

Zechariah

Zechariah Calls for a Return to God

Focal Verses: 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 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)

Lesson 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,

2 "The Lord hath been sorely 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 overtake your fathers? And they returned and said, '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.

Chapter 7

8 And the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, saying,

9 "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, 'Execute true judgment, and show 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 has 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.”

The Lesson **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 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 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 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 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).

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 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.

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.”

Closing Prayer

Week of 24 March 24

Daily Bible Readings

RESURRECTION DAY IS COMING!



Monday – Proverbs 30-31

Tuesday – Ecclesiastes 1-4

Wednesday – Ecclesiastes 5-8

Thursday – Ecclesiastes 9-12

Friday – Song of Solomon 1-8

Saturday – Isaiah 1-4

Sunday – Isaiah 5-8