

# Zechariah Calls for a Return to God

Printed Text · Zechariah 1:1-6; 7:8-14

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY God's calling for us to repent of our sins and seek forgiveness; feel CONVICTED for any wrong things that we have done; and PRAY for forgiveness of our sins.

## In Focus

Cleveland Foster did not know real freedom and hope until he repented of his sins and accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. His eyes filled with tears as he shared his testimony in Bible study one evening:

"I know what God can do," he proclaimed. "I lived the life of a gangbanger and drug dealer. I was shot at, wounded, and now have to walk with a cane. After my mother's violent death when I was 13, I gave up on life and lived as an angry and rebellious teenager. It finally caused me to spend 24 years in prison. One day, through a church's prison ministry, I heard the Word of God. They wrote me letters for more than 15 years, encouraging me and sharing their faith. Finally, I accepted Jesus Christ as my own Lord and Savior, and He turned my life around. I regret all the terrible things that I did! I am truly sorry for my sins and I know that God has forgiven me.

Since then, I have earned my bachelor's degree and I am working on getting my master's in social work. I want to help others who have lost their way, as I was helped. I want to share with some lost boy, girl, man, or woman what God has given me."

*In today's lesson, Zechariah teaches that we are called to repent and show compassion, justice, and mercy toward one another.*

## Keep In Mind

"Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 1:3, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

- A. **Prophet** (Zechariah 1:4) navi (Heb.) – Foreteller; God's spokesman; a divinely called minister who announces the will of God to His people.
- B. **Word** (7:8) babar (Heb.) – A message from God.

## Say It Correctly

**Zechariah.** zeh-kr-ai-uh

**Babylon.** BA-buh-laan

**Exile.** EG-zile

**Covenant.** KUH-vuh-nuht

## KJV

**Zechariah 1:1** In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,

2 The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers.

3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.

4 Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord.

5 Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?

6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

**7:8** And the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, saying,

9 Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother:

10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

11 But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.

12 Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.

13 Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts:

14 But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.

## NLT

**Zechariah 1:1** In November[a] of the second year of King Darius's reign, the Lord gave this message to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo:

2 "I, the Lord, was very angry with your ancestors.

3 Therefore, say to the people, 'This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.'

4 Don't be like your ancestors who would not listen or pay attention when the earlier prophets said to them, 'This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Turn from your evil ways, and stop all your evil practices.'

5 "Where are your ancestors now? They and the prophets are long dead.

6 But everything I said through my servants the prophets happened to your ancestors, just as I said. As a result, they repented and said, 'We have received what we deserved from the Lord of Heaven's Armies. He has done what he said he would do.'"

**7:8** Then this message came to Zechariah from the Lord:

9 "This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another.

10 Do not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. And do not scheme against each other.

11 "Your ancestors refused to listen to this message. They stubbornly turned away and put their fingers in their ears to keep from hearing.

12 They made their hearts as hard as stone, so they could not hear the instructions or the messages that the Lord of Heaven's Armies had sent them by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. That is why the Lord of Heaven's Armies was so angry with them.

13 “Since they refused to listen when I called to them, I would not listen when they called to me, says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

14 As with a whirlwind, I scattered them among the distant nations, where they lived as strangers. Their land became so desolate that no one even traveled through it. They turned their pleasant land into a desert.”

## The People, Places, and Times

**Zechariah.** Zechariah, the 11th minor prophet, was born to a priest. His place of birth is thought to be Babylon. His prophetic ministry took place during a period of political strife and turmoil. The people had strayed from God (again). Through the divine intervention of God, Zechariah was called to minister and prophesy to the troubled people in a troubled time. He penned the first chapter of the book that bears his name in 524 B.C. About five years later (519 B.C.), he wrote the seventh chapter. The biblical events described in this lesson occurred during the restoration period. That is why Zechariah was known as a “restoration prophet.” Zechariah is second only to Isaiah in the number of prophecies given about Jesus.

Chapters 1–8 of Zechariah speak of eight visions that the Lord gave the prophet to help the people overcome their problems in rebuilding the Temple and their disobedience in worship. Here, we read Zechariah’s prophecy about the second coming of the Lord and how He will rule over all nations and judge them. Zechariah was a priest who preached hope to the people. He called for righteousness, repentance, and spirituality in worship, home life, and politics.

## Background

The prophet Zechariah was born in Babylon during the Exile. Zechariah was a young man when he returned to Jerusalem after King Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians in 539 B.C. and decreed that the Israelites could return to their homeland in 538 B.C. As with all of His prophets, God called Zechariah for a specific purpose. He wanted Zechariah to proclaim His word to the small remnant of Jews who had returned to Judah from exile to rebuild the Temple and their nation. He also wanted to help them by pointing out and explaining the consequences of their sin and calling the Israelites to repentance and obedience. Here, Zechariah shares the first of eight visions that God gave Him through the night.

The people were aware that the Temple they were building would not be as magnificent as the one that had been destroyed; still, they had begun to feel overwhelmed. They were ready to give up—to quit. Therefore, God called Zechariah to: (1) inspire the people and encourage them to finish rebuilding the Temple, (2) restore their recognition of God in government, (3) restore their faith and hope during this period of despair, (4) bring them back to an orderly life and true worship of God, and (5) encourage them to repent of their sinful worship of false gods (idols).

## At-A-Glance

1. Encouraging God’s People (Zechariah 1:1–6)
2. God Gives Israel a History Lesson (7:8–14)

## In Depth

### 1. Encouraging God’s People (Zechariah 1:1–6)

Ten years had passed since the exiles returned from captivity to rebuild the Temple, and the

work was still not completed. Like many of us who experience prolonged discouragement due to overwhelming trials and tribulations, the people were discouraged and began to ignore their service to God. They had lost their zeal for worship and were just “going through the motions.” In fact, they had even begun fasting without being truly repentant for their sins. Zechariah let the Israelites know that halfhearted service was unacceptable to God.

Zechariah reminded the people that their forefathers had fallen prey to false leaders who had exploited them. God was angry with the Israelites’ ancestors because they had ignored His prophets in the past. This disobedience was evidenced by worshiping idols and not acknowledging God as the one true God in their lives. As a result, they broke their covenant relationship with God time and time again, causing their intimate relationship with Him to suffer. They paid the consequences for their sins, finding themselves in bondage to the Babylonians for approximately 70 years. They were prisoners during the reigns of King Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus. Now it was time for the next generation to pick up the reins and carry out God’s mandates. It was time for the people to get right with God, renew their relationship with God, brush off their discouragement, pull themselves together, and obey God’s command. Through Zechariah, God promised the people that they did not have to fear any enemies while building the Temple because He would protect the workmen and empower them to get the job done. At the same time, God expected them to fulfill their part of the bargain as well.

## **2. God Gives Israel a History Lesson (7:8–14)**

The history lesson continues as Zechariah reminds the Israelites of how their ancestors had not listened to God’s messengers. They had stubbornly turned away and would not listen to God’s prophets. They were a hardheaded, stiff-necked people, and they suffered for their rebellion by being forced into slavery. God had not listened to their forefathers because of their disobedience and lack of repentance; likewise, He would not listen to them if they fell into the same rebellious behavior.

When we do not obey God’s Word, we can expect God to respond to us in the very same way. When we sin or are disobedient, we open the door for Satan to build strongholds in our lives that imprison us. God expects His children to be genuinely sorry for their transgressions. True repentance, then, is completely turning away from sin. After repenting, if we ask God for forgiveness, He will restore our relationship with Him.

God wanted the Israelites to know that disobedience and sin have dire consequences. He warned the Israelites that they did not want to experience His wrath again. God wanted them to come to Him with a sincere desire to know and love Him. He is a jealous God and wants believers’ complete devotion, not their halfhearted service. We, too, must follow the instructions He has given us in His holy Word and remain pure until His Second Coming. If there is sin in our lives, we must repent and turn to Him for forgiveness.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. “The LORD hath been sore \_\_\_\_\_ with your fathers” (Zechariah 1:2).
2. What did God want the Israelites to do (v. 3)?
3. Name two things that the Lord had wanted the Israelites’ forefathers to do (Zechariah 7:9).
4. How did God want the Israelites and their forefathers to treat widows, the fatherless, strangers, and the poor (v. 10)?

## **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Discuss what your church or denomination says about salvation and what it means to return to God.
2. What sacraments does your church regularly engage in that provide an opportunity for personal reflection, repentance, and renewal?

## **Liberating Lesson**

There is an old adage that says, "What goes around, comes around." This is another way of saying, "History repeats itself." The Old Testament cites numerous instances of the Israelites' disobedience, which resulted in punishments from God; subsequently, there was repentance by the Israelites, followed by the Lord's forgiveness. The New Testament follows the same pattern. There are many instances in which the Lord forgives sinners. Even on the Cross, Jesus asked His Father to forgive His murderers. Jesus wants His followers to be merciful and compassionate, just as He is.

We encounter similar disobedience in our present-day society. Every day, we meet people who harden their hearts when it comes to hearing the word of God. However, Zechariah says that when we return to the Lord, the wholeness and happiness we have in Him leads to a right relationship with and true worship of Him. We must be patient and walk with the Lord. As we do so, He will keep us and encourage us in times of rejection and discord.

## **Application For Activation**

We must think positively and focus on godly things so that we can live joyously. In this way, we will be encouraged to take positive actions. The Holy Spirit fills us with a joy that the world does not give and, therefore, that it cannot take away. We must bathe in that joy, especially in times of turmoil, for it is in these times that the Lord provides protection for us. When we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are to witness and to win souls for Christ. This is the mission of the church until the Lord comes again. Let Zechariah serve as a model for us, thereby encouraging us to continue ministering to others, helping, and encouraging them to turn to God.

## **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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## **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Zechariah 1:1–6; 7:8–14

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

The Hebrew phrase *dabar* (daw-baw'), here translated as "came the word," is a common way of referring to Jehovah's communication through His prophets by means of His Spirit (see also, for example, Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Micah 1:1). This phrase, along with the phrase "word of the LORD" (Heb. *dabar Yevovah*, daw-BAW Yeh-ho VAW), leaves no room to doubt that the process often called "inspiration" is in view here. Drawing on the language of 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration" (literally, "Godbreathed" or "breathed out by God"), Christians use the word "inspiration" to describe the process by which God speaks authoritatively and without error through the Scriptures. Zechariah gives us hints as to what this process looks like. First, the prophet's solemn declaration that it was Jehovah's own word that had come directly to him removes the possibility that inspiration can mean simply a heightened ability to perform or create (as in "The Knicks sure played inspired basketball tonight").

On the other hand, the Bible reader should avoid the other extreme of believing that God somehow dictated His words directly to a prophet in a way that ignored the prophet's personality or background altogether. Even a shallow reading of Zechariah—or of any other prophetic book, for that matter—will show that the prophet's personal characteristics are reflected in his prophecy. There is surely some mystery here, but the prophets spoke as they were "moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21), with this process of "moving" neither wiping out the personality of the prophet nor allowing the prophet's sinfulness and weakness to override the perfect transmission of God's holy Word.

The reign of Darius, king of Media and Persia, brought about an era of relative peace in the volatile region of the ancient Near East. The powerful Babylonian empire was in shambles, and, as the man in Zechariah's vision proclaims, "We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest" (1:11). God's providence had ushered in a time in which the tattered ruins of Jerusalem and the scattered remnant of the Jews might be rebuilt and restored.

### **2** The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers.

The phrase "sore displeased" is *qatsaph* (kawtsaf ') in Hebrew and means "to be angry, to be wroth, to be full of wrath." Therefore, the sentence literally reads, "The LORD hath been angry with a great anger." The old-fashioned language of the King James Version puts it nicely: The Lord is "sore displeased."

This ominous opening statement accomplishes several things. First, it provides an important backdrop for Zechariah's prophecy—specifically, the ongoing disobedience of God's people. The prophets are executors of God's covenant, and as such they often recall the curses in Deuteronomy, where God promised discipline if His people would not show covenant faithfulness. Without giving much detail, Zechariah establishes the fact that the Israelites as a nation have been wayward, and the Lord owes them nothing. Second, this opening statement introduces the concept of God's justice and wrath in response to sin. The fact that God had judged Israel before meant that He could do so again. Early on, then, the Israelites receive a warning. Third, the most important function of this opening statement is to set up a contrast with what follows. The merciful invitation that God extends to Israel (vv. 3–6) is all the more glorious in light of verse 2. Even though God owes these

people nothing, He is offering them everything, if only they will turn to Him.

**3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.**

Three times in this verse, Jehovah presents himself in military terms. The “hosts” are angelic armies; therefore, the name “LORD of hosts” presents Israel’s God as a conquering warrior, full of power. No wonder some translations render the phrase “Lord Almighty.” Three times His voice thunders as He speaks to and through Jeremiah. The great and terrible King issues a command, but that command is full of grace and compassion! The King’s simple command is to turn (Heb. shuwb, shoob), carrying the idea of turning back or returning. Notice the nature of the command: Jehovah does not say “come,” but “turn (around),” meaning that the one invited is not facing Him but has his back turned toward Him! Although the Lord’s terrible judgment, which had been carried out by the Babylonians as they swept through Jerusalem less than a decade earlier, is still fresh in the Israelites’ minds, the unfinished Temple in Jerusalem stands as a grim reminder that not much has changed among this people. Yet the Lord makes it known that “mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James 2:13).

**4 Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.**

The Lord’s words to Zechariah now demonstrate, by negative example, what it looks like to turn to the Lord. The prophetic call here brings to mind another common device used by Israel’s prophets: rehearsing the history of the people. The reminder here is succinct: Zechariah refers to the prophets as a whole, probably referring to all those who prophesied during the reigns of Israel’s and Judah’s kings. The warning again mentions the “fathers,” no doubt indicating those whose sins and idolatry had brought about the Babylonian Exile. Israel’s faithlessness is rehearsed in the New Testament as well (Acts 7:51–53); however, the greater truth of the Gospel is also presented. The inheritance that Israel lost is now available, in a spiritual sense, to both Jews and Gentiles. In Jesus, all believers possess by faith the inheritance that was originally promised to Israel (Hebrews 3–4).

**5 Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?**

Often Israel’s prophets—including Jesus, its ultimate and final Prophet—ask questions that are intended to be sarcastic and rhetorical (that is, with an obvious answer). The questions in verse 5 again speak of two groups of people: fathers and prophets (v. 4). The point is not that the people’s ancestors were no longer alive on the earth—the fact that no one lives forever would have come as no surprise to God’s people—but that all memory of the fathers and prophets had been wiped out. All the visible reminders of Israel’s enduring existence under God’s gracious promise—Jerusalem, the Temple, the king, the priest, etc—had been wiped away in Judah’s exile to Babylon. The prophets are presented as a separate category because as long as there was a prophet in Israel, the opportunity for repentance remained. In the midst of this painful reminder, God’s grace endures in an ironic way, for who is it that reminds the people that the prophets in the kingdoms of Israel of Judah are no more? None other than a prophet—Zechariah himself. And so the offer of repentance in verse 3 rests on solid ground, for a prophet remains to extend the offer to God’s people. One day, even that offer will be rescinded, as foretold earlier by the prophet Amos: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11). As we see in Malachi 1:1–7, Israel failed to fully heed Zechariah’s warning, and so not until the coming of that great Prophet promised by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15) would God speak in a way that restores His people to Him forever.

**6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take**

**hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.**

The little word “but” is the smallest Hebrew word in Scripture (only one narrow letter in Hebrew), yet it often turns out to be one of the most important words in a sentence. Here, it sets up an important and powerful contrast: Even though God’s unfaithful people (and even the faithful messengers sent to them) have been blown away and have withered like the flowers of the field, one thing still remains: the enduring word of the Lord (Isaiah 40:6–8). The victory of the conquering Warrior, the Lord of hosts, is evident in the prevailing power and truth of His promises, decrees, and warnings. Zechariah presents these holy words as “take hold” (Heb. *nasag*, *naw-sag’*) meaning to reach, overtake, take hold upon. Thus, God’s Word did not take hold upon the people’s rebellious fathers. Although many of Israel’s leaders and prophets insisted for a long time that God’s holy city and nation could not possibly fall (see Jeremiah 26:9), they soon saw the light. The Judge, who had spoken from His holy law court, is now vindicated by the evidence: Jerusalem and the Temple are no more. And so, as the people were commanded to turn in verse 3, Zechariah now uses the same word in reference to their fathers (Heb. *shuwb*, *shoob*). Here, however, the word does not mean that the fathers repented and received mercy, but that they returned (one might say “came around”) to the right opinion. They had to admit that the Lord had indeed spoken rightly through his prophets! So Jehovah’s word was vindicated.

The serious warning and the wondrous grace in the Lord’s word to and through Zechariah are completely fulfilled. Jehovah’s reminder that His past warnings were no idle threat leaves no doubt that His people face further calamity if they do not repent of their sinful idolatry and turn to their covenant King. But the very existence of such a warning—and of such an offer of grace and blessing through the presence of the living God—demonstrates the depth of God’s mercy. Although spurned more times than anyone could possibly count, the great Lover of Israel will return to His bride once again as they return to Him.

**7:8 And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying,**

What connects this passage to the passage in chapter 1 is the mention of the preexilic prophets who spoke to Israel before their deportation to Babylon. The people of Bethel (a very important and symbolic town, for its name means “house of God”) had sought out the priest and prophets to see if they should fast during a certain month, as was their custom. Jehovah takes this opportunity to recall to the people’s minds the former prophets and their message. Zechariah realizes that Bethel’s religious practice is similar to that of Israel and Judah before the Exile, who were practicing religious rituals but did not have any true heart involvement or genuine repentance behind it. Zechariah likely knew of the people of Bethel and suspected that their religious practice reflected this same kind of empty formalism. In light of this suspicion, he reminds the people that the prophets had, for years, warned the people about practicing ritual without true worship. Again, the word of God is “breathed out” (see comment on verse 1) through the prophet.

**9 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother:**

At this point in the book of Zechariah, the building of the Temple is well underway, so that in one sense, God’s people are showing responsiveness and obedience to His command. However, it is clear from Jehovah’s word through Zechariah that true covenant faithfulness is absent, as evidenced by the failure of the people to demonstrate justice and kindness “horizontally” in community. God’s voice thunders with another verb-noun combination: *Shaphat* (*shaw-fat’*) and *mishpat* (*mish-PAWT*) are linked together in a phrase that might be literally translated as “judge a judgment.” This word combination has a variety of meanings that, taken together, speak not only of “judgment” but of “judgment according to truth.” Although the people have apparently shown some



discernment and wisdom, the forceful repetition of this word group indicates that they have not extended true justice and mercy to their neighbor, even though the Lord has shown remarkable mercy to them. As a result, Jehovah demands conduct that simply reflects the way He has treated His people. "Mercy" and "compassions" do not refer to some heroic act or unreasonable demand, but rather to the natural and proper outgrowth of the mercy the people had received from the Lord's hand.

**10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.**

Zechariah's call for justice rather than oppression repeats the calls of the prophets before the Exile, as well as God's command to show mercy to the helpless (Jeremiah 5:26; 6:13; Hosea 4:1–3; Deuteronomy 14:29; 16:11; 24:19–21). Although the verb *ashaq* (aw-SHAK) can often mean "defraud," "oppress" is a better translation here because, in this context, the word emphasizes the position of power in which the Israelites find themselves, relative to the helpless in their midst. Once again, these commands are full of sad irony: Although the Jews found themselves utterly helpless in Babylon and Persia, God showed them mercy and made a way for them to return to Jerusalem and build the Temple. Yet, shockingly, the Jews have turned and looked on the powerless in their midst with contempt, perhaps even taking advantage of their lowly position.

The New Testament contains similar themes. The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21–35) graphically portrays the crimes the Israelites are guilty of here, and James 1:27 again speaks of widows and orphans in describing what "true religion" looks like. The covenant context provides the background in both cases: God's covenant people are supposed to mirror the covenant faithfulness He has shown them. In light of the Gospel revealed through Christ, the perfect Covenant Keeper, we understand that our failings are covered in the blood of the new covenant, shed by the Lamb. Because of Christ's sacrifice, we should strive to demonstrate His faithfulness to us in our dealings with each other!

**11 But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.**

The word "hearken" in the King James Version, although not commonly used today, brings out the sense of the Hebrew word *qashab* (kawshab'), which means more than just listening. It does not merely indicate that the Israelites had failed to hear the prophets' warnings; it means that they had heard these warnings all too well, but had stubbornly refused to repent and obey. Nevertheless, the focus on hearing is obvious; the phrase "pulled away the shoulder" might be expressed in more modern terms as "turned their backs" (implying a breaking of relationship and disobedience, but also making it harder to hear). The phrase translated "they stopped their ears" literally means that they made their ears heavy, suggesting that their ears were made of stone, or else that the act of listening was burdensome to them. The final clause shows the purpose of these actions on their part: They did not want to hear the warnings of the prophets, and although they no doubt heard the warnings, they made every effort to pretend that they hadn't. Zechariah's warning gains added force in that his hearers could hardly claim not to have heard him! The actions of their ancestors and the resulting destruction and despair would have made God's warning utterly impossible to ignore.

**12 Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.**

The description of the covenant people's faithlessness continues, with a natural transition from the ears to the heart (which in the Bible always represents the center of both the understanding and the affections). There is no doubt as to who is the guilty party in this covenant violation; God is not even

said to “harden their hearts,” as He did with Pharaoh. On the contrary, the prophets before the Exile portray a God longing for His people to return to Him, pining for His adulterous bride (see Hosea, for example). The intentional hardening described here was heartbreaking, coming from a people who had seen the disastrous consequences of disobedience.

Zechariah mentions the Spirit as the agent of his inspiration. This reference brings out the seriousness of not heeding the prophets’ commands and warnings—to do so was to deny the very Spirit of God. The New Testament shows us that denying the Spirit is blasphemy (Mark 3:22–30). Ananias and Sapphira paid with their lives for what is called “lying to the Holy Spirit” in Acts 5. It is no wonder that the military phrase “LORD of hosts” reappears, with God pictured as going to war against His own people! Their treason has brought about the King’s inevitable response, despite centuries of patience.

**13 Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts:**

The verbs in this passage suggest repeated, customary actions; the Lord’s call to His people was, of course, repeated many times over, as was their unbelieving response. God in His mercy patiently offered restoration far beyond what His people deserved. Eventually, however, He executed His justice in a perfectly proportional way. Because He had called to them and they had not listened, he would not hear their cries. Yet, God provided safety and security (albeit in Babylon) for those who truly repented. Many of these same people returned to Jerusalem and were addressed by Zechariah. For them, the importance of hearing the Lord’s call was abundantly clear.

**14 But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.**

The term translated “scattered . . . with a whirlwind” occurs only three times in the Old Testament (see Isaiah 54:1; Habakkuk 3:4), and in each case it refers to a violent storm. This is not a literal storm, however, but the worst kind of curse imaginable: exile from the land of Canaan, where the people had rest, and forcible removal from that land into the terrible strangeness of foreign lands, with strange customs and foreign gods. It is no accident that the curses of Deuteronomy 28 focus primarily on assault and capture by a foreign people; this was the worst kind of judgment imaginable for a people whose very lifeblood, blessedness, and shalom depended on the land that had been promised to their great forefather Abraham hundreds of years earlier. And so the worst kind of upheaval took place: Whereas back in the glory days of Israel—the reigns of David and Solomon—the whole world traveled through the blessed land, now it had become desolate, without the hum of merchants traveling through it. Given that this land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean was a key crossroads, its desolation would have been a terribly striking reminder of God’s rejection of His people.

As Zechariah now stands among the people to whom God has shown great mercy and to whom He has restored their land, his warnings and promises focus on making sure that the people retain the blessedness promised to them. Such warnings and promises are wonderfully relevant to people who are richly blessed in Christ. Believers must both hear and obey God’s commands.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

James 4:6-10

## **Tuesday**

Psalms 103:8-18

## **Wednesday**

Isaiah 12

## **Thursday**

Zechariah 1:1-6

## **Friday**

Zechariah 7:8-14

## **Saturday**

Zechariah 8:1-8

## **Sunday**

Zechariah 8:14-17, 20-23