

Message #2

Zechariah 1:1-6

I finished reading through the Bible several weeks ago, so I started over and Tuesday morning about 4 AM, I was sitting in my Lazy Boy drinking a cup of coffee and I was reading Deuteronomy 6. In that chapter God tells Israel that she needs to make certain that when He brings her into a “land flowing with milk and honey” (6:3) that she needs to stay focused on fearing God and obeying God and worshipping God. God says things will be great if you keep that focus. But then He says this; if you drift away from Me and start following the worship practices of people who don’t know Me, **“the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you and He will wipe you off the face of the earth”** (Deut. 6:15).

Wow. That’s pretty intense. Wait a minute. We love reading about how God loves us and will bless us, but we sure don’t like reading about a God who would get angry with His own people and actually kill them. Thank goodness we don’t live in the O.T. days where God threatens He would kill people in the church.

Well there is that text in Revelation 2:23 where Jesus Christ was addressing the church of Thyatira and he was fed up with the fact that the people going to that church were idolatrous and immoral so Jesus said I will start killing people in the church, including children. Wait a minute, God would never allow people in a church to be killed, would He? He is a loving God, isn’t He? He is a forgiving God, isn’t He? He is a merciful God, isn’t He? Yes, He absolutely is, but in any dispensation, if His people move away from Him, He will get angry and when God gets angry with His people and property, He sovereignly sanctions bad things to happen. He can wipe out a nation and He can wipe out a church.

Zechariah is a book of positive encouragement, but Zechariah does not open his prophetic book with positive flattery. He gets right to the heart of things.

Verse 1 says that this first prophetic message came in the 8th month of the second year of Darius. The month was October or November and the year was 520 B.C.. So this happened almost exactly 2,537 years ago this very time.

When the Word of the LORD came to Zechariah, the Israelites were leading a relatively quiet life (Zech. 1:11). Nearly 50,000 Jews had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon and they had rebuilt the foundation of the Temple. Things were going quite nicely and life was good. Darius was very positive toward Israel and the days of the Babylonian dominance were over and Darius had reinforced the edicts of Cyrus. So Jews were back in the land and life was good.

One thing we see from **verse 1** is that Israel was under the control of a foreign Mede king, Darius. There should have been a King in Israel, but there was no king in Israel. This is really a slap in the face against Israel. Israel was supposed to be on top of the Gentile world; instead, the Gentile world was on top of Israel. Jesus predicted that Gentiles would continue to dominate Israel in the world until she turns to Him (Luke 21:24; Matt. 23:37-39). She has not done this to this very day.

The problem with God's own people is that most of God's people were never really serious about being right with God.

Oh they liked their religion and they were enjoying their lives, but they weren't too interested in really being right with God. They were not serious about God and His Word. In fact, most did not see themselves as sinners. They certainly did not see themselves as needing to turn from evil. They did not sense some need to do much of anything for God.

It was in that very context that God decided to speak to His people through a young man named Zechariah. Zechariah's first message is not a pleasant one, but it is what God wanted revealed to His own people.

We learn from **verse 1** that Zechariah did not come up with this opening message, "the LORD" did. It was "the word of the LORD" that came to the prophet Zechariah and, as a prophet, he had the responsibility to present it accurately and precisely to the people.

That phrase "the word of the LORD" appears six times in the book—1:1, 7; 4:8; 6:9; 7:1, 8. Zechariah is not sitting home dreaming up something to share with the people. This is not just Zechariah's opinion; this revelatory message is directly from God Himself.

By the way, this is always what God does to revive the spirituality of His people; He raises up someone to powerfully proclaim His Word. That is what God did in the 1500's with Luther. That is what God did in the 1700's with Whitefield. He always raises up someone to proclaim His Word.

Now the opening message that Zechariah is called to present to the people is not light. What Zechariah says is this:

GOD INVITES HIS PEOPLE WHO ARE DOING EVIL TO RETURN TO HIM AND HIS WORD TO EXPERIENCE HIS BLESSINGS RATHER THAN BEING THE OBJECT OF HIS ANGER.

This is the key to a blessed life. God's people need to continually return to the Lord from their evil. We need to continually commit ourselves and recommit ourselves to our relationship with God.

Now many of God's people were back in the land thinking God loves us and is real happy with us. After all, we are part of the elite people who left Babylon and came here to Jerusalem. Their whole thought was we are blessed by God and God is sure happy with us. Zechariah says you aren't even right with God and you need to get right with God because God is a God who has an angry side and if you cross that line, you will experience one bad thing after another.

The opening verses of Zechariah are a message from God. In this message, he communicates some key thoughts:

THOUGHT #1 – The LORD was very angry with your fathers. **1:2**

The opening message to His own people is not some light, fluffy, upbeat message designed to tickle their religious itches. It is straight and right to the point.

Zechariah is reminding Israel that the reason for all of the problems that led them to the mess they were in was because the Lord was angry with the sin of His people and He let them go into captivity. God said, “I got very angry” with your fathers.

The words “very angry” are emphatic in Hebrew. God was extremely angry with Israel and as near as I can tell, He still is. Take a look at Jerusalem right now. Would you say God is happy with Israel and is blessing Israel? You have some idolatrous Muslim shrine, Dome of the Rock, sitting on property that is sacred in the mind of God. Is God happy with Israel? Well we would say, “No.” Well why not? Why has He let this happen? Because she is not right with Him and she is not even interested in being right with Him. That has made God “very angry.”

Stephen Miller writes: “Look around! Jerusalem is in ruins, and Solomon’s magnificent temple is destroyed. This is the result of rebellion and sin. We must not rebel against the LORD like our ancestors did. We must repent” (*Zechariah*, p. 139).

Sixty-six years before this prophecy of Zechariah, God allowed Jerusalem to be totally destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.. Why? Because He was angry.

See there is a holiness and righteousness side to God and when His own people are not pursuing His kind of holiness, it makes Him angry. This is what most people don’t understand. God is a God of love and grace. He is a God of tremendous forgiveness. However, He is also a God of righteousness and justice.

There are things God loves and there are things God hates. If His people do not turn away from the things God’s hates, they will anger God and when that happens negative things hit.

The reason why Israel ended up in Babylonian captivity was because the forefathers of these very people turned away from God and His Word and they refused to repent of their sin and God sent judgment.

God expects His people to pursue a life that pleases Him and not angers Him and Israel was not doing that. This is exactly what Zechariah said.

G. Campbell Morgan made an interesting observation when he said people can look back on past history that was glorious and focus on that and forget about how the glory was lost (*The Minor Prophets*, p.135)

It is one thing to realize that things used to be good in the past but then forget about how things got so bad and how we are on the same path that led to the bad things.

THOUGHT #2 – God’s people need to return to the LORD. **1:3**

This is an amazing invitation of grace. God still cares about His people and He wants a relationship with His people even when they have wandered far away from His Word and will.

Three times God reveals Himself in this verse to be “the LORD of hosts” (YHWH Sibaoth). Why three? God is a Trinity. There are three members of the Godhead who have sovereign power—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This title means God is saying I am absolutely sovereign over everything in heaven and on earth and I have infinite resources at My disposal to be able to carry out My will. God is the Almighty Sovereign God over all forces and powers in the heaven and universe. **God says I sovereignly control everything and if you will return to Me, I will return to you and use My resources to bless you.**

Now you would think that someone from Israel who reads the Bible would ponder this. You would think they would say to themselves, well God is the Sovereign God, why isn’t He blessing us? Why aren’t the nations of the world looking at and saying there is the nation of God?

The answer is right here. This message is straight forward. God’s people need to return to the LORD and they need to turn from evil. If they do, God will return to have a relationship with them that blesses them. **If God’s people will turn from evil and turn to God, then the Sovereign God who is above all and over all will use all of His resources to bless them.** What an amazing invitation. In Deuteronomy 11:12 God says His eyes are always on Israel’s Land.

Now what they needed to do was face evil sin. What one needs to return to the Lord from is evil sin. If one is going to return to the Lord, one must turn away from evil.

That word “return” means to turn away from the sin and evil and turn to God and His Word. The repentance message here is given to people who are already God’s people. **This is what real repentance is; it is turning from sin and turning to God. But the repentance message is not aimed at lost heathens; it is aimed at God’s people.**

In the New Testament, James communicates exactly the same message: “Draw near to God and He will draw hear to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners; and purify your hearts you double-minded” (James 4:8).

Now of course to return to the LORD, one would have to admit he is away from the Lord and is not right in his relationship with God. One would have to admit sin and evil. You don’t return to something unless you realize you are away from something. This is a mandate for God’s own people to admit they are sinners.

Here is one of the great grace offers—if God’s people return to Him, He will return to them. What that means is that He will favor His people and bless His people who turn from evil and turn back to Him.

No matter how far out there you are, if you return to God, He will return to you. What that means is that God will make His presence known to Israel and she will become the special object of His blessing and power and protection.

THOUGHT #3 – God’s people do not want to be like those who do not listen to God’s Word.
1:4

People interested in being right with God will be very interested in the Word of God. There are many people who claim they are right with God who will not ever listen to the Word of God. There are many people who think they are fine just the way they are.

We do not know specifically what the “evil deeds” are, but Zechariah challenges the people to return to the LORD, no matter what they are.

We know that in many places there were things listed like injustice, oppression, theft, murder, adultery, perversion and idolatry. In Zechariah 7:9, we learn that the people were not just, kind or compassionate with each other. The fact is, they were not heeding the Word of God and they needed to turn from their evil works, whatever they were.

The problem with their forefathers is that they did not turn to the Lord. In fact, they would not listen to the Prophets and pay attention to the Word of God. **Here is a key factor for not getting the blessings of God; one is not serious about God’s Word.**

THOUGHT #4 – God asks His people questions about their fathers and prophets. **1:5-6**

If we choose to follow someone who didn’t care about God or His Word, we are a fool. If we choose to follow someone who was never blessed by God, we are absurd.

Now there are three questions that God asks of His people:

Question #1 - Where are your fathers?

Zechariah says where are your fathers who didn’t listen to the prophets? **The answer is lying dead in Babylon.**

What a legacy those people left for their children to see. Their dads and moms were never serious about God and His Word and they ended up dying in some foreign land and never did experience the blessings of God.

Question #2 - Do the prophets live forever? **The answer is no.**

God raised up prophets to warn the people and the people didn't listen. God warned Israel and Judah that if she did not turn from evil, He would destroy them. Those prophets included Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and others. Those prophets did not live forever and in the end they died and the people stayed in their sin and never did get serious about God's Word.

Question #3 - Did My words that I proclaimed through My prophets overtake your fathers?
The answer is yes.

So the point of this is in the end, the only thing that really lives forever is the Word of God. In the end the Divine Word of God stands.

No one lives forever. However, you can live your life in such a way that it is right with God so you may enjoy all of His blessings. That happens by obeying God's Word.

The nation Israel suffered one curse after another that came from the hand of God.

THOUGHT #5 – God's prophetic Word finally led to repentance, but had they repented earlier, they could have escaped God's judgment. **1:6**

God is graciously willing to deal with His people, but His people must deal with their sin and deal with their relationship with God.

God loves us and has a desire to have us come back to Him even when we are way out of His will.

Take a look at what happens to people who do not turn from their evil. It is not a happy story.

There are two main themes that run throughout this opening message of Zechariah:

Theme #1 - Sinning against God angers God and will bring the judgment of God.

Theme #2 - Turning from sin to God pleases God and will bring the blessings of God.