

Riders on the Storm

Zechariah 1:7-17

By [Dr. John Currid](#)

It's good to be with you on the Lord's Sabbath Day, where we can come together to study His word. If you would open up your Bibles to the book of Zechariah, Zechariah 1:7-17. This evening we will be looking at the first vision of Zechariah. We are going where angels fear to tread and pastors very rarely go: the book of Zechariah and his wondrous visions. Chapter 1, beginning at verse 7. Please focus and concentrate upon the word of God.

7On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, as follows: 8I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine, with red, sorrel and white horses behind him. 9Then I said, "My lord, what are these?" And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "I will show you what these are." 10And the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are those whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth." 11So 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 is peaceful and quiet." 12Then the angel of the LORD said, "O LORD of hosts, how long will You have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which You have been indignant these seventy years?" 13The LORD answered the angel who was speaking with me with gracious words, comforting words. 14So the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion. 15But I am very angry with the nations who are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster." 16Therefore thus says the LORD, "I will return to Jerusalem with compassion; My house will be built in it," declares the LORD of hosts, "and a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem." 17Again, proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem."'

Most heavenly Father, I pray that You would quiet our hearts at this time, that You would remove the busyness from them. Take away our wandering thoughts.

Open our hearts. Prick our hearts with Your word and then seal Your word in our hearts that we may apply what we hear from the Scriptures. It's in the name of Jesus who sits at the right hand even now that we now pray. Amen.

Let me begin by asking you a question, Do you ever despair over the condition of the Church in the world? At times, does it not appear that the church has no impact, sometimes the Church is irrelevant, the Church is out of touch? When you think of the culture wars, when you think of abortion, it looks like we've lost that one. Promiscuity, looks like we've lost that one. And here we go again, same-sex marriage, looks like we're gonna lose that one. Is that how you feel? Do you despair over such situations? The Church continues to be under great persecution throughout the world. Do you despair over that, over the people of God? And when we look at that we say, "That doesn't seem right. That doesn't seem fair. The Church is God's people. Why then is it in such a state? Why are God's people persecuted? Why are God's people on the run? Why does the Church appear to be impotent in this world?" It's almost as if God has abandoned His people. The world looks victorious in conquering; the Church looks weak and irrelevant. Do you ever feel that way in your own life? Where is God? Has He abandoned me?

The context of Zechariah's visions

Well, the first thing we need to note is that in this text we learn that this is nothing new for the people of God. It was the same in Zechariah's day. The Church was in despair. The Church was being persecuted. The Church was in exile. That's what we see here in chapter 1 of Zechariah. Much of Israel is yet in exile in Babylon. A few have returned, but only a small portion of the people has come back to Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem are yet in disrepair. The temple is in the process of being rebuilt, but it is truly a pitiful affair. All you have to do is read the book of Ezra to see that's the case. When that temple's completed, those who had seen Solomon's temple, they look at the new temple and they weep. They cry forth because it pales in comparison to the temple of Solomon. The people in Jerusalem are under great physical persecution from the people of the land. They are yet a subjugated people: the Persians have control of them. And thus we witness great despair and discouragement from the people of the covenant. And Zechariah and the people of his day were asking the same questions, Has God abandoned His people? The ungodly of the earth appear to be in control—where is God? Why does He not care for His people? How long, O Lord? And we ask that same question, "How long, O Lord?" when we see what goes on around us.

Zechariah's vision itself:

He saw the night.

In the midst of such questioning by the people of God, Zechariah has the first in a series of visions. That's what we want to look at tonight, so I hope you have your Bibles open as we look here at Zechariah 1, beginning in verse 7. I want to read the first two verses again. We're going to work our way through this passage. It's a wondrous passage! Zechariah 1, and I want to look at verses 7 and 8. "On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, as follows: I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine, with red, sorrel and white horses behind him."

Now verse 7 is very interesting. It shows that the people of God are in despair because the date given here is the second year of Darius, and Darius is the king of the Persians. See the Hebrews, most of them, are in exile under the Persian domination. And so they're questioning, O, Lord, where are You? How could You abandon us? How could You put us under the power of the Persians? And then Zechariah has this wondrous vision beginning in verse 8. Look what it says, "I saw at night—" It begins with those words, but that's not what it literally says. Literally from the Hebrew it says, "I saw *the* night." It's not as some understand it that Zechariah's having night visions, that he's dreaming or he's in the night. That's not what's going on here. He sees the night. He sees the darkness. He sees the gloom. That's part of the vision. He sees nighttime and darkness hovering over the sea. Try and picture the vision he has. That's why it's being given to you.

He saw a man riding on a red horse.

And what does he see in the midst of this darkness, in the midst of this gloom? He sees the presence of a man riding on a red horse. And later in verse 11 this figure is identified as the angel of Yahweh, the angel of the Lord. And this, of course, throughout the Old Testament is a pre-incarnate appearance of the Messiah. This is the Messiah on the red horse in the midst of that darkness and that gloom and that despair. We see that other horsemen are accompanying him: these symbolize heaven's legions. These are the hosts that are talked about in the first six verses of the chapter where God is speaking to them and says, "He is the Lord of hosts. He is the Lord of legions. He is the Lord of armies." And that's what we have here: We have the Messiah pictured on the red horse and heaven's legions at the service of the Messiah. There they are on earth, mounted, the presence of the pre-incarnate Christ and the heavenly host mounted on horses on the earth.

And now what does Zechariah see? The Messiah standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine. That's a very interesting picture. It's translated in a lot different ways and a lot of different versions: "in the ravine," or "in the glen," or "in the hollow," or some type of word like that. But the reality is that that term

literally means in Hebrew “the depths,” or “the abyss,” or “the chaos.” There he is: The Messiah there with the horsemen behind Him and they’re among the myrtle trees *over* the chaos, over the depths. And that language is often used of the depths of the sea, such as of the Red Sea. “The depths of the sea” symbolically refers to the chaos, to the trouble, to the dark deep, to the gloom. Are you getting the picture? What Zechariah so far envisions is the earth in darkness and there's a chaotic deep there.

Does that remind you of something? Well, it should. It should remind us of Creation in which there was darkness over the surface of the deep, where there was a gloom, a picture of chaos and emptiness. But Zechariah also sees the presence of the Messianic warrior standing on the sea. This certainly symbolizes the triumph of the Messiah over chaos, the triumph of the Messiah over the oppressive powers of the world. Yes, there's chaos, but there's the Messiah standing, patrolling the earth. And we see Him; He's standing there among the myrtle trees over the abyss. And those trees in the Old Testament portray an idyllic picture of fertility and luxuriance on the earth. This is idyllic symbol and is tied directly to the presence of the Messiah. And so what we see is the earth is pictured as engulfed in darkness and chaos, yet the Messiah is here along with the legions of heaven. What a great and awesome vision! ...especially to a people in despair, people who have no hope, who are crying forth, “How long, O Lord?”

The purpose of the horsemen

Now in verses 9-10, the purpose of the horsemen is now stated. “Then I said [here Zechariah is speaking], ‘My lord, what are these?’ And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, ‘I will show you what these are.’ And the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, ‘These are those whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.’” Here are all the horsemen behind the Messiah, the legions of Yahweh; their purpose is to patrol the earth by the direct command of God. He has set them to scout out the earth, to see the state and condition of the earth. This reminds me of Genesis 28 in which Jacob has a dream of a stairway, or a ladder into heaven, and at the top of the staircase stands Yahweh. And going up and down are God's legions of angels. They are at His beck and call to do His good pleasure, going to the earth to do His will there. And that's what these horsemen are doing. They're out scouting and patrolling the earth. The report of the horsemen—“All the earth is peaceful and quiet.”

Then in verse 11 we see the report of the horsemen. They go out on the earth and what do they see? “So they answered the angel of the LORD [they answered the Messiah] who was standing among the myrtle trees and said, ‘We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth is peaceful and quiet.’” All the earth is quiet, sitting, restful, at peace. The ungodly nations are at ease; they're at rest; they're in harmony. But how can this be? How can chaos be at rest? How can

the ungodly be at peace? And in contrast the covenant nation is not at ease. They're not at peace. The people of God are being persecuted. They're being oppressed. What we see of the ungodly is what we expect of the promised people, the people of God. We expect peace, harmony and rest for the people of God, but what we see is the exact opposite. What the angels and the legions say is, 'Chaos is at ease'; the people of God are in tumult. We see that today, don't we?

The Messiah intercedes—"How long, O Lord?"

Then in verse 12 we see the Messiah intercedes. "Then the angel of the LORD said, 'O LORD of hosts, how long will You have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which You have been indignant these seventy years?'" The Messiah now intercedes for the people and He asks Yahweh that burning question, that burning question of the prophets, "How long?" It's one of the common questions of the Old Testament prophets in the face of injustice, in the face of violence and in persecution. Habakkuk asks that very question when he looks out among his own people and he sees the violence going on among his people, and he says, "O Lord, how long?"

The same question we have today, "How long, O Lord, will things continue to deteriorate?" We look at society around us and we think it cannot get any worse, yet everyday we read the paper and we see it is getting worse. The Church appears to be impotent to stop this immoral slide. The Church seems irrelevant. It seems chided. It's teased; it's persecuted. How long, O Lord, until You step in? Have You abandoned us? How long, O Lord?

Yahweh's answer—"comforting words"

In verses 13-17, we get Yahweh's answer, and let's see what He says here. Beginning in verse 13, "The LORD answered the angel who was speaking with me with gracious words, comforting words. 14 So the angel who was speaking with me said to me, 'Proclaim, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion. 15 But I am very angry with the nations who are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster.' 16 Therefore thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Jerusalem with compassion; My house will be built in it,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'and a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem.' 17 Again, proclaim, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.'"

Look at Yahweh's answer to how long, and in verse 13 He answers with good words. He answers with "comforting words," with words of compassion and mercy to His people who are undergoing these terrible things...compassion and the easing of one's soul. The Israelites are mystified and they're in despair. There's chaos in their hearts, but God speaks soothing words to them. Are we

not the same way? Is there not despair in our hearts? Are we not mystified why God apparently is not acting? But God speaks soothing words to His people.

And His first response is found in verse 14. Did you see that? “So the angel who was speaking with me said to me, ‘Proclaim, saying, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I am—”’ That’s His first response: “I am.” The point for the Hebrews is that despite what they see, despite...they see all the chaos around them and the dominance of the ungodly in the earth...Yahweh is with His people. “I am with you.” This is a crucial affirmation of God’s presence with His people. Despite their outward circumstances, God is jealous for His people. He’s good to His people. He loves His people, and He’s angry with those who are not His people. And He’s working all things according to His purpose for His own glory. What a wonderful lesson for the people of God through history! We’re not to be in despair. We’re not to be afraid. We’re not to consider ourselves defenseless, no matter that the world would tell us that. God is in the midst of His people. He is the rock upon which they stand. As the Psalmist declares, “The Lord of hosts is with us. We will not fear!” Zechariah’s vision here...he lives up to his name. The name Zechariah means, “God remembers.” God does not forget His people. He does not abandon His people. He is with them...*now*, no matter what things look like.

We live by sight and we look irrelevant and we look impotent—but this is untrue. This reminds me, does it not, of the haunting story of 2 Kings 6, in which the king of Syria surrounds Elisha in order to capture him? And in that story, we read beginning at verse 14, “And he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’ So he answered, ‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ And the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” Oh, that the Lord would open our eyes to see that God is with His people. He’s directing them, guiding them, protecting them, bringing all things upon them for their good and for His glory. Oh, that we would have the eyes of faith to see that. No matter what we read in the paper, no matter what we see on TV, no matter what the world would tell us—God is the sovereign Lord of the universe and nothing happens apart from His will and decree.

Now the Lord gives a second response in verses 16 and 17. He says this, “Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘I will return to Jerusalem with compassion; My house will be built in it,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘and a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem.’ 17 Again, proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.”’” These two verses are in the future tense: “*I will*,” He says. In verses 14 and 15 it is “I am with My people,” and 16

and 17, "I will." And the point is that God will never abandon His people, nay, never, ever.

And not only that, there are some great promises here. Not only will He not leave His people, but He promises a wonderful future restoration. And you see what's included in those verses? Following are gifts to His people who He's with, a new temple, a new Jerusalem, a new land, great prosperity. And indeed we see later, even in Zechariah's day and for the Hebrews of his day, there was an insipient fulfillment of these promises. There was the completion of the new temple under Zerubbabel, the rebuilding and its walls under Nehemiah, the return of the people of exile to the land...but is that all?

Is that it? That little temple that they cried over and wept over, that's the fulfillment of this vision? I think not! This initial fulfillment in Zechariah's day does not exhaust that prophecy but it merely points to a greater ultimate fulfillment. Indeed these two promises are for God's people for all time! The present tense is surely true: God is with His people yesterday. Today He is with us. And His promise in the future tense is also true, "I will."

But what about these individual gifts here that are attached to these promises? Are they for the people of God today? Indeed! It's not just for the people of Zechariah's day. But in what manner are these things fulfilled? What about a new temple? Well, it's very clear, isn't it? You go to the gospel of John 2:19-21. Listen to this: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews therefore said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body." In Revelation chapter 21, in the New Jerusalem it is the direct presence of Christ that is the new temple. That's ultimately what Zechariah's prophesying: the presence of God in human form, the shakina glory descended in flesh—the new temple is the Messiah. The new temple is Jesus Christ!

But what about a restored land? Peter talks about this, 1 Peter 1:3-4. Listen to this closely: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." This new land, this new inheritance that Christ has secured for us has been done by His resurrection from the dead as He rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father. Thus all the promises recorded in Zechariah 1 ultimately come to fruition in the work of the Messiah.

But one major difference exists between the people of Zechariah's day and us. They were anticipating. They were looking for the fulfillment of the promises, whereas we look back to the cross of Christ and we see the realization and fulfillment of those promises. How then can we despair of our situation? We need

not ask, "How long, O Lord?" for Christ has come! He's been victorious at the cross! How can we say, "How long?" The rider on the horse has come. He has conquered the chaos and the darkness and the despair. He has had compassion on His people. He has built a New Jerusalem, a new temple and a new land. And He is ever with His people: "And, lo, I am with you always. Do not despair." Amen and amen. Please pray with me.

Most heavenly Father, I pray that You would take this word and sear it into our hearts, this wonderful vision of the Messiah in Zechariah's day that He would come and be triumphant over the chaos. And now we as His people can look back and know that He did that at the cross and He did that for His people. Therefore, we will not fear. Therefore, we will not despair. It's in the wondrous name of Christ that we now pray this.

Please stand for the benediction. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you peace now and forevermore. Amen.

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