

GOD'S PLANS FOR THE FUTURE
ZECHARIAH 1:18 – 2:13

Jeanne Calment was born in 1875 in Arles, France. When she was 13, she met Vincent Van Gogh when he came to her hometown to paint (she didn't like him). She stopped riding her bicycle in 1975 — **at the age of 100**. The *New York Times* wrote about her, "Calment might as well have stepped out of a time machine. When she was born, Victor Hugo was still alive and Marcel Proust was just a boy. Alexander Graham Bell had yet to invent the telephone. The gas-powered automobile, the airplane, and the use of electric power all lay in the future. 'I see badly, I hear badly, I can't feel anything, but everything's fine,' she says. When asked what kind of a future she expects, she replies, 'Short, very short.'" [*NY Times*, quoted in RD, 8/95.]

There was no *New York Times* reporter available to ask the Israelites what they thought about their situation when Judah returned to its land after the Babylonian captivity, but given that after laying the foundation of the temple for its reconstruction and then doing nothing more for 15 years because of opposition that Judah faced, I suspect that the average citizen might have responded similarly — **"our future is short, very short."** They were dispirited and discouraged about the future (as we also are often tempted to be).

To encourage the newly returned citizens as well as the citizens who had remained in Judah during the captivity, Zechariah was given a series of prophecies to encourage Judah about the future and to exhort them to continue the work. In the opening six chapters of this book, Zechariah reveals eight visions that he was given on the night of Feb. 15, 519 B.C. (1:7). The second and third visions actually build on the first vision — the second vision (1:18-21) expanding God's anger against the nations (1:15) and the third vision expanding God's commitment to restore Judah (1:14). Combined, these two visions reveal how God comforted and will comfort Israel (1:13) in her troubles and opposition —

GOD COMFORTS BY THE REVELATION OF HIS PLANS FOR JUDGMENT AND BLESSING.

This morning, we consider Zechariah's second and third visions:

1. **What Zechariah SAW in the First Vision (1:18, 20)**
2. **What Zechariah's First Vision MEANT (1:19, 21)**
3. **What Zechariah SAW in the Second Vision (2:1-3)**
4. **What Zechariah's Second Vision MEANT (2:4-5)**
5. **What Zechariah's Visions TEACH About God (2:6-13)**

1. What Zechariah Saw in the Second Vision (1:18, 20)

- The word **then** (1:18) is a conjunction that is used throughout these visions; it connects them so that while they are distinct, they are related. Visions two and three are especially connected to vision one.
- There is simplicity in the two revelations Zechariah saw in this vision —
 - ✓ He saw **four horns** (1:18) —
 - Like the first vision, there is an emphasis on the number four in this vision (1:8, 20); in the final vision there are four chariots (6:1; and presumably four horses) matching the first vision.
 - While Zechariah did not understand the immediate meaning of the horns, he likely would have understood the broad meaning of horns, because the figure was used often in the OT.
 - Animal horns were symbols of power and pride, and often of military power (Ps 18:2; 89:17; Mic 4:13). To shatter someone's horn would be to bring about his defeat (Ps. 75:10; Jer. 48:25).
 - ✓ He saw **four craftsmen** (1:20) —
 - The word "craftsman" is generic; it refers to someone who works with metal — a blacksmith.
 - Perhaps the horns were made of iron and the image is that only an ironworker would be able to cut off the horns. (That's a possibility, but I am not convinced that is meant or even implied.)
 - What is certain is that the four craftsmen are meant to match (and surpass) the horns.
- That's the extent of the first vision. What does it mean? What is its importance?

2. What Zechariah's Second Vision MEANT (1:19, 21)

- As with the first vision, Zechariah does not immediately understand, so the **angel** again explains (1:9).
 - ✓ The horns are identified with nations (1:19) — they are the nations which **scattered** Judah...
 - ✓ To **scatter** pictures winnowing grain — separating the grain from the chaff; in this instance the image is of the nation being winnowed (separated) from her land (cf. 1 Kings 14:15; Ezk. 36:19).
 - ✓ The angel is also specific that the scattering is of **Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem** — both the southern and northern tribes of Israel and her capital have been scattered (taken captive). The scattering is from bottom to top in the land. The scattering is total; nothing and no one escapes.
 - ✓ The main question is, "who are these horns?" Almost certainly nations, but which ones?
 - Numerous commentators relate this vision to Daniel's visions (Dan. 2, 7) saying they are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. However, Zechariah says this scattering has already happened ("scattered" is past tense), so maybe it is a reference to Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and M-P.
 - It is better to see it more generally: the four horses in 1:8ff went through all the world (1:11) and in the final vision, the four chariots went to the four points of the compass (all the world (6:6-7)). It is probably best to see the four horns as the full opposition of world against Judah.

- From the beginning of the nation returning from Egypt in Exodus to the day of Zechariah, Israel had always been in a struggle against the nations; these four horns represent the constancy and completeness of that struggle — it is against all the world/earth.
- Corresponding to these four conquering and oppressing horns are ***four craftsmen*** (vv. 20-21).
 - ✓ Notice the destructiveness of these nations — so that ***no man lifts up his head***. They ***lifted up their horns*** (power) ***against the land of Judah*** — so they could keep Israel bowed down and humble. This phrase indicates “the utterly prostrate and forsaken condition of Israel...” [Feinberg] The nations were relentless in attempting to destroy God’s chosen people and Israel was “beaten down.”
 - ✓ So these craftsmen were given by God to ***terrify*** and ***throw down*** the horns.
 - The oppressing nations were (and will be) destroyed and vanquished.
 - Every enemy nation that opposes Israel and Judah will be thoroughly (finally) defeated.
 - The nations have beaten down Israel, but they will in turn be destroyed (greater punishment).
 - ✓ The question is, “who are the craftsmen?” If you see these horns as Babylon, M-P, Greece, and Rome, then the craftsmen are M-P, Greece, Rome, and the Messiah.
 - ✓ But that probably sees it too narrowly. Because God doesn’t identify the horns or craftsmen, we should be cautious about identifying them.
- Most of the visions have an “oracle” section — declaration(s) from God about that vision. This vision doesn’t have those declarations, but we can make some observations about God from these verses:
 - ✓ **This vision is a promise of the full restoration of Judah and Israel**; no matter the appearance when Israel and Judah were being oppressed, those nations would not be victorious, but God would overwhelm them and exalt Himself and His people. **2 Sam. 7:16** is fulfilled (**Rev. 19:11-16; 20:4**).
 - ✓ It is a reminder that God not only is angry at sin and injustice against Israel (**1:15**), but that **He is just and will pour out His righteous retribution** (**Dt. 32:35**; **Rom. 12:19**). He will hold all sinners accountable for all of their sins.
 - ✓ **Israel can trust that God would not let injustice rule**. He knows all of Israel’s suffering and the full extent of their difficulties and He will not let a single injustice escape His wrath.
 - ✓ This vision ends much as the first one did — Judah has faced opposition from many places, but God’s people should be encouraged and hopeful that the Lord will be just with the nations.
 - ✓ He will do what is right. He will do what is right for Israel, and He will do it for us as well.

3. What Zechariah **SAW in the Third Vision (2:1-3)**

- The second vision offers hope for Judah against the unrighteous nations (1:15). The third vision offers hope of the blessing of God for Judah and Israel — she can be confident of her future.

- What did Zechariah see when he **lifted up [his] eyes**? (The phrase often indicates a new vision.)
 - ✓ He saw **a man with a measuring line**. This measuring line was also mentioned in **1:16**, where God is seen to be measuring the location of His millennial temple (not the temple of Ezra 5-6).
 - ✓ Here the measuring line is used to measure the boundaries of Jerusalem (v. 2). That Jerusalem is being measured is a reminder of that city's importance (**2 Chron. 6:6**). Even though the city had been taken into captivity by Babylon (586 B.C.), Jeremiah anticipated the return of the city when he redeemed land from his uncle as a prophecy of future building in Jerusalem (**Jer. 32:6-15**).
 - ✓ The reason a measuring tool was used then is the same reason we use it today: to establish the various locations of a building or city so that we know where to build and what tools and materials are needed for building. It's the first step in the building process (cf. **Ezk. 40-42**).
 - ✓ So when the angel said it was to measure Jerusalem, it was an encouragement not only that the temple would be rebuilt, but that the rebuilding of the entire city was about to begin.
 - ✓ You may be wondering who the man with the line is. We don't know (because we aren't told). We know it's not the angel (or the second angel, v. 3). We know it's not Zechariah. Some suggest that it is the angel of the Lord (pre-incarnate Christ), but the text gives no hint. We just don't know. (And notice that from Zechariah's question in **2:2**, he is unconcerned about the man's identity.)
- There are two items of importance in the vision (because they are emphasized):
 - ✓ Jerusalem is being measured, which is a reminder of her exalted status as the chosen city of God where the Messiah will rule and God's center of worship (temple) is located (**1:16**).
 - ✓ We don't know the identity of the second angel — what is important is what he says: **run, speak...** Those are urgent words (**vv. 3-4a**). (And we should recognize that it's not the angel's personal message, but that it is a message from God, given through the angel — the messenger — so it is also urgent because it is coming from God.)
 - ✓ The urgency is because of the importance of giving hope to the residents of Judah/Jerusalem.

4. What Zechariah's Third Vision MEANT (2:4-5)

- The message to Zechariah (the **young man**) contains the meaning of the vision.
 - ✓ **Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls...**
 - Remember that Jerusalem and the temple have been measured; i.e., "where is the city going to be positioned and where will everything be located?"
 - The first part of the message is that after measuring, it was determined there will not be walls.
 - Walls were needed for two reasons: to keep the animals inside (to keep them from wandering) and to keep enemies outside (to keep them from harming the human inhabitants).

- But the message is that walls will not be needed —
 - ... There will be no danger of losing the cattle to wandering or theft.
 - ... In fact, there are too many people and cattle for the measured space (indicating the overflowing blessing of God to His people).
 - ... There will be no need of walls for protection because of the provision of God and His Messianic King (**v. 5**). God, not the walls, would be the protector of Judah (which is good news because walls fail — the Great Wall of China was not so impervious, etc...)
- ✓ We also need to recognize that while Zechariah was prophesying to encourage the people of his day (and he did, since they rebuilt the temple within two years), he is also thinking about a future day.
- About 75 years after this vision, in the time of Nehemiah in 445 B.C., the walls were in disrepair (**Neh. 1:3**) and Nehemiah exhorted the people to rebuild them (which they did). For those 75 years, Israel was protected (in partial fulfillment of this promise).
- But then the walls were rebuilt (and there still is a wall around the city today). So for 2-1/2 millennia, there has been a wall around the city (contrary to the prophecy). So we are still looking for a time when the city won't need the wall.
- And in Nehemiah's day, the city also wasn't bursting with people: cf. **Neh. 7:4; 11:1-2**. So this prophecy wasn't fulfilled then; we are awaiting still a future fulfillment.
- This was to be a great encouragement to the people — don't just look at the circumstances as they are today; remember the nature of God and His promises, and be confident.
- We also do well to remember things similarly. The walls of morality are broken in our world and the gathering of God's people doesn't seem to be bursting, but that's not the final story.
- Do you ever say, "The world is really broken...?" I do. Pretty close to every day. "Brokenness" is not the final word. "Restoration" and "wholeness" are the final word. Though we don't see those days clearly, yet, like the Israelites, we need to hold onto that promise w. determination.

- We hold onto the promise of restoration with determination because of v. 5.
 - ✓ Why won't there be walls around Jerusalem? **For** [because] **I will be a wall of fire around her...**
 - God doesn't build a physical wall. There is no "spiritual" wall around the city.
 - *God* is the wall ("I — [emphatic pronoun] and no one else — will be a wall"). And since *He* is the wall, the "wall" of protection has all the qualities of God — He is providing infinite and eternal protection. Nothing can get in to harm, oppress, or destroy.
 - Moreover, He is a wall **of fire** — doesn't that make you think of something else? How about the pillar of fire in the wilderness? Cf. **Ex. 13:21-22**. That provision of God not only gave light and direction, but also protection (**Ex. 14:24**). And it also means His presence (**Neh. 9:19**).
 - When Jerusalem has God as a wall of fire around her, she is safe and has all she needs.

- ✓ And not only will God be a wall of fire, protecting Israel, but ***I will be the glory in her midst.***
 - Not only is God's glory around the city, but it is inside her (in the temple).
 - This reaffirms what was promised in 1:16 — the return of God's glory (**Is. 60:19**; Rev. 22:1ff).
 - Note this: Ezekiel had prophesied of the return of God's glory to the temple (43:2-5), but Zechariah sees God's glory returning to the whole city — and later to the whole land (**14:20f**).
 - This is God's declaration that "everything is mine — and I am coming to be with My people and to bless and protect them."
 - Remember when you were young and maybe your family went to spend the day with friends? You came home late. It was dark and the rhythm of the road noise is melodic. You hear mom and dad talking quietly in the front seat. It's cold outside but cozy in the car. You fall asleep contentedly and peacefully. You're safe in the presence of dad. There are still dangers: cold, rain, drunk drivers, evil people, etc... But you trust dad and are contented that you are safe.
 - That's something of the image that Zechariah is painting here — in his day, there were still dangers, but the people were safe. And there is a coming day when all the dangers will be gone, and all God's people will be completely (eternally) safe.

5. What Zechariah's Visions **TEACH** About God (2:6-13)

- Verse six begins another section of the vision — an oracle of declarations that arise from the vision. What should the people do and what should they think because of this vision?
- ***Captivity is not final; restoration is final.***
 - ✓ **Verses 6-7** remind us that not everyone who had been taken in captivity to Babylon had returned (they were **dispersed...**[and still] **living with the daughter of Babylon**).
 - ✓ We don't know why they had not returned, but perhaps it was fear, or laziness, or contentment with living in Babylon. But God calls them to come to Jerusalem (and Him) — **flee...escape...**
 - ✓ The call to return is a reminder that while God is acting for Judah, He still calls them to repentance. They need to act in faith and trust Him to be their protector. And the same is still true today; God offers salvation for all suffering sinners, but we need to act in faith to trust Him.
 - We give up our "Babylons" — our sins — asking God to forgive and liberate us.
 - We believe that we can only be forgiven of our sin by the work of Christ (Rom. 3:25; **6:23**).
 - We live for Him and not ourselves — obeying and enjoying Him in all things (**Rom. 6:17-18**).
 - ✓ As in vv. 4-5, this is still ultimately in the future — we have experienced some of God's restoration; there is a final (and complete) restoration still coming. He has promised.
- ***Rebellion is not final; retribution is final.***
 - ✓ It has been said that verse 8 is the hardest verse in this book to understand — who is speaking and what does the speaker say (who is the subject of the spoken sentence)?

- ✓ Some translations read as if God (**the Lord of hosts**) speaks and that He sends Himself to fight the nations. It seems an unusual way to speak.
- ✓ A better sense is probably something like, “YHWH of hosts has said the following, that after glory He has sent me (Zechariah) to the nations plundering you...” Zechariah is sent, but he is sent not to destroy but to declare. His message is one of warning about God’s righteous retribution.
- ✓ You can’t poke God in the **eye** (“apple” is “gate” or “pupil” — most sensitive part) and not expect Him to respond. Israel is His most prized possession; He will respond.
- ✓ In verse 9, Zechariah says that as simply as he waves his hand over them, God will make them to be **plundered** by **their slaves**. The weakest and most vulnerable will plunder them.
- ✓ It’s a reminder that the promise God first made Abraham (Gen. 12:3) will be fulfilled. Every act of injustice and unrighteousness is seen and will be evaluated and judged fully by God. No escaping.
- ✓ Whether we are four-year-olds complaining “that’s not fair” about food portions, or 44-year-olds complaining about legislative and judicial rulings, we are prone to fear that injustice wins. This is God’s declaration that injustice will never win. He will judge all.

- **Lament is not final; praise is final.**

- ✓ Because we are prone to lament (complain), we need to be reminded to **sing for joy...** (v. 10).
- ✓ The verb is an imperative — praise is necessary. It’s necessary because it is fitting for God’s people.
- ✓ And the content of our praise should be delight in the Messiah’s final coming to rule on His throne.
- ✓ And not only will He come, but notice the other promises:
 - **I am coming** — the return of the Messiah is imminent (a promise to Judah and warning to the rebellious sinners/nations).
 - **I will dwell in Your midst.** The King who came to be with His people (Mt. 1:23), will finally dwell eternally with His people.
 - And not only will He live with His people, but v. 11 says that **many nations will join themselves to the Lord** — Gentiles (us!) will be brought into that protective fellowship with the Messiah. How great is God’s grace that He invites and enfolds those who are not His into His family?
 - **The Lord will possess Judah as His portion** — This phrase is the only time that the phrase “holy land” is used in Scripture — it is a reference not to the covenant promise of land, but a reference to the cleansing power of God to sanctify a land (& people) so that it is worthy of God.
 - Judah was not to be overwhelmed in lament, but to praise (delight in) God for His promises. He is faithful to do what He says. **He will again** [still] **choose Jerusalem**. He is keeping her.
- ✓ As part of praise, **be silent** — don’t speak against the Lord (Ps. 46:13) and be silent (in awe) of His grace to His people. **He is aroused** — not “He is asleep and being awakened,” but “He is arising, getting ready to act.” Like dad getting out of His chair to act towards His children (blessing to obedient and fear to the disobedient), so God is about to fulfill His plan. He is coming quickly.

CONCLUSION: In *The Next Story*, Tim Challies reminds us of an event from two decades ago:

In 2002, the National Science Foundation combined forces with the Department of Commerce to create a report that attempts to peer two decades into the future.

“Understanding the mind and brain will enable the creation of a new species of intelligent machine systems that can generate economic wealth on a scale hitherto unimaginable. Within a half-century, intelligent machines might create the wealth needed to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, a clean environment, and physical and financial security for the entire world population. Intelligent machines may eventually generate the production capacity to support universal prosperity and financial security for all human beings. Thus, the engineering of mind is much more than the pursuit of scientific curiosity. *It is more even than a monumental technological challenge. It is an opportunity to eradicate poverty and usher in a golden age for all humankind.*” [*The Next Story*, 30-1; emphasis mine.]

Well, two decades later, it appears that the National Science Foundation has missed the mark. Science will never bring in a golden age for mankind.

But Christ *will* bring in the final age. And the promise and prophecy of that day and time is meant to be a comfort to God’s people. It was a comfort for Judah in the day of Zechariah (they finished the temple), and it is a comfort to us. God has not overlooked sin and He has not forgotten Israel. And He has graciously enfolded us into the promises of salvation for Israel — so we too have hope.

Oh friend, in this broken, ungodly, hostile world, *be comforted by God and the revelation of His plans for judgment and blessing.*

BENEDICTION: Baptism and membership prayer for Jerry Harvey