

July 5, 2026

A HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE FOR WEARY BELIEVERS

Zechariah 1:7-21

(2 of 10 in a series through Zechariah)

Many of the prophecies of God bringing his people back to Jerusalem out of exile are extraordinary. The Lord declares that they will no longer refer to him as the one who brought them out of Egypt but the one who brought them out of the north country (Jer 16:14-15), and when you consider the extraordinary nature of the Exodus, that's saying something. They would rebuild the temple, and its latter glory would be greater than the former (Hag 2:6-9). He would restore their fortunes (Amos 9:11-15). And the nations would stream in (Micah 4:1-8). It all sounded too good to be true.

And yet, just as God promised, in 539 BC, the Persian king, Cyrus, told the Israelites that they could go back home and rebuild the temple. It no doubt felt to some like this glorious seemingly-too-good-to-be-true day had come. They were about to experience heaven on earth. And yet, only a few more than 42,000 of them were even willing to make the trek initially, many others content with the life they'd established while in exile in Babylon. Rebuilding the temple was built with resistance, and eventually, after laying its foundation, they stopped for nearly two decades. And even with the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah calling them to repent and get back to rebuilding the temple—a call they obeyed—it sure felt like a far cry from that heaven-on-earth experience some had prophesied. A few months into the work, they were still facing harassment. Things on the world stage hadn't really changed at all, as they were still under a foreign ruler. No doubt, with each day's labor, they simply grew wearier, not simply because of the physical labor but because of the emotional disappointment of the scene and struggles all around them.

And then, one night, specifically February 15, 519 BC the Lord gave them a series of encouraging words as the prophet Zechariah received a number of visions. By the time it was over, he'd receive eight visions in all. But the visions weren't straightforward and obvious in their message. It would be fair to say that they were odd. First, they're almost all given in a literary form that we're not that familiar with in the twenty-first century, called "apocalyptic." There are many features in this literary form that are odd, and yet consistently occur apocalyptic literature. For example, it's almost always given from a heavenly perspective so that you're viewing matters on earth through a heavenly vantagepoint. And because you're getting this heavenly vantagepoint, there's often an angel that guides you through the imagery—as we'll see here with Zechariah (and see in the book of Revelation). Kings and kingdoms are represented by symbols like horns. Numbers are symbolic. And there are all kinds of metaphors. It's simply not a literary form that exists in our present literature and, consequently, is not one we're familiar with. But the visions are also odd to the point that they are initially puzzling to Zechariah. Throughout, he'll ask the angel who's explaining the vision what things mean and will note his ignorance of things repeatedly.

But the visions are a rich gift because what they do is provide a heavenly perspective on what is really going on for these weary laborers rebuilding the temple. In other words, it's as if God peels back the curtains of heaven and says, "Here's what's really going on. Here are some realities you can't see with your eyes. Here's what's going to happen going forward. And here's why you should be so encouraged." In this way, it's very much like what we find in the book of Revelation—not only because that book too is written in this apocalyptic literary form—but because after the letters to the churches call the saints to endure in such difficult circumstances, holding on to the testimony to Christ even as it costs them their lives, the Lord there too peels back heaven and says, "Here's why you should be encouraged." We read part of that encouraging scene in Revelation 4 to open the service this morning.

And so as we look at Zechariah 1:7-21 and see the first two of these eight visions, we're going to see why those weary and discouraged Israelites in the sixth century BC should have been encouraged. But we're also going to see why we—even as we find ourselves weary and discouraged at times—should be encouraged as well. And it's because the truths that the Lord unveiled in these visions in the sixth century BC are truths that bear on us today. So, what is it that the Lord showed Zechariah in these first two visions that he would use to encourage these weary laborers? Let me note four realities that Zechariah was to prophesy to the people. First, Zechariah was to remind his hearer of God's sovereign rule.

God's sovereign rule

As Zechariah's first vision opens, the prophet says, "I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. Then I said, 'What are these, my lord?' And the angel who talked with me said, 'I will show you what they are.' So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, 'These are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth'" (vv. 8-10).

Now, this can be an odd scene, so let's just note a few things to better understand it. The man riding a red horse and standing among the myrtle trees in verses 8 and 10 is identified in verse 11 as the "angel of the LORD." That's important for us because throughout Scripture the "angel of the Lord" is identified as God himself. It's God the Son appearing before men, even prior to his virgin birth. There's much evidence of this, but I'll just note a couple reasons to conclude this is the Lord himself. Remember how the Lord interrupted Abraham, telling him to stop and spare the Isaac when he'd gone to sacrifice him? Well, Genesis identifies that one speaking from heaven as the "angel of the Lord." Then, this angel of the Lord says in Genesis 22:16, "By myself I have sworn," which the author of Hebrews identifies as God himself speaking (Heb 6:13). Then we see this same reality as the commander of the Lord's army appears to Joshua (as we heard read earlier), and Joshua worships him. Now, throughout Scripture angels don't receive worship. Rather, they rebuke the worshiper and instruct them to worship God. But this one receives worship because this commander of the Lord's army who is the angel of the Lord is himself God the Son. And so there are two angels in this vision. One is the Lord himself, and the other is the one guiding Zechariah through this vision.

Second, it's obviously not the case that the Lord needs to send out armies on horses patrolling the earth to find out what is going on in his creation. God, by nature, knows all things. But in apocalyptic literature, one way to communicate realities like the fact that God is all-knowing and present everywhere is to illustrate it visually, as is done here with his armies on horses, patrolling the whole earth. It communicates his omniscience and omnipresence in visual images that communicate powerfully. It's the same reality that is seen when Elisha shows that the Lord is with them by praying that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant, and he saw the mountains around them full of horses, chariots, and fire (2 Kings 6:15-17).

Therefore, to a weary people who are trying to obey the Lord by rebuilding the temple but are being harassed and are discouraged by their surroundings, probably even seeing Persian armies on horses, patrolling the areas throughout the empire, God is saying, "I too am patrolling the area. I see what you're doing. I know what's going on. Don't think I'm absent or aloof or don't care. I see." It may look like the Persians are ruling over God's people, but the Lord declares otherwise as he reveals his horses patrolling the earth.

This is the scene you can think of any time you're tempted to ask, "Does God see what's going on with me?" As you say that, imagine armies of angels, patrolling on horses all around you, reporting to the Son of God what they are seeing. And let that be a comfort to you. Again, obviously the Lord knows all just by nature of being himself, but he gives us this image that communicates to us and comfort us, as if we might imagine the angel saying to the Son of God, "I've looked at her, and she's needs your persevering grace. I've seen him, and he needs your care and help." Whatever it may be, the Lord sees, the Lord knows, and he's in control. God is ruling over all, even when it might not look like it. Second, we see an invitation for us to cry out to God.

God's invitation for us to cry out to him

In this vision, those patrolling the earth on horses give their report of what they've seen to the angel of the Lord, and they say, "We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest" (v. 11). Now, to us, this probably sounds like a great report. What can be better than hearing that the earth is at rest? But this isn't a good report.

You see, the Lord's promise of salvation for his people is that he'd judge their enemies and deliver them. We saw a picture of that in the Exodus, right? The Lord judged the Egyptians and delivered the Israelites from their oppressive powers. Well, Israel is right back there again. Sure, Persia seems to be a better ruler over them than Egypt. They're even allowed to rebuild their temple. But they're still under the rule of a foreign power. This is a far cry from the glorious days of David and Solomon that they long for. So, to hear that all is at rest and nothing is even hinting at threatening this world power that reigns over them is discouraging.

And here is where the angel of the Lord speaks up, and interestingly he responds with a prayer of lament, saying, "O LORD of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?" (v. 12). In other words, he's

saying, “Will you soon deliver? Why do you allow them to remain under this enemy’s rule?” And we’ll get to the answer that he received from the Father in a second, but for now I just want to focus on the prayer.

The angel of the Lord crying out in lament is none other than the one who is our high priest—our representative before God—crying out in lament. In other words, it’s a picture for us of what is an appropriate response to God in the midst of seeing disappointment and discouragement around us. He’s showing us that we’re invited to cry out to God. And so we should see these first two truths together. We are invited to cry out in prayer to the one who rules over all things, seeing all, knowing all, and reigning over all. So, yes, comfort your heart with the fact that God reigns. But don’t stop there. Cry out to him. He welcomes your prayers. Third, we see God’s jealous love and yearning to be with his people.

God’s jealous love and yearning to be with his people

After the angel of the Lord asks how long the Lord will show no mercy toward Jerusalem, we’re told that the Lord “answered gracious and comforting words” (v. 13). And then another angel, who is responsible for communicating everything to Zechariah that’s going on here tells Zechariah what this gracious and comforting message was, as he says, “Cry out, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion. And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster. Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Cry out again, Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem’” (vv. 14-17).

Now, there’s a lot of good here, but let’s start with the note that the Lord is jealous for his people. Though we may think of jealousy as a bad thing, like covetousness, it doesn’t denote something bad. In fact, jealousy is a necessary part of genuine love. If a husband says he loves his wife but doesn’t mind if she commits adultery—that is to say, he has no jealousy over her—then we’d say, “There’s something lacking in that man.” And we’d be right. True love says, “I won’t let you go. I won’t allow our intimacy to be shared with another.” And that’s why our Lord, who loves his people and makes them his own, said, “Have no other gods before me.” He is jealous for our exclusive affection. And so part of these comforting and gracious words were that God isn’t simply letting his people go. He’s saying, “I’m coming to take you back and be with you.”

Moreover, he communicates that his discipline that he brought against them from these foreign nations that led them into exile wasn’t so that he might cast off his people forever. The nations themselves acted with evil motives, and God will ultimately judge them (as we’ll see in the next vision), but God disciplined for a time in order that he might again show mercy to his people, as he notes here.

And, finally, the mercy that he is going to show them is that he's going to return to them. He says, "I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it" (v. 16). These realities of God returning to his people and the temple being built are intentionally linked. You may remember the sad scene of Ezekiel 10 as the glory of the Lord left the temple before judgment fell on Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed. Now, the Lord is saying that he's returning to Jerusalem so that the temple might be rebuilt and so that his glory might dwell among them. Thus we see God's jealous love for his people and yearning to be with them.

This is definitely a truth that sounds too good to be true and yet is. God's love for his people burns with such jealousy that he won't let us go. You may run after sin to make it your god, but he'll run after you. He'll discipline you in love to bring you back. He loves us with a jealous love and longs to be with us.

Now, again, imagine how comforting this is to a people who might look around and say, "Where is God?" Oh, how they would be underestimating his love for them by asking this! And we're likely doing the same. When we look at the circumstances of our lives and ask, "Does God care for me?" we must remember in that moment that he loves us with such jealous love, that he won't let anything take us away from him. Even the things that are painful in your life may well just be his loving discipline to draw you close to him so that you do not run away, chasing after sin. And, finally, we see God's commitment to set everything right.

God's commitment to set everything right

After the first vision, you would no doubt be overwhelmed as an Israelite at this good news. God is ruling over this world that often looks like the enemy has gotten the upper hand. He invites us to cry out to him in prayer. And, he loves us with a jealous love that yearns to be with us. But, you could still look around and say, "Though all of that is true, there's still a lot of evil around. It still looks in many ways like the enemy is prevailing." But there is another vision that addresses this in verses 18-21.

This second vision begins with Zechariah noting that he lifted up his eyes and saw another scene unfold before him. He writes, "I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold four horns. And I said to the angel who talked with me, 'What are these?' And he said to me, 'These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.' Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. And I said, 'What are these coming to do?' He said, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one raised his head. And these have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it'" (vv. 18-21).

In this second vision, Zechariah sees four horns, and like before, he asks what they are. We're told they're the horns that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. Now, even with that explanation, we have questions, don't we? But here's where having a little familiarity with apocalyptic literature can help us. Typically in apocalyptic literature, horns or beasts with horns can represent kings or kingdoms. And so in this case, these horns represent the kingdoms or nations that have come against God's people.

Moreover, the number four in this kind literature signals something being world-wide. So, think of the book of Revelation referring to the “four corners of the earth” (Rev 7:1) or describing God’s world-wide redeemed people in a four-fold way: “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). So here, giving us four horns to represent the enemy nations is symbolic of all of God’s enemies, world-wide.

So, with that in place, let’s note what’s going on. After God identifies these four horns, representing his enemies and the enemies of his people, he calls forth four craftsmen who are coming to “cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it” (v. 21). In other words, they’re coming to judge God’s enemies.

Now, when you put the two visions together, you see how good this is. The report of those on patrol was that the national enemies of God were at peace. There was no threat to them on the horizon. It looked like evil was prevailing. The angel of the Lord asks how long this will last. And then the second vision is one where the enemy nations are being cast down. In other words, the Lord is saying, “Don’t be distracted or discouraged by the delay and apparent victory of evil forces. I will cast them down. I will set all things right.”

Just over the last few weeks, we’ve watched a dear saints snatched away by Alzheimer’s, a baby fighting for its life, another friend I met this past year die suddenly, a cancer diagnoses for a dear sister, while others deal with all kinds of other diseases and struggles. And that’s on top of seeing the attacks of the evil one and sin cause all kinds of reasons for us to cry out, “How long, O Lord?” And the answer to that question “How long?” is, “Not forever.” I don’t know when the Lord will return and set all things right, but I know he will. And we get to live in light of that certain future, that certain hope. Heaven on earth will one day become a reality.

As Israel was in the middle of laboring under wearying and discouraging conditions as they looked at the world around them, the Lord burst into their lives with a series of visions to Zechariah. And in these first two, the Lord was telling them, “Don’t worry, I’m still in control. I see what’s going on. I’m with you, and I’m reigning.” And in the meantime, he reminds us that we can cry out to him, and he’ll hear us. We can cast our concerns on him because the things that we see as evil, he does as well. And though he might not remove them all today, we can know at this moment that he loves us, enjoys us, and longs for us to be with him and he with us in a much more intimate way than we experience in this life, and one day that great day will come about as God sets everything right.

That was the message God delivered to his people that night, February 15, 519 BC. And a little over 500 years later, God proved these declarations true. While another world empire was reigning, he sent his king into the world as the Son took on flesh. He provided for our greatest need when we weren’t even asking. He sent Immanuel into the world, meaning “God with us,” proving his jealous love and yearning to be with us. And he did everything to guarantee that coming day when all will be made right. And just as those in Zechariah’s day and those in the first century should have been greatly encouraged to keep pressing on in faithful obedience in light of

these truths and these realities, so should we. So, let's press on by faith, trusting our Lord and awaiting the day he makes all things right. May that day come soon! Amen.