

Zechariah

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Would you turn, please, to the book of the Prophet Zechariah, chapter 1 and verse 1. From that.

The burden of the exercise is to spend the week, if the Lord will, in developing some of the major features and trends that come through in the book of the Prophet Zechariah. Speaking for myself, I suppose there are half a dozen verses which would come to my mind when I think of the book of Zechariah. But generally speaking, I must say that other than general reading, I've devoted little time in the past to the study of the book as a whole. But having given some attention, as we all have, to prophetic matters and the teaching of Scripture as a whole, what we can hope to do is to examine the text as we come to it, and to do the scriptural thing, [00:01:09] and examine it first of all in its own context, and then examine it in the context of Scripture as a whole, which is the only way to rightly study any Scripture. We shall find, as we do that, that many of the things that are detailed are well known to us, if not from Zechariah, from other prophets and other texts in the New Testament. And we shouldn't be surprised at that. Now, because the exercise is to examine the book in its own setting, and to get the primary interpretation of it, it means we'll have to be very economical indeed with time, and avoid largely the temptation to apply morally to us everything that is said. [00:02:05] There are some writers, serious quotes and others, who tend to fly immediately to the moral application, and that's always worthwhile. But a moral application for us, in this dispensation, can't have its proper meaning and full bearing unless, first of all, we've examined the book in its own context. So rather than confuse each other, that's what I hope to do. Now, there are those, perhaps some of you among them, who are a bit uneasy about examining Old Testament prophetic matters in case it becomes merely academic, because it doesn't concern the Church directly, because it doesn't concern the Christian dispensation directly. The hymns that we've sung are a pointer to the fact that if matters dealt with in the word of God are for the glory of Christ [00:03:09] and for the fulfilment of the will of God, they must necessarily be of interest to the believer in every dispensation. Valid to which, in any day and dispensation, there are universal truths which are stated, which are applicable in any day. Now, it is for that reason that the suggestion has been made that we fasten, to gauge our thinking by, in each session that we think about certain words which stand out from the text. Now, twice over in these first seven verses, we read that the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah. Now, we are not going to go right through the prophecy tonight and examine every time those words come. [00:04:02] It is a profitable line of study, but like much more detail, we'll have to leave that for our individual exercise. But there will be certain phrases crop up regularly, which we would do well to score, to colour in with a different colour, to write down, and to see the lessons we can learn by grouping these regular phrases together. And, as a start, we are thinking, first of all, that all that the prophet Zechariah had to say was the outcome of him receiving a revelation from his God. The word

of the Lord came to Zechariah, aroused his interest, engaged his attention, and as a result of that, he was conducted through various exercises which were for his blessing, his service, and has been preserved in the canon of Scripture. [00:05:03] So, in thinking of that phrase, the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, and because this is the introductory address, we will be thinking a little while, for a few moments, of the man and his message. Very often, especially in the Old Testament, prophets or servants were very carefully selected that their names, their lives, their service, are characteristic of all that they had to do, and we can learn something from that. We are told, of course, in the opening verse, who Zechariah was. He was the son of Berechiah, the son of Edo, the prophet. Whether this means that Zechariah was the son of Berechiah and the grandson of Edo, whether this means comparing it with other scriptures, [00:06:04] and again, we cannot study Zechariah without giving some time in our private study to Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah, we will find that perhaps Zechariah was born of a man who may have well had an early death, and Edo, his grandfather, helped in his upbringing. That is a detail which need not concern us. Here we have three generations, and perhaps we'll have something to learn from that in a few moments. If we compare this with the Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai, we will probably come to the conclusion that Zechariah was contemporary with the later phase of Haggai's prophecy and service.

[00:07:03] A younger man, taking account of all that Haggai had said, being colored to some extent by what Haggai had done and said, and then somewhat after the same mold, but with a different message to carry, here we have Zechariah coming on the scene. And if we are thinking of him personally, it's worth comparing all the scriptures, there aren't many that speak about him personally, and we learn that Zechariah was not only a prophet, he was also of the priestly line. Here we have, then, some characteristics. He was following a servant of the Lord, who'd been used to declare the moral condition of the people. He, in the sense of that, and colored by that ministry, he was going to take the nation, and the remnant of the nation in particular, [00:08:05] right on to the last days, and we'll have something to see and learn from that. But the one who was competent to deal with that which was from God and for God, and looking ahead to how the ways of God would emerge as history proceeded, was also one who knew what it was to draw near to God as priest, as well as prophet. Now, that's the man himself, and we'll come back to him, but if we look, again, down the text, if we look at verses 3 to 6, we get an important trend which the prophet draws the attention of the remnant to in the early stages. And in substance, in language we would use, he says, now look. [00:09:05] He said, you examine the history of the nation, even the history of the godly element of the nation, and he says you'll find that there's a certain cyclical succession. You get a cycle of attitudes and things that happen, and he says, wherever you start on the cycle, you can keep going in a continuous way. And if, for instance, we start with the fact that God chooses to bless his people, and he does so, before very long, you find that the nation are disobedient, in spite of the blessing. They are disobedient to the God who has blessed them in a wonderful way, and as a result of this, God raises up a prophet who warns the nation. Generally speaking, the mass of the nation disregard the warning, they ignore the warning, [00:10:07] and as a result, the promised punishment comes.

God disciplines the nation, not only for going astray, but because being warned of the error of their ways, to abandon the disobedience, to abandon the idolatry, to abandon their waywardness, they completely disregard that, they go on their way, and God must needs discipline them for it. God sends other prophets.

They cry from the heart, and there is a measure of repentance in those who are seeking to be true to God.

And as a result of that turning in repentance towards their God, [00:11:01] God is pleased to lift the discipline for the moment, and to grant them a further blessing. Now, in line with what we've learned in Christianity, we find that if something is taken away, because the people of God, for the moment, don't deserve it, after they've repented and been restored, the blessing that God in his wonderful grace grants to them, is better than what they had before. A marvelous tribute to the grace of their God and ours. So there is this cyclical succession that takes place. The blessing, the disobedience, the warning, the disregarding of the warning, discipline, the punishment, there is repentance in measure, and then God blesses those who are restored in a more wonderful way than they had had before. [00:12:04] In each case, what was given up in responsibility was good. But what God, in his goodness, provides is even better. And, of course, we would be able to say, always it's true that the best is yet to be. Now, in many cases, and Zechariah is typical of this, the repentance is induced in the Lord's people by giving, through the word of the prophet, a long-term view of what God has had in mind from the outset.

I suppose in modern terms, we would say it's like looking through a zoom lens. We are here, we are looking at something fairly close to hand in time, and then suddenly the lens seems to zoom right into the distance [00:13:04] and say what's not visible by the naked eye at the moment, but to whom it is revealed, God is going to do wonderful things in accordance with his will. And when that is done, a repentance in measure occurs.

The verse I like to put to that kind of thinking is that lovely verse in Proverbs 4, Let thine eyes look right on.

There's blessing in every day, in getting things at the present time in proper perspective, by letting our eyes look right on and seeing what God has in mind.

Well, Zechariah does that, and we'll see that very shortly. And in doing that, in telling them what's going to happen in the future as a result of the grace of God, repentance at that time, [00:14:02] which is another phrase that comes here and there, at that time, now as far as they were concerned, and repentance was produced, and a measure of restoration is given.

Now that covers the first six verses, I suppose, of chapter one.

The occasion of the prophecy was the return from Babylon of a remnant, a small proportion, who responded to the permissive instruction that was given, the decree was given, that those who wished could return to Jerusalem and, as the case may be, be involved in either the reconstruction of the temple or the reconstruction of the city. But the return from Babylon, here again you see, as a matter of judgment, [00:15:05] they've been disciplined, because of their disobedience, in being captured by Babylon, taken into a far country, made to serve foreign kings there.

It was a defined time of 70 years, as Jeremiah tells us.

And then, with the word of the Lord coming to some, produced repentance in them, which made them willing to respond to the invitation to go back to Jerusalem. Now, the return from Jerusalem, to Jerusalem in itself, is a preview of a greater opportunity and a greater return and a greater prosperity and peace than the remnant ever knew. And, if the Lord will, we'll come to that. [00:16:02] And, of course, God dealing with Babylon, as we shall see, is a picture of God finally dealing with all their enemies and coming into the promised land. Now, in many scriptures like this, we can see an

immediate or present fulfillment and, at the same time, we can see how what is happening at the present time is, in itself, an illustration of something greater and more universal that's going to happen. It's almost like looking through a window pane. I don't know if you've ever thought about it. If we look through a clear window pane, we can either focus our eyes on the pane itself and something that's on the pane, or we can let our eyes focus on something well into the distance and we don't quite see what's on the pane. We can see in proper focus something which is more distant. [00:17:03] Now, it's difficult to focus on both at the same time. But, often in the prophets, we find that something in the near or immediate future is spoken of as a symbol, as a picture of an eventual fulfillment that will surely come. And, of course, as far as the recovery and return of the remnant from Babylon was concerned, it is a wonderful picture how, when the Lord Jesus Christ appears in power and great glory, then, and only then, will true peace and prosperity be enjoyed by the nation.

Now, we must hasten on, and there is a phrase in chapter 2 which confirms that. Now, if we look then, just briefly, at chapter 1, verse 1, this succession of generations, [00:18:02] if we accept that, very often, these names are characteristic as well as personal, we get a message even in the succession of the names. If we put them together, we learn this, which certainly, whether it's the right interpretation or not, it's certainly true of the 14 chapters as a whole. We learn that, as far as the names are concerned, at the appointed time, which is the meaning of Edo, Jehovah will remember, that's Zechariah's name, and when God remembers his people, God will bless them. At the appointed time, God will remember and God will surely bless. Now, we learn that from the first, the opening verses, that God has something in mind which will not be frustrated even by the disobedience of his people in responsibility. [00:19:03] Now, that again is a universal truth.

We first learn, in coming to the Lord, that we are in a situation where our blessing is entirely dependent upon what God has done on our behalf.

What horrifies us, at first, is there's absolutely nothing we can do to earn salvation. There's nothing that we can do in ourselves which will merit favour with God. But the thing which is absolutely shattering at first becomes our anchor. Because we had no contribution to make, there's no weak link in the chain. It's all of God.

Now, the nation, as a nation, has to learn the same thing. When God defines the time, when God says this is the time, this is the occasion, God will bring in the full and final blessing, and this is the message that is given.

[00:20:08] Now, some of the things that Zechariah has to say to us, and in our opening session we must take account of this, and we'll see it in some of the detail, some of the things that he said had already happened when he gave his prophecy.

Other things have happened since the days of the prophecy and our day. And some of the things remain unfulfilled until the present. And we will perhaps have to distinguish between some of them. We have the advantage of hindsight. We can look back.

We can compare what's happened in history with the word of God, and we can say, yes, we see it now. One of the great advantages to us of having the whole canon of Scripture, [00:21:01] that seeing how the word of God, delivered in the past, has been so wonderfully fulfilled in such a detailed and accurate way, gives us renewed confidence in that which is unfulfilled. But as the past came into being because God said it would, this gives us renewed confidence in that which is going to take

place. Now, one last word on this opening message of verses 2 to 6.

It's a call to repentance.

Now, this, as ever, is the way the prophet delivers his message.

He doesn't start with the good news. First of all, he reminds the people why they are in their present state as a nation. Now, that's a universal truth. [00:22:01] No good prescribing the cure, or to say what the final condition is going to be, unless, first of all, he says, this is the condition, this is the cause, this is the reason, this is why you are where you are. So, he makes this call to repentance. He says, your fathers have been subject to the Gentile powers because of their disobedience. And Zechariah says to the people, learn the lesson of history. If prophecy teaches us anything, it's that history repeats itself.

If I make a mistake in a certain direction, if I had the opportunity to start again, almost certainly I'd make the same mistake in the same direction, but twice as badly and twice as quickly. The flesh in us is like that. Well, the people had had that repeatedly in their history. [00:23:05] But if you look at these verses, summing them up, you return to him.

And so we turn to verse 7 to the end of chapter 2.

We come here then to a comprehensive second message that the apostle has to give, which takes us right through to the end of chapter 6. And we shan't have time for all of that tonight, but I hope that we'll have time at least to deal with the first and second chapters and some of the visions that come to light there. Now, you choose for yourselves how many visions you decide there are, [00:24:01] whether you take them as individual visions or whether you take them as groups of visions with subsections. Certainly there is a trend, and this is what we want to look at tonight. I would suggest that from verse 7 of chapter 1 right through to the end of chapter 2, we have three categories, if you like, three visions.

He had several visions. Very busy night, we learn that he had all these visions in one night. And when we see the substance of them, we can see what a busy night he had. The first vision, as I will term it, is the vision of the man among the myrtle trees.

The second vision I will take in a comprehensive way to include the horns and the carpenters at the end of chapter 1. And then in chapter 2, the man with the measuring line. [00:25:05] Now, again, we'll have time for overall remarks, and some of the detail will come out further in the prophecy, some necessarily we'll have to leave in private study. Now, the man among the myrtle trees.

Now, the general lesson is plain.

We've learned it from Daniel.

We've learned it from Ezekiel. We've learned it from Revelation. But we can learn it from Zechariah. Now, and the lesson is this.

Nothing new about it. When his earthly people go astray, God uses the Gentile nations to discipline his people. This is part of the disgrace, that they who should be at the head of the nations are

subjugated to one nation after another, [00:26:04] and they feel it as a disgrace to them. What they don't feel is that it's dishonoring to Jehovah, their God. That's the real probe, the real nub of the issue. But they certainly resent, they have a burning resentment that they've been subjected to these Gentile powers. Now, God's principle is this.

He says, you, my earthly people, have been disobedient to me so that you may understand my judgment about it. I'm going to remove the protective umbrella away from you that Isaiah 5 speaks about.

And he says, I'm going to allow a Gentile nation to conquer you and you'll have to do what they say. Instead of you being the head of the nations, you'll be kicked about from pillar to post. [00:27:02] And he says, now that is a direct result of your disobedience. But then he also adds that he who allows the Gentile nation to conquer his people and discipline, he will hold the Gentile nations responsible to himself for how they've dared to treat the nation he calls the apple of his eye, which comes into the text. We've become acquainted with the figurative use of the term something which is precious and dear, the apple of the eye. I understand it refers to the most sensitive, tenderest part of the eye. And no doubt that is how God, looking down on his fair creation, having brought this nation into being, for his pleasure that he might dwell upon amongst them, [00:28:01] how keenly he feels what anyone dares to do to them.

So Israel then, lowly, downtrodden, because of their failing in responsibility, they are carefully watched over by God, they are prayed for by the faithful remnant that there is among the nation at any time, and God is going to take account of the way that the Gentile nations have treated them.

Now, if you look at verse 15, I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease. Take that first of all.

By the time Zechariah comes along at this stage, Babylon has fallen, [00:29:03] the empire of the Medes and ultimately the Persians is underway.

After the conquering of Babylon, things had become fairly stable, and Israel weren't giving their captors too much trouble, and the conquerors were just settling back and having an easy time and enjoying themselves. And Jehovah God says, I cannot tolerate this. It's out of order.

The only time that proper peace and proper stability will be upon earth, when Messiah is in control, and through my earthly people, Israel, they will distribute the blessing, they will dispense all the good things that are to be enjoyed, they will maintain the peace. And he says, it was offensive to God [00:30:03] that the leading nation, Gentile nation of the day, should have settled down and accepted a kind of peace, which involved Israel being in subjugation. It was out of order with God's plans.

But he says another thing in the same verse. I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease. He says, I was a little displeased with my own nation, Israel. I allowed this nation to afflict them a little bit, and see what they've done. They've heaped it on.

This helped forward. They'd aggravated the nation of Israel. They'd gone far greater in this disciplinary matter than God had originally envisaged. And he says, I will take you to account for that. So there we get, in verse 15, [00:31:01] something of the substance of prophecy as a whole. Israel subjugated because of their disobedience. Gentiles permissively allowed to be on top for the

moment, but responsible to God for what they do. The second vision, as I would call it, you may call it two and three, the horns and the carpenters.

I would suggest they are linked in this way. Throughout scripture, in the Pentateuch, in Daniel, horns are very often symbolic of powers, defined as such in the prophetic part of Daniel.

And the fact that there are four horns that are mentioned, and again, verses 18 and 19 of chapter 1, he says, behold, four horns.

[00:32:03] What be these?

These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. Here we have it.

Fitting it into the context of scripture as a whole, God says, this is not the first time. And it won't be the last time. He says, taking a panoramic view of history of the nation, he said, one and another and another and another, there will eventually be four Gentile nations who are brought in in a disciplinary way to subjugate my earthly people. And about this verb, to fray, it seems to involve concern, getting upset, a measure of fear.

And certainly God is saying, now look, these four Gentile nations, we know in advance [00:33:02] that when the prophecy emerges, and linking it up with Daniel, we know that it's Babylon which had come and gone, the Medes and Persians, which were extant at the time, ultimately followed by the Greeks and then the Romans, and then eventually the revived Roman Empire. We know the succession of four. We have the testimony of scripture for that. But he surveys the whole thing. His eyes look right on.

And he's holding this, first of all, as a warning, and then ultimately, as we shall see, as a promise of future blessing.

What are these then, these carpenters, to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles? It's evidently powers that are brought in, which successively will deal with the four horns. Now, we may or may not choose to identify the carpenters. [00:34:05] He says, first of all, a horn, then a carpenter, then a horn, then a carpenter, and so on. Now, it certainly seems to bear the interpretation that the second horn was the first carpenter, because certainly it was Darius the Mede who conquered Babylon.

Certainly it was Alexander the Great who conquered Persia. And it was certainly the Romans who brought about the downfall of the Grecian Empire. This takes us on, by way of encouragement, the final form of the Roman Empire will be brought about by the personal intervention of God in the person of his son, the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, when he appears in power and great glory. So, I wouldn't quibble with you if you conclude [00:35:03] that the horns are those four Gentile empires, and the four carpenters are the last three, and the Lord Jesus himself.

If you want to leave it in a general sense, that's fair enough. There's something else involved in this verb to fray. I suppose it's what I would call wittle.

When I spent my formative years in the back lanes of Baica, the sophisticated kind of thing we used to do was get a bit of wood and a knife, and we used to spend long hours whittling away, turning it

round in our hand, taking a bit off here, taking it off there, forming it, shaping it, so that we could eventually use it in some way, perhaps, as a tool, or just something we liked the look of. Now, I think this verb fray is used something in the sense [00:36:02] that the power of the Gentile nation, who think they're oh-so-mighty and oh-so-clever, God brings in another power to limit the previous power, to shape it, to control it, so that ultimately, by way of discipline, he only allows them to go so far and no farther. And I think, perhaps, we can learn that lesson from there. And now, in chapter two, the man with the measuring line.

What a comfort in any dispensation that when man fails in responsibility and is necessarily disciplined and appears to be missing the blessing and it seems to have gone forever, it's always consoling to know that God himself is in ultimate control.

[00:37:05] It's God who has the measuring line. He's the one who has the measure. As we would see in many other connections, he's the God of measure. He sets the limit as to how far God will allow people to go, families to go, nations to go, local assemblies to go. He sets the limit.

Persecution, slander, or anywhere else, God sets the limit.

Ten days.

And no force of man or demon can go farther than God has decreed. And so, when we look in chapter two and verse one, we find that a man has a measure and he sets the limit.

Now, that's all I propose to say about the measuring line.

[00:38:01] God reserves to himself ultimate overall control.

To any suffering saint in any dispensation, it's one of the messages of prophecy that God has his overall plan, which he is working to, and that man cannot say nay to.

What God has decreed will ultimately be brought to pass. Now then, where is it going to happen? If we look, I'll read now from verses eight to thirteen of chapter two.

We've covered the substance of the other verses.

Verse eight of chapter two. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoil you, for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, [00:39:04] and there shall be a spoil to their servants, and ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee, and the Lord shall inherit Judah, his portion, in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent to all flesh before the Lord, for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.

God gives the prophet, and the prophet passes on to the nation, this final view.

He said God's plans will not be thwarted. [00:40:02] The day will come when the nation, and the city of

Jerusalem, will be in right place, and have the right blessing, and the right relationship with their Jehovah God. And then, and only then, will everything on the earth be in its proper place. But he says, I must say, that there's a time given here, which is looking right on.

Here again he says, let thine eyes look right on. There are two phrases here, verse 8, after the glory.

And another phrase, which is characteristic of the prophecy, verse 11, in that day.

After the glory in that day, thinking even of ourselves, [00:41:02] we learn, we know, that when he shall appear, so shall we also appear in glory.

We know that at his appearing, that grand public climax on earth, when God personally intervenes in the person of his son, exercises due retribution upon the enemies of God, and the enemies of the people of God. Having put down the enemies, he introduces his kingdom, and the time then comes in that day, which God has looked forward to for so long. As he says, God has appointed a day, in which he will rule the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he has given assurance unto all, [00:42:01] in that he has raised him from the dead. Feel free, if you will, to use that in the gospel, to bring a challenge to an individual soul, but I'm assured that that looks on to the glory, that day, that day when the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings, Lord of lords, ushers in his kingdom.

That is the only day, when the world will be ruled, administered in righteousness, by God's appointed man.

After the glory, after his appearing, there will be a day of peace, prosperity, and glory, that the world has never yet seen. The culmination of the ways of God on earth, when all these long-term prophecies, at the time of Zechariah, are fulfilled literally.

These partial recoveries, partial restorations, [00:43:01] partial repentances, look on to the time, when there'll be national repentance, national deliverance, national elevation.

And for some of those details, we must wait till another time, if the Lord will.

But for the moment, let us sing hymn number 430.

To wait for that appointed day, when Christ, his glories will display, be this our one great care.

God gives us information about the future, to regulate our lives at the present time. In the light of what we are beginning to learn, about God's dealings with his earthly people, it should make us more sensitive to what it means to be true to him, as we wait for the Lord to come. 430. [00:44:02] To wait for that appointed day, when Christ, his glories will display, be this our one great care, to regulate our lives at the present time.

For what is good of coming down here, we know the whole truth.

Land of Israel, Lord of Israel, land of our fathers, land of our fathers, [00:45:03] now and forevermore, earth, wave, water, fields, lakes, and swamps, in your eternal years, your nations and their elders, thy children, all the time is theirs, how long is the good day?

We wait till that appointed day.