

Visions of the Restoration of Jerusalem [chapters 1-8], Part 1

Any Sesame Street fans out there?

Tonight’s sermon is brought to you by the number *four!*
And by the Hebrew letter *yod*.

I thought about preaching only on chapter 1 –
but chapter 2 completes chapter 1.

The promise of the measuring line in chapter 1, verse 16, is fulfilled in chapter 2, verse 1.
And the judgment against the nations in chapter 1
ends in the salvation of the nations in chapter 2.

And what holds these two chapters together is the number 4.

The key number in these opening chapters is the number 4.

There are four horses (1:8).
There are four horns (1:18).
There are four craftsmen (1:20).
There are the four winds of the heavens (2:6).

In other words, these opening visions are all about the whole world.

The four horseman “patrol the earth.”
The four horns are all the nations that scattered God’s people.
The four craftsmen are those who cast down the nations that scattered God’s people.
And the four winds of the heavens describe the extent of the scattering.

And the Hebrew letter *yod* does something interesting to the story at the end of chapter 2 –
which made me realize that the whole passage needed to go together!

1. Return to Me, and I Will Return to You (1:1-6)

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying,

The eighth month of the second year of Darius is October or November of 520 B.C.
Haggai was a contemporary of Zechariah.
And Haggai’s prophecies came in the sixth, seventh, and ninth months
(from August to December of 520 B.C.)

So the call to Zechariah comes towards the end of the messages of the LORD through Haggai.
This interlocking calendar has the effect of tying together Haggai and Zechariah

And of course, the second year of Darius is one of the key years in the book of Ezra – because it was in the second year of Darius that the rebuilding of the temple resumed. Ezra 6:15 tells us that the temple was finished in the sixth year of Darius – so it took around 3 ½ years to complete the building of the temple.

But Haggai and Zechariah played a crucial role in encouraging the people of God through their preaching!

Zechariah starts by reminding Israel of their history:

The LORD was very angry with your fathers.

² *“The LORD was very angry with your fathers. 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. ⁴ Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. ⁵ Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? 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.’”*

The anger of the LORD drives this opening chapter.

The opening message of Zechariah is a message of warning – a call to repentance – to *return* to the LORD.

Do not be like your fathers.

Your fathers heard the call of the prophets – but they did not repent.

Where are they now?

The prophets do not live forever –

you can always ignore a prophet – or kill him!

But the Word of the LORD endures forever –

and his words – his statutes – cannot be altered.

And so when the LORD speaks, you can be certain that it will come to pass.

“As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.”

So the question is:

What will you do?

How will you respond to the word of the LORD?

Will you “return” to the LORD?

Because God says that if you return to him, he will return to you.
Does that seem backward?

Scripture speaks in both ways:

Sometimes it speaks in terms of God turning us to him –
other times it speaks of our turning to the LORD.

But if you think about it,
the fact that *God* is *calling* his people to return to him
already indicates his gracious disposition toward them.

And you see particularly God’s gracious disposition toward *sinner*s.

John Chrysostom, the fourth century bishop of Constantinople, said it well:

“Indeed, God is good to everyone,
but he shows his patient endurance especially to those who sin...

God always seems to be severe to the righteous
but good to sinners and quick to clemency.

He restores the one who sinned and fell and tells him,

“Shall not he who falls arise;
or he that turns away, shall he not turn back again?”

And... again “Return to me, and I will return to you.”

Elsewhere he assures with an oath

the salvation from repentance by much clemency,

“As I live, says the Lord, I do not desire the death of a sinner,
but that he should turn from his way and live.” (232)

God is merciful to *sinner*s.

He calls you to return to him and he will return to you.

2. The LORD Will Again Comfort Zion (1:7-17)

a. The Word of the LORD (v7)

⁷ *On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying,*

There are eight visions that came to Zechariah on the 24th day of the eleventh month.

They are commonly called “the night visions” –
based on verse 8 – “I saw in the night...”

It is the 24th day of the 11th month, in the 2nd year of Darius.

February 15, 519 B.C.

The eleventh month is not really a very important month in biblical history.

There is only one other event in biblical history associated with the eleventh month.

Moses preached his farewell sermons in the eleventh month on the plains of Moab (Dt. 1:3),

as Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land.

The message of Deuteronomy lies firmly in the background of Zechariah.

In Deuteronomy 30, after saying that Israel was going to fail –
and Israel was going to be driven out of the Promised Land –
then Moses told them;

“And when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse,
which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations
where the LORD your God has driven you,
and return to the LORD your God, you and your children,
and obey his voice in all that I command you today,
with all your heart and with all your soul,
then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes
and have compassion on you,
and he will gather you again from all the peoples
where the LORD your God has scattered you.” (Dt 30:1-3)

But there is another connection that is equally important.

We just finished looking at the prophet Haggai a few weeks ago.

Haggai’s last prophecy was on the 24th day of the 9th month, in the second year of Darius.

Exactly two months after the last prophecy of Haggai,
the word of the LORD came to Zechariah.

There is a way in which Zechariah continues and develops the message of Haggai.

At which point, all of you are wondering,

“Could you remind us, what was the message of Haggai???”

The central theme of Haggai was the call to rebuild the temple.

The LORD objected that Israel was busy building their own houses,
while God’s house lay in ruins.

The central message was “Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts.

according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt.

...The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former,
says the LORD of hosts...” (2:4-5, 9)

Haggai was all about the importance of *building the temple* –
building up the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Haggai’s message was an exhortation to the people of God
to *get back to work!*

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness!

That should be your focus!!

Zechariah is now dealing with the bigger picture – the longer term.

And so, not surprisingly,
there is a lot of apocalyptic imagery in Zechariah –
lots of connections to the book of Revelation.

For instance, right up front we see the four horsemen of the apocalypse:

b. The Horseman on Patrol Reports that the Earth Remains at Rest (v8-11)

⁸ *“I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. ⁹ Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me, ‘I will show you what they are.’ ¹⁰ So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, ‘These are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.’ ¹¹ And they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, ‘We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.’*

We see a man riding on a red horse (think of a rich chestnut color).

Behind him are another red horse, a sorrel (light brown) and a white horse.
Presumably the other horses also have riders –
since “they” speak in verse 11.

The picture here is of a scouting party reporting back to their captain.

The man on the red horse is the angel of the LORD.
His patrol has been out scouting the earth.

And they report that all the earth is at rest.

You might think that this is a good thing –
but the angel of the LORD disagrees:

c. The Angel of the LORD Intercedes for Jerusalem (v12-13)

¹² *Then the angel of the LORD said, ‘O LORD of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?’ ¹³ And the LORD answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.*

The temple had been destroyed in 587 B.C.

We are now 67 years later.

There are actually two different “seventy years” spans –
the first is from Babylon’s first attack to Cyrus’s decree (605-538),
the second is from the destruction of the temple to its rebuilding (587-515).

Different prophets focus on different aspects of the “seventy years” –
but the point is that it is not a good thing for all the earth to be at peace –
if that peace is *hostile* to the Kingdom of God!

If the kingdom of God is going to come,
then the kingdoms of the earth cannot remain at peace.

For God to show mercy to his people,
there must be disruption of the powers that are arrayed against the gospel!

When we see the chaos and trouble of the nations today,
that can actually be a good thing!
The disruption of the nations is something that causes them to seek and look for something else!
Think of how Mao-tse-dong disrupted the peace of China –
and even though he was hostile to the gospel,
he wound up tearing down all the opposition to the gospel,
with the result that many millions of Chinese were seeking something.

Think of how disruptive Al-qaeda and ISIS have been!
And yet *nothing* has prompted more conversions to Christ in the Middle East!
No missionary has ever been half as effective as Osama Bin Laden!
Hundreds of thousands of Muslims have turned to Jesus
because of the disruption caused by radical Islam.

When the nations are “at rest” – the kingdom of God suffers.
And hearing the comforting words of the LORD, the messenger now says to Zechariah:

**d. The Message for Jerusalem: The LORD Declares that His House Shall Be Built
and He Will Comfort Zion (v14-17)**

¹⁴ So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. ¹⁵ And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster.

When God is only *a little angry*, things get worse!
But when God gets *exceedingly angry with the nations*
then salvation comes to God’s people.

Now watch how this works!
It’s why I realized that I had to preach on *both* chapter 1 *and* chapter 2 tonight!
Because if we stopped with chapter 1,
you might think that when God saves his people,
he destroys the nations.

But take a sneak peak at the end of chapter 2 – verses 10-11:
“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion,
for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD.
And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day,
and shall be my people.”

God's *blessing* comes upon nations that join themselves to the LORD.

When Constantine became a Christian,
that was a *blessing* for the Roman emperor.

When Vladimir I of Russia became a Christian,
that was a blessing to the Russian people.

Oh, sure, there are all sorts of problems that come when powerful people become Christians.

But that does not change the fact that their conversion is exactly what God promised!

God disrupts the "ease" of the nations because they are hostile to him –

but he does that in order to bring salvation to the nations
through his holy city...

And you see that in verses 16-17:

¹⁶ Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. ¹⁷ Cry out again, Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.'"

The rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem is for the purpose of the salvation of the nation.

But it *starts* with the comfort of Zion – and the election (the choosing) of Jerusalem.

By this point it should be clear that God's *disposition* towards Jerusalem
is one of grace and mercy.

The call that we saw at the beginning of the chapter –

"return to me, and I will return to you" –

needs to be understood in the light
of God's gracious disposition towards his people.

In some passages the focus is on God's *faithfulness* to his promises –

his steadfast love – his loyalty to his own word.

But here there is a different emphasis.

Covenant loyalty – faithfulness to his promises – is all very good

(and indeed, it is *very good!*),

But it is equally important to highlight (as verses 16-17 do)

God's *mercy* and *compassion*.

He is both faithful to his own word *and* merciful and compassionate toward *us*.

And that's *why* he will cast down the nations that scattered Jerusalem!

3. The LORD Will Cast Down the Nations that Scattered Jerusalem (1:18-21)

¹⁸ [a] *And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four horns!* ¹⁹ *And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these?” And he said to me, “These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.”* ²⁰ *Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen.* ²¹ *And I said, “What are these coming to do?” He said, “These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one raised his head. And these have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it.”*

Verses 18-21 then show us a vision of *four horns* –
which are the nations that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem;
and then the LORD showed me four craftsmen,
which have come to terrify the nations and cast down the horns of the nations,
“who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it.”

Why is it a *good thing* for God to “terrify” the nations?
God himself says, “Vengeance is mine, says the LORD, I will repay.”

Sometimes we talk as though vengeance is bad.
But if that was true, then the saying would be:
“Vengeance is bad, God will do nothing.”

But what happens if God does nothing?
Then the wicked will continue to triumph –
the peace of the wicked will continue to flourish –
which can only end in misery and destruction for all the earth!

God’s *vengeance* is essential for bringing *true peace* on the earth!

And this what we see in the vision of chapter 2.

God had said in 1:16 that the measuring line would be stretched out over Jerusalem –
and that’s exactly what happens at the beginning of chapter 2:

4. The Presence of the LORD Will Bring Many Nations to Him (2:1-13)
a. Measuring Jerusalem? Don’t Bother – the LORD Will Be the Glory in Her Midst (v1-5)

² [b] *And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand!* ² *Then I said, “Where are you going?” And he said to me, “To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length.”* ³ *And behold, the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him* ⁴ *and said to him, “Run, say to that young man, ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock in it.’* ⁵ *And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD, and I will be the glory in her midst.’”*

He is going to measure Jerusalem –
but the angel says, tell him, don't bother!
Jerusalem is going to grow so fast,
you won't be able to measure the walls!

And before you worry about how they will defend themselves against their enemies,
don't worry – “I will be to her a wall of fire all around...
and I will be the glory in her midst.”

Jerusalem will flourish!
The city of God will expand and grow –
and God himself will dwell in her midst –
and *he* will protect her as a wall of fire!

Don't be afraid!
Jesus has poured out his Spirit upon the church!
The wall of fire can never be breached!

Oh, sure, we will suffer afflictions of various kinds –
but the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.

And so therefore, the LORD urges his people to flee from the nations who are under judgment!
Flee from the land of the north (Babylon) –
and escape to Zion:

b. Escape O Zion! (v6-7)

⁶ Up! Up! Flee from the land of the north, declares the LORD. For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, declares the LORD. ⁷ Up! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.

There is a slight translation issue in the ESV.
Verses 6 and 8 use the second person masculine endings.
Verse 7 uses second person feminine endings.
So those fleeing from the land of the north are masculine.
But the one escaping in verse 7 is feminine!

There is a simple – and elegant – solution!
Translate verse 7 as “Up, escape, O Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.”
Most translations render it as *to Zion* because they are thinking of Zion as a place.
But Zion is also the designation of God's people as the bride.
And – as we saw in Ezra-Nehemiah –
there were definitely those among the returned exiles
(think of Sanballat and Tobiah)

whose allegiance was more to Persia (or perhaps their own interests!)
than to the kingdom of God!

It is not enough to flee *to Zion*.
It is not enough to live in the earthly city of Jerusalem!

Zion herself must escape from Babylon!
We are citizens of a heavenly city!
But what is more, *we are the heavenly city*.
Our earthly citizenship must be held very lightly.
As American citizens, we must always *use* our earthly citizenship
in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ,
because we are his bride – we are his holy city!

Because the earthly city is coming under judgment –
therefore:

c. The Nations Who Plundered You Will Become Plunder (v8-9)

⁸ *For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me^[e] to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye:* ⁹ *“Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me.*

You might be wondering:
what about Jeremiah’s letter?
“Seek the peace of Babylon”?
Seek the welfare of the city where I have put you?!

Which one is it?

And this is especially important for us today – to know the difference!
Which one are *we* supposed to do?
Are we supposed to seek the welfare of the city of South Bend?
Or are we supposed to *flee* from South Bend?

I’m happy to say that the word of God gives a clear and unequivocal answer to this question!
YES!!!

So which is it?
Seek the peace of the city?
Or flee from the city?

Exactly!

Just make sure that you don't do only one of them!
Seek the peace of the city – but don't get entangled in it!
Don't let the peace of the city become *your peace*.

It is not the *Pax Romana* – the peace of Rome – that should govern your heart!
Let the *Pax Christi* – the peace of Christ – rule in your hearts!

And when the peace of Christ rules in *your heart* –
then you can seek the peace of the city in a way that *brings peace*.

And when the peace of Christ rules in *your heart* –
then you can *flee* from the city
when its peace becomes idolatrous –
when its peace becomes the be-all and end-all of its existence.

If your goal is to “make America great again” –
then you will sacrifice the glory of the city of God
for the sake of the city of man.

But if your goal is to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness”
then you will invariably love your neighbor –
so that the stranger becomes a neighbor,
and the neighbor becomes a friend.

And you see the beauty and glory of how this works in verses 10-12:

d. When the LORD Dwells in Your Midst, Many Nations Shall Join Themselves to the LORD” (v10-13)

¹⁰ Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. ¹¹ And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. ¹² And the LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.”

Notice that there are two voices who say “I will dwell in your midst” in verses 10-11.

“behold I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD” –
so plainly it is the *LORD* who comes and dwells in your midst.

But then the angel of the LORD says in verse 11,
“And I will dwell in your midst,
and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you” –
so it is plainly *the angel* who dwells in your midst.

Our Lord Jesus was reflecting on this passage (and others)

when he said in John 14:23,

“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him,
and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

The LORD and the angel of the LORD are one God (with the Holy Spirit).

Zechariah did not necessarily understand this –

but he wrote down what he saw and heard –

and therefore *we* can see more clearly what God was saying and doing here!

Because it is only when God himself came in our flesh –

when the Son of God took to himself our humanity and *dwelt* with us –

that salvation came to the human race.

God became man so that man might become God.

He became all that we are by nature, so that we might become all that he is by grace.

The incarnation is the heart and soul of the gospel.

And so chapter 2 concludes in verse 13:

¹³ *Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.*

Verse 10 says “sing and rejoice, O Daughter of Zion!”

Verse 13 says “be silent all flesh”

Which one are we supposed to do?

Again – of course – the answer is “both!”

Because when the scripture says “be silent” before the LORD,
the point is not *utter* silence.

The point is be silent when God is talking – *so that you can hear him!!*

Be silent when God is doing his mighty deeds – *so that you can see him!!*

And then sing and rejoice in response!

We often use a call to worship that includes the line:

“The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him.”

We are silent when he speaks – so that we can listen!

We are silent when he acts – so that we can behold his mighty deeds!

And then we sing and rejoice before him as we celebrate his great salvation.