

Zechariah 1:1-17

Israel—Chastised but Not Abandoned

If we want to understand end times prophecy, we have to understand the importance of Israel's role in God's plan for the future of the world.

Many Christians are handicapped in their ability to interpret prophecy because they believe that God has rejected the nation of Israel because of their rejection of Jesus Christ, and therefore, they believe that the Nation of Israel is no different than any other nation, and that Israel has no special place of prominence in the future.

If that is your belief, you will be hopelessly lost in trying to interpret end times prophecy, and you will probably ignore it completely, because the nation of Israel is the focal point of most prophecy related to the last days.

The focal point of Old Testament prophesies is that a Messiah, a Jewish King, a descendent of King David, would arise in the last days, and conquer Israel's enemies and establish Israel as the central nation in a global Kingdom, and the Messiah would rule as King from His throne in Jerusalem, exercising political authority over the whole world.

In preparation for the coming of the Messiah to set up His Kingdom, the people of Israel were supposed to be missionaries to the world to turn the hearts of the world to the Lord, inviting the nations to be part of the Kingdom, so that when the Messiah came the world would be ready to embrace Him as their King.

But Israel failed to tell the world about the Lord, and when Jesus, their Messiah, came, not only had they failed to reach the world, but in rebellion, they rejected Jesus and crucified Him.

Thus, after 2,000 years of working with the descendants of Abraham, God's promises for setting up the Kingdom were all put on hold, Israel entered a time of experiencing the disfavor and judgment of God as the Lord shifted His focus, temporarily, away from Israel and began building the church.

Unlike Israel, the church was never intended to become a physical nation or a political Kingdom, but people from all nations, living as foreigners, scattered among the nations of the world. The church never replaced Israel's role as a chosen nation.

Whenever the church has tried to establish itself politically it has always failed. It failed when the Roman Catholic Church was established as an extension of the Roman Empire.

It failed when the Anglican church became an extension of the British Empire.

And we see it failing when the evangelical church has tried to exert itself politically through American politics. That is not the role of the church.

When Christ returns to earth, that will be the role of Israel—to exert its influence politically over the world.

But the Lord gave to the church, the missionary task of always going to the unreached, and making God known and worshiped among all the nations everywhere.

However, the Bible makes it very clear that God is not done with the nation of Israel nor is He done with the Jews as a chosen people, nor is He done with His plans for establishing a political Kingdom on earth.

As God focused on the Jews, the natural descendants of Abraham for 2,000 years, He has now focused on the church, the spiritual descendants of Abraham for 2,000 years.

And when the time of the church has been completed the Lord will come to get His church, and take us home with Him, and He will continue where He left off in His dealings with the nation of Israel.

All of God's plans and promises that He made in the Old Testament for Israel and the Jewish people will still be fulfilled in the very near future.

And when Jesus, the Messiah, returns to this earth, to establish His global Kingdom, we, the church, will return with Him, in glorified bodies, to play a major part in running His Kingdom on earth.

If we don't get a basic understanding of the message of the Old Testament prophets, we will not be able to make sense of the many end times events, which are already beginning to come to pass all around us today.

Of all the Old Testament prophets, Zechariah is one of the clearest and most detailed in his description of Israel's future and Christ's second coming to judge and rule the world.

There are 71 quotations or statements taken from Zechariah in the New Testament. Almost half of them, 31, are found in the book of Revelation.

Background: the Babylonians had destroyed many of the cities of Judah including the city of Jerusalem and they destroyed the temple Solomon had built, and they took most of the surviving Jews captive back to Babylon where they remained in captivity for 70 years (606 -536 BC)

The events in the book of Zechariah began (520 years before Christ) about 16 years after many of the Jews returned to their homeland of Israel and found everything in ruins.

The returning Jews were very discouraged at the hopelessness of the devastation they found when they returned to Israel. The people were poor, they had few resources, and they were very vulnerable to their enemies all around them.

They had started rebuilding the Temple but lost motivation.

So, for 16 years the foundation of the new temple sat incomplete.

The circumstances of the people of Israel in Zechariah's day, have parallels with the people of Israel today.

Only a remnant of the Jews had returned to the land.

They had no temple.

They were surrounded and oppressed by hostile nations.

The Lord called Zechariah when he was very young, probably still in his teens (c.f., Zech. 2:4), to call the nation of Judah to repent of their selfish pursuits, and get their spiritual priorities straight.

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

The name Zechariah means, "he whom the Lord remembers." One of the main themes of his prophecies is that the Lord will not forget Israel.

It is significant that the name of the second last book of the Old Testament, which is addressed to the nation of Israel, is "He Whom the Lord Remembers."

Zechariah 1:2, "'The Lord has been very angry with your fathers."

The people that Zechariah is addressing are the Jews who had returned to Israel following their seventy years of captivity in Babylon.

For many years, before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, and took the people of Israel into captivity, the Lord had been warning the Jewish people through the prophets that, unless they repented, judgment would come from God and that God would allow their enemies to invade their land, destroy their cities and take them captive to a foreign land.

But the Jewish people basically ignored the prophets. So everything the Lord had warned would happen did happen, just as He said it would. The Lord was very angry with them.

But now after having gone through that severe judgment from God, the small remnant of Jews that returned to Israel to begin rebuilding their land were already ignoring the Lord. They were preoccupied with pursuing their own lives and had no time for the Lord.

So God is sending Zechariah to call the people to return to the Lord.

Zechariah 1:3, "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Return to Me," says the Lord of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts."

The Hebrew word for "return" means, "repent." And if they did the Lord would return to them and restore His blessing upon them.

God was not done with them; He was willing to return His favor and blessing to these people and to work with them if they would turn to Him.

When God brings judgment upon a land, as He is doing in our land today, His primary motivation is that the judgment would motivate the people to repent of their sin and turn to the Lord.

Zechariah 1:4, "'Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds.' ' But they did not hear nor heed Me," says the Lord."

Notice the phrase, "*Lord of hosts*," repeated four times in verses 3 and 4. Meaning the Lord of all the armies of heaven.

This repeated title will gain significance in a few verses.

God is calling them to turn from their selfish pursuits—to *repent*, meaning to change their way of living and to turn back to whole-heartedly following the Lord.

Repentance must always come before blessing and deliverance from God's judgment follows repentance.

Could we see a lifting of the judgment that is coming upon our nation? If there is a wide-spread repentance. Even if there isn't wide-spread repentance, God's blessing and protection is available to spare individuals who are repentant and who turn to the Lord.

Zechariah 1:5-6 NLT, " 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, [when they were in Babylonian captivity,] 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.'"

The words of the prophets all came true, they suffered plagues and food shortages, the Babylonians invaded their land, destroyed their cities and put most of their people to death, and took the survivors into captivity for seventy years—exactly what the prophets had warned would happen.

Many Christians do not believe that end-time Bible prophecy will be fulfilled literally—they think it is only metaphorical. This study of Zechariah will challenge that faulty belief.

All of these Old Testament prophets, who warned about the judgment of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, and their prophecies came true exactly the way they said they would, these same prophets have also prophesied about the yet future judgment at the second coming of Christ and the setting up of His Millennial Kingdom.

This is the conviction that we have in looking at Bible prophecies about yet-future events, will also come to pass, exactly as the prophets have said it would happen.

Prophecies about the world falling into great deception, increased persecution against Jews and the church, the rapture of the church, the coming of a global government, a global economic system, a cashless society, the Great Tribulation, increased wars, severe plagues, and natural disasters, complete destruction of the city of Damascus, the invasion of Israel by Russia, Turkey, Iran and allies who will all be destroyed by God, etc.

These, and many more prophecies about the last days, will all be fulfilled literally in detail, just as the prophecies made by these same prophets about past events, like the rise and fall of the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman Empires, and the first coming and crucifixion of Christ were all fulfilled literally and in detail.

Zechariah 1:7-8, "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 son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet: ⁸I saw by night, [He was not asleep, but in the night he saw this vision] and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees [a small fragrant shrub, often a symbol of the people of Israel] **in the hollow** [meaning in a small valley—in a low place]; and behind him were horses [perhaps many]: red, sorrel, and white."

The man on the horse is identified in verse 11 as “the Angel of the LORD”—meaning He is an Old Testament appearance of Jesus the Messiah, known as a Christophany.

What is significant here is that the man (Messiah/the Angel of the Lord) appeared “among” the people of Israel (the myrtle trees), when they were in a low place in their experience. Though they were oppressed and surrounded by enemies, they were not alone.

Isaiah 43:1–3, "But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. ²When you pass through the waters [a low place], I will be with you; And through the rivers [a low place], they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. ³For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior..."

And the Angel of the Lord on the red horse was accompanied by other horses (presumably also with riders on them): red horses, sorrel [or brown] horses and white horses.

Who did the Lord identify Himself as four times repeatedly in verses 3 and 4? The Lord of hosts—meaning the Lord of the angelic armies of heaven.

Who were these other horses behind the Lord of hosts? We aren't told how many there were, but they are believed to be a mounted heavenly army.

In the physical realm they could not be seen, but in this vision, Zechariah saw them and they were standing among the people of Israel in this low place.

What Zechariah saw was perhaps similar to what Elisha and his servant saw in **2Kings 6:16-17**, *“So [Elisha] answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with [the enemy].”¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, and said, “LORD, I pray, open [my servant’s] eyes that he may see.” Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”*

The message to Israel in this vision was, though you are in a valley experience, though you are very low and very small (like little shrubs) in the eyes of the world, the Lord has not abandoned or cast-off Israel.

The same is true of troubled, bullied, despised, tiny Israel today. Invisibly scattered among the nation of Israel, standing in the midst of them is their commander, the Angel of the Lord, backed up by an angelic army of heaven.

The people of Israel are oblivious to their presence, but they are protecting the nation of Israel.

Why do you think that the constant attacks of the enemies of Israel can never succeed?

The invisible armies of the Lord are among the people.

This prophetic vision was given at the beginning what the Bible calls “The times of the Gentiles” when Israel would be dominated and trampled underfoot by the Gentiles.

Luke 21:24, *“And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”*

We are now living very near the end of the times of the Gentiles. The times of the Gentiles will conclude when Christ returns physically at the end of the Great Tribulation to destroy the Gentile rulers who oppose Israel and to set up His Kingdom on earth.

Zechariah 1:8–10, *“I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him were horses: red, sorrel, and white.⁹ Then I said, “My lord, what are these? [Referring to all of these horses.]” So the angel who*

talked with me [this is another angel who serves as a messenger to interpret the vision for Zechariah] *said to me, "I will show you what they are."*¹⁰ *And the man who stood among the myrtle trees* [the pre-incarnate Messiah] *answered and said, "These are the ones whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth."*

This is a message of encouragement for the people of Israel.

When Satan appeared before God as the accuser of Job, he said that he came, *"From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."* (Job 1:7)

Peter explains to us the purpose of Satan's restless roaming around the earth, **1 Peter 5:8**, *"... your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*

God also has His own angelic messengers who walk to and fro across the earth to counteract and frustrate Satan's designs, and to care for and protect, and in many more ways than we realize, to be ministering spirits to those who will be heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14).

Zechariah 1:11, *"So they* [those riding the horses] *answered the Angel of the Lord, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, "We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly."*

The people of Israel were in distress, Jerusalem was in ruins, their cities were in ruins, the enemy nations had scattered the Jewish people, taken possession of their land and were now resting quietly in peace while Israel was in distress.

We have the picture of a spiritual army, visible only by this God-given vision, who are protecting Israel, and they have scouted out the earth, and have put the nations of the earth into a false sense of peace and security.

Now they have reported back to their Commander—everything is ready for judgment to begin upon the unsuspecting nations.

There are aspects of this prophecy which applied to Zechariah's day, but most of this prophecy, and most of what we will be studying in all of this book of prophecy, is pointing forward to God's dealing with Israel in the last days.

This vision seems to be describing the scenario that Paul also prophesied about in the New Testament, in **1 Thessalonians 5:2-3**, *"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord* [the judgment of God upon the nations] *so comes as a thief in the night.*³ *For when they* [the unbelieving people of the world] *say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."*

Zechariah 1:15, *"Then the Angel of the Lord answered and said, "O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?"*

"And the Lord answered the angel who talked to me, with good and comforting words. ¹⁴So the angel who spoke with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal. ¹⁵I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; For I was a little angry, and they helped—but with evil intent."'"

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