

Zechariah Chapter One

Prologue: The Call to Repentance (1.1-6)

The first six verses of Zechariah lay the foundation for the entire prophecy. God desires to bless His people, but there must be a reciprocal spiritual attitude of heart to receive such blessings. **v.1:** Zechariah began prophesying in the *eighth* month (October/November) of the *second* year of Darius (520BC). Haggai had already begun his ministry two months previous (see table below).

Date	Prophecy
29 August, 520BC	Haggai 1.1-11; Ezra 5.1. Feasting when they ought to have been fasting. Relaxing when they ought to have been building. <i>Consider your ways.</i>
21 September, 520BC	Haggai 1.12-15; Ezra 5.2. Temple building resumed. <i>I am with you, saith the Lord.</i>
17 October, 520BC	Haggai 2.1-9. The glory of the temple. <i>Be strong and work. I will fill this house with glory.</i>
October/November 520BC	Zechariah 1.1-6. Call to repentance. <i>Turn ye unto me... and I will turn unto you.</i>
18 December, 520BC	Haggai 2.10-23. Defilement of the people. Promise of future blessing upon repentance.
15 February, 519BC	Zechariah 1.7-6.8. Eight visions.

Prophets frequently dated their prophecies by the reign of a king, usually of Israel or Judah (e.g. Jeremiah 1.2; Isaiah 1.1). Sadly, the books of Haggai (1.1, 15; 2.10) and Zechariah (1.1, 7; 7.1) name a pagan, Gentile king. There is no king in Israel; it is the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21.24). Darius was the Persian king who succeeded Cambyses (530-522BC) and Cyrus (559-530BC), the latter being used of God to decree the return from exile in Babylon (538BC). Zechariah the prophet was raised up as God's spokesman. Prophets were not philosophers; neither did they merely tell the people what they wanted to hear. They were *divine* messengers, declaring the word of Jehovah. The very names of Zechariah and his ancestors would have stirred up much encouragement for the people and provides a synopsis of the prophecy: Jehovah remembers (*Zechariah*) and blesses (*Berechiah*) at the appointed time (*Iddo*).

v.2: Zechariah's first words emphasise God's anger with their ancestors. The Hebrew literally reads: 'Angry was Jehovah at your fathers with great anger'. He was angry, angry, as exhibited by a remnant of Israel standing amidst the rubble of Jerusalem. The reason for such anger is found in **v.4**. They had displeased God because of their disobedience. Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah constantly called the people to turn *from* their evil ways (a direction or tendency towards evil) and practices (the actual activity of evil) *to* God. These prophets denounced two sins time and again – idolatry and hypocrisy. Idolatry is putting something else in the place of God and giving it the honour only He should have. Hypocrisy is 'worship divorced from any serious commitment to obeying God in everyday life'. The fathers did not listen and would not repent, thus God disciplined them in captivity. *2 Chronicles 36.16: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.* **v.5:** Zechariah asks two rhetorical questions to warn the people of the brevity of time. Your fathers, where are they? They died in judgment. Do the prophets live forever? The opportunity for repentance they offered is brief. There is so little time in which to do anything for the glory of God. **v.6:** But, in great contrast to the brevity of life, the word of God never passes away (1 Peter 1.25). *JJ Stubbs: The human instruments God had used to warn and demand repentance from their fathers had ceased. Their voices had long since become silent, but the divine word had been solemnly fulfilled.* In fact, God's word of impending judgment had pursued and overtaken the fathers, resulting in their captivity (Deuteronomy 28.15, 45). Ironically, the fathers repented in captivity, recognising that their punishment was just reward for their actions (Ezra 9-10; Daniel 9.1-19).

Verse 3 is thus the focus of Zechariah's first message. The Lord of Hosts (x3 in this verse) demands repentance. 'Be not, then, as your fathers. Don't repent when it's too late! Don't repent *after* the judgment!' God will not bless His people regardless of their spiritual condition. 'Lord of Hosts' is a title that is used 53 times in Zechariah. In Scripture, 'hosts' is a word used to describe stars, angels, people and armies. It therefore depicts Jehovah as sovereign and omnipotent Master of the universe. In a day when Israel had no army, Jehovah would be their army (Isaiah 52.12). 'Turn ye' or 'repent' is the great cry. The people were no longer where they ought to be. *Positionally* they were back in the land, *practically* they had begun building, but *spiritually*, a deeper commitment was required. They were immersed in themselves, living like ordinary people with no interest in God (Haggai 1.4). A personal return to **God** (not the Law) and allegiance to Him was needed. As Christians, we are prone to drifting from proper devotion to our God. We must listen to the Spirit's voice gently calling us closer. Are there things in our lives that need to be set aside? *James 4.8: Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*

Vision One: The Man Among the Myrtles (1.7-17) Divine Presence

v.7: Zechariah's second message came *three* months (approximately) after the first. It was on this very day, *five* months earlier, the building of the temple had resumed (Haggai 1.14-15). This word from the Lord (1.7-6.8) contains *eight* visions which concern God's purpose for the nation of Israel, centred in Jerusalem. It is by means of the fulfilment of these visions that God will re-display His glory in the coming Priest-King (6.13).

v.8: The *first* vision depicts a military scene declaring the Lord's presence with them (Haggai 1.13; 2.4). Zechariah saw a *vision*, that which is seen by a person who is awake (in contrast to a dream). That these visions came by night is suggestive of the dark social and spiritual conditions of the nation. The 'man' is later identified as the Angel of the Lord (v.11) and is a personal manifestation of the Captain of the Lord's hosts (cf. Joshua 5.13-15). The vision was readily applicable to the times as Persian rulers used mounted horsemen to patrol their empire and report on its condition. The Angel rides a 'red (dark chestnut) horse'. Horses are symbolic of war (Jeremiah 6.23; Ezekiel 39.20) and the colour red of blood, judgment and vengeance (Isaiah 63.1-2; Revelation 6.4). The 'myrtle trees' (*haddasah* shrub, from Jewish form of 'Esther') appear to be symbolic of the nation of Israel. The tree was a lowly (growing only 6-8 feet) and fragrant (with white blossoms) evergreen, often associated with new life and millennial blessing (Isaiah 41.19; 55.13; Nehemiah 8.15). Israel was presently in the 'valley' as a nation, having been brought through the humiliation and shame of exile. Three groups of horses (plural), *red, speckled* (mixture of red and white – light brown) and *white* in colour stood behind the Angel. They represent an angelic squadron (cf. v.10) ready to execute their Captain's commands. The colours speak of judgment tempered with mercy (speckled) and victory, triumph and glory (white). The picture clearly depicts the 'readiness of the *Lord of Hosts* to go forth with His angelic cohorts to execute swift judgment on Israel's oppressors' and restore them to blessing (David Baron).



v.9: So that Zechariah might understand the visions, he is accompanied by an interpreting angel who appears in seven of the eight visions. **v.10:** But it is the 'man', identified as the Angel of the Lord (v.11) who answers Zechariah's question. He is the great revelation of truth. The Angel seems to have dismounted from the horse and now stands in the ravine amongst the myrtles – a beautiful picture of God in the midst of His people. 'To and fro' suggests *restless activity* and is used of Satan (Job 1.7). The Lord's angelic squadron move unceasingly throughout the earth to frustrate Satan's designs and defend the Lord's people (Psalm 34.7). They are Divine emissaries patrolling, surveying and recording the activities of nations. **v.11:** Although He has not appeared in Israel's history for 200 years, the Angel of the Lord is depicted in Scripture as the defender and protector of Israel (Genesis 16.13; Exodus 3.2; Psalm 34.7; Isaiah 63.9). The record of the Angelic reconnaissance is 'the earth sitteth still, and is at rest'. The Gentile nations had exiled and scattered Israel, and were now living in the undisturbed enjoyment of relative political peace. No one seemed to care about the afflictions and sorrows of Israel. **v.12:** No one that is except for the Angel of the Lord. This is the faithful High Priest who ever pleads the cause of His people – those who are upon the onyx stones of His shoulders, and precious stones of His breastplate. The Angel pleads for the completion of the process of restoration. Whilst the seventy years' captivity had come to an end in 536BC, the seventy years' *desolations* of Jerusalem were not yet accomplished. 516BC marked the completion of the temple (seventy years since it was destroyed, 586BC). This is likely the years of 'indignation' spoken of here (Jeremiah 25.11; 2 Chronicles 36.21). Note then the timeliness of the intercession (1 John 5.14).

v.13: The Lord responds with 'good' (prosperous, cheerful) and 'comfortable' (compassionate) words, expanded in vv.14-17. First, God is jealous for His people (**v.14**). The Hebrew word comes from the Arabic meaning 'to turn intensely red or black' – describing the colour of the face when someone is furious. God is *intensely passionate* for His covenant people and cannot tolerate their mistreatment. Second, God will judge those heathen Gentile nations that added to the affliction of His people (**v.15**). *David Baron: It is as if while a father was reluctantly punishing his forward but still beloved child with a stick, a stranger were to come and begin to smite him with an iron rod!* Third, the 'tender affection' (mercies) of the Lord would ensure the temple and city of Jerusalem would be re-built once again (**v.16**). This is a prophecy of double character. Whilst the temple would be rebuilt in three years, and the city of Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah, their full glories await a millennial day when the Lord shall be in their midst (Isaiah 51.3; Ezekiel 48.35). The surveyor's line being stretched forth upon Jerusalem is a figure of *reconstruction* and *restoration* (cp. Lamentations 2.8). Fourth, Jehovah will abundantly bless His people (**v.17**). Not only Jerusalem, but the cities of Israel would be enriched and 'overflow' with economic, social and spiritual prosperity (cp. Haggai 2.15-19; Isaiah 60.4-9). Zion shall yet be comforted by the fulfilment of God's promises, and Jerusalem will be universally displayed and re-affirmed as the city of God's choice (Romans 11.29).