning exiles.
 - b) In our day, we anticipate the fulfillment of all that God has promised.

II. The Verdict of God Rendered (Zechariah 1:2)

- A. This was the verdict, not an indictment.
- B. **Jeremiah 16:10-13,**
- C. **Jeremiah 25:4-11 (Jeremiah 25:8-11)**

III. The Call Issued in Grace (Zechariah 1:3)

- A. The need for repentance - God’s anger over sin (**Zech 1:2**). What is repentance? Repentance is two things happening simultaneously:
 - 1. It is turning from sin
 - a) **The way of sin** is the direction, the orientation, the path a person is walking. It is the heart set toward sin — the love of it, the bent toward it, the trust placed in it. The "way" is the inner disposition that produces the outward acts.
 - b) **The works of sin** are the specific acts that flow from that disposition — the idols actually carved, the offerings actually poured out, the injustices actually committed. These are the visible fruit.

- c) Repentance is not just stopping what you are doing — it is turning around. That is why the NT word for repentance, *metanoia*, means a change of mind that reorients the whole life.
- 2. It is turning to God
 - a) Repentance toward God reaches down to the will and produces obedience. Not obedience as the ground of acceptance — that is moralism — but obedience as the evidence of a heart that has actually turned.
 - b) Repentance has two feet — one steps away from sin, the other steps toward God. A man standing on only one of them has not yet repented; he has only shifted his weight.
- B. God's reception of the repentant (**Zech 1:3**)
 - 1. **Zechariah 1:3**, *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.*
 - 2. This is our great hope for repentance: that, however great our sin and backsliding, God is ready to receive those who come to him in repentance and faith.
- C. It is only through the blood of Jesus Christ that God forgives those who repent:
 - 1. God's call to repentance was directly linked to the rebuilding of the temple. The reason for that: it was at the temple that blood sacrifices were offered, which addressed the problem of sin. God is a holy God; he must always judge sin. There must be an atonement for sin.
 - 2. Theologian J. I. Packer explains: ***"Between us sinners and the thunderclouds of divine wrath stands the cross of the Lord Jesus. If we are Christ's through faith, then we are justified through His cross, and the wrath will never touch us, neither here nor hereafter. Jesus 'delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thess. 1:10)."***

IV. The Warning Given (Zechariah 1:4-6a)

- A. The command: *"Do not be like your fathers."* (**Zech 1:4**)
- B. The indictment: *"They did not hear or pay attention to me."* (**Zech 1:4**) This is what Stephen will say of that same generation in Acts 7 — "stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit." The warning in verse 4 is not "do not miss the message." It is "do not harden against the message you have heard."
- C. The question: *"Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?"* But the word remains (**Zech 1:6a**)

V. The Confession of Repentance (Zechariah 1:6)

- A. ***But my words and my statutes...did they not overtake your fathers?"*** (Overtake – pursuit, capture, creditor chases and overtakes a debtor, or an army pursuing an enemy)
- B. ***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.***
 - 1. *They agreed with God about His purpose.* "As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us..." They acknowledged that the exile was not random, not Babylon's victory, not history's accident. It was the LORD's purpose.
 - 2. *They agreed with God about themselves.* "...for our ways and deeds..." (III. A.)
 - 3. *Third, they agreed with God about His justice.* "...so has he dealt with us." They acknowledged that what God had done to them was right. Not excessive. Not arbitrary. Not unjust.
- C. Repentance acknowledges the justice of the verdict before it receives the mercy of the call.
- D. When we repent, therefore, we must come through faith in Jesus Christ and in his blood, which turns God's righteous anger into joyful acceptance and love. Because Jesus was slain upon the cross for us, God robes us in his righteousness and is glad to receive us with arms open wide in bounteous grace as we return in penitent faith.