

Gracious and Comforting Words

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Date: 04 May 2025

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[0 : 00] We're going to be reading from Zechariah chapter 1, starting at verse 7. Zechariah's in the Minor Prophets. If I've met you before, my name's Dave, I'm one of the pastors here.

As Nathan said, we are looking through the book of Zechariah, which is a pretty challenging book, but it's a wonderful book which points us to the Messiah again and again and shows us the glory of God and wonderful comfort as well.

Zechariah chapter 1, starting at verse 7. On the 24th day of the 11th month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Edo, saying, 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? The angel who talked with me said to me, 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. And they answered the angel of the Lord, who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, we have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.

[1 : 29] Then the angel of the Lord said, 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 70 years?

And the Lord answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. So the angel who talked with me said to me, cry out, thus says the Lord of hosts, I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion, and I'm 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 again choose Jerusalem.

And 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.

[2 : 46] 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. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your word to Zechariah. We pray that as we come to it now, that you would teach us and you would encourage us. You would give to us gracious and comforting words, as you gave to the angel of the Lord that was with Zechariah.

Amen. And we are looking at gracious and comforting words. And I remember when I was a teenager, I grew up in Middigong, which is a town our south of Sydney in the southern highlands.

And it got cold there. It's like it would be sunny everywhere else. And then you'd go up the hill on the way home and then rain clouds all the time. And it was often really cold and windy and often with that kind of sleet that kind of just drizzle that is a little bit icy.

[3 : 58] I never really dressed adequately as a teenager. And sometimes I'd come home from school exhausted, freezing, always starving. I've got homework to do.

And then occasionally I'd hear these comforting and gracious words from my mum. I'm cooking pikelets for afternoon tea. Brilliant. What a difference those words made.

Before I've tasted anything or anything has actually changed at all, I'm already feeling way better. Pikelets are coming on these freezing days. It can be great. Or perhaps a worse situation.

Things look really bleak. But you hear a comforting word. That tumour is not cancerous. Your child is safe. Or perhaps at a time where you feel isolated, abandoned, forsaken, unloved, alone, someone has said, I'll stand by you.

Comforting words can change your life, can't they? God has gracious and comforting words that he shares. Words that make everything better. Because they describe a new reality.

[5 : 08] Life has changed. These words point us forward to the grace and the comfort that God has shown us in the Lord Jesus. And so, hopefully, as we look at these words, we too can experience the grace and the comfort of God's word.

Last week, we examined the start of this letter, the message, as Nathan said, that if God's people returned to him, he would return to them. And they did. They returned to him. And so, God gives Zechariah eight visions, seemingly on the same night, to communicate to his people what it means for him to return to them.

And it's glorious. It's awesome. So, we're going to quickly look at overview of these visions. Then we're going to just unpack these first two visions that we read, work through the text, try and understand what it's saying, and then at the end, we'll consider these gracious and comforting words that God has for us in the Lord Jesus.

So, overview of the visions. There's eight visions between chapters 1, verse 7, and chapter 6, verse 8. And they form a chiasm, which means they kind of mirror the first and the last mirror, and then the second and the second last mirror, and so on.

They speak about similar themes. So, the first one talks about these different coloured horses, and the last one talks about different coloured horses that are pulling chariots. And they're both patrolling the earth.

[6 : 29] Then the next and the last mirror each other, and so on. The two visions in the centre of the chiasm are the focal point. So, the first image raises the big issue.

The last image closes it off. The first three visions have God returning to Jerusalem. The last three visions have sin being removed from Jerusalem.

And right in the middle, God's visions to Zechariah thrust us forward to the incredible, mind-blowing way that God is ultimately going to solve the problem for his people. And it involves Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor.

It points us forward to God's priest and king. But we'll get to that in coming weeks. For today, we're covering these first two visions.

But I want you to see that this is part of a tightly woven whole. These two visions actually form part of the whole big picture. So, it's worthwhile reading Zechariah week to week as we look at these visions and seeing it in the context of all the visions.

[7 : 33] So, let's jump in and have a look at this first one. So, firstly, the date in verse 7. On the 24th day of the 11th month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah.

So, Zechariah's came to tell us exactly when he got this vision. And we know what date it is. It's actually February the 15th, 519 BC.

It's a real night and a real place in history. God gave these visions to Zechariah. Now, last week, Joshua was telling us about the date in verse 1.

And again, this date, like the other one, is according to the Babylonian calendar and according to the Persian king. So, it's a foreign calendar that's being used because God's people are being ruled over by foreign kings.

And this date is three months after that first date. Jerusalem is this tiny wrecked city in the middle of this backwater sub-province in the distant province beyond the river.

[8 : 38] It's this tiny, insignificant part of a vast Persian empire. If you can see it up there, it really is very insignificant on the world stage. But God is saying, I will come back to you.

I will return to you as you return to me. And here's the first vision. Let's take a look at it. So, there's a man riding a red horse. He's among myrtle trees. He's in a glen. Behind him, you've got a bunch of other horses.

So, there's white horses and there's red horses and there's sorrel horses. And it's implied these other horses all have riders on them too. So, let's have a look at a few of these details.

The man on the red horse is identified as the angel of the Lord in verse 11. And note there's two angels. So, there's one who's with Zechariah, who's talking with Zechariah, and he shows up throughout the visions.

This is a bit of an interpreter for the visions. And then there's this one that's riding on the red horse among the myrtle trees. And so, verse 9 has this interpreter angel showing up.

[9 : 45] He said, Then I said, What are these, my Lord? And the angel who talked with me said, I will show you what they are. And so, the angel who talked with me is different to the angel standing among the myrtle trees riding the red horse.

Now, the horses are different colours. There's no particular significance given to the colours here. I don't think we should read in too much. In Zechariah 6, there's also different coloured horses, but the colours are different to the colours that are in chapter 1.

I don't think we're told any particular significance, but here, these are God's messengers that go patrol the earth and reconnoitre it. And then, in chapter 6, they're God's messengers that go throughout the earth and bring judgement upon it.

Later on, in the Bible, Revelation chapter 6, this imagery of horsemen, again, is picked up at the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and so on. And specific judgements are associated with each rider on different horse.

But I don't think that significance is here in Zechariah itself. Now, the man on the red horse is standing among myrtle trees in a glen. Now, again, I don't think there's any particular significance to myrtle trees.

[10 : 59] They're a good tree. They're like a desirable tree. They're a tree that grows where there's water and life that don't grow in the wilderness. And so, when God speaks of refreshing coming to the earth in Isaiah, He speaks of briars giving ways to myrtles.

Myrtles, and actually Esther, Queen Esther, her Israelite name, her Jewish name, was Hadassah, which means myrtle. So, myrtles were around Jerusalem at the time.

So, Nehemiah celebrates the Feast of Booths, and he tells the people, you know, go out into the hills, bring back branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths. So, that is to say, these horses are among the myrtle.

They're these desirable trees in a fertile place they're not out in the wilderness, and they're in a glen. Sounds like a pleasant little place, doesn't it? The myrtle glen. But the word glen is literally the depths, which is often used to describe the ocean, the depths of the sea.

So, they're not on Mount Zion, they're in a ravine, or they're in a glen, or they're in a hole. What's the significance? Again, we're not told anything hugely significant about it, so I don't want to draw too many conclusions, but I wonder if it's a picture of secrecy.

[12 : 16] The horses are hidden. They're in the depths, among the myrtle trees, at night. So, as we'll see, they've returned from patrolling the earth.

They've been on a scouting mission. God has sent them out, what is going on in the earth? And they've come back, and they're reporting to the man on the red horse that all the earth is at rest.

And so, perhaps it's a picture of hiddenness, scouts reporting back to their commanding officer in private, among the trees. So, God sent these horses, these horses and riders out to patrol the earth, to walk back and forward throughout the earth.

They've done it, mission is completed, they've come back, they report, behold, all the earth remains at rest. Seems like good news, doesn't it? World peace.

All the earth's at rest. The vast Persian empire has brought peace and stability. The Persian king is on his throne. God's angelic scouts have found there is rest for the world.

[13 : 18] But there's a problem. What about little insignificant Jerusalem, in the sub-province of Judah, in the backwater province beyond the river? What about God's promises to his people?

So, verse 12, the angel of the Lord said, 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 70 years?

So, the issue is, 70 years ago, God abandoned his temple, handed his people over to be defeated, taken into exile, and then his temple was destroyed.

And so, though now, 70 years later, some of his people have returned from exile, they're still suffering. They're still finding it hard to actually grow and eat food. They've started rebuilding the temple, but then that building has stopped and it's been abandoned and it's been abandoned for many years.

And so, Ezra, chapter 4, tells us what has happened. So, Ezra, chapter 4, verse 4 says, then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed councillors against them to frustrate their purposes all the days of Cyrus, the king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

[14 : 36] So, it's been about 16 years now since the foundations were laid but then work stopped. It's been abandoned because the people of the land have discouraged them.

People are harassed, they're afraid, they're frustrated, God's promises aren't fulfilled, they're in this city without a temple, without walls, they're still being harassed by the nations around them and then God gives these visions to Zechariah and the angel cries out, how long?

In verse 13, the Lord answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with you. And then after these gracious and comforting words from God, Zechariah is given a message to cry out to the people and there's three things in this and I take it that these are the gracious and comforting words.

So verse 14, the angel who talked with me said to me, cry out. Thus says the Lord of hosts, I'm exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion and I'm exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease.

For while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster. And this verse is key to understanding this vision and all the visions in the book of Zechariah.

[16 : 01] Do you notice that verb exceedingly? God is super duper jealous for his people and he is super duper angry at the nations. He's jealous in the positive right sense.

He's jealous in the sense that they are his treasured possession. Their affection rightly belongs to him and he is steadfast towards them. He will not let someone else come and destroy them without inflicting vengeance upon them.

Though he's judged them, though he's been angry with them, though he's withheld mercy, they're still his and he is jealous for their affection which is what caused him to judge them in the first place but now also is the reason that he cannot abandon his people and he will restore and reverse their fortunes.

So he's jealous for his people but he's exceedingly angry at the nations. These nations are at ease, right? The angelic scout riders have reported the whole earth is at rest.

God's angry at them. Why? He was angry but a little, right? He was angry at his own people as we've seen in verse 2 and then in verse 12 but the nations furthered the disaster.

[17 : 16] What does that mean? What's happened? Well, through pride and arrogance. So God gave his people into the hands of the nations to be judged because of their own abandonment of God but he prophesied judgment against the nations for ascribing their might to themselves and so by saying I destroyed Israel in my own strength ignoring God and considering their own strength and for showing Israel no mercy.

So one example of this, Isaiah 47. So Isaiah 47 verse 5 Isaiah is prophesying and he says this to the Babylonians Sit in silence and go into darkness a daughter of the Chaldeans for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms.

I was angry with my people I profaned my heritage I gave them into your hand you showed them no mercy on the age you made your yoke exceedingly heavy you said I shall be mistress forever so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end.

The nations living at ease and at rest through this vast empire of stability that the Persians have got and world peace and God is not pleased and he's not content he's exceedingly angry and his anger will be outworked in disaster for the nations an end to their rest and their ease they've furthered the disaster through their arrogance their pride through not acknowledging God who rules over them.

So you need to understand this to understand the book of Zerah that last week we saw God said return to me and I will return to you and the people did they repented and returned to God and today we see God is jealous for his people and angry at the nations and we're going to see these two themes of God returning and returning with jealousy and with anger again and again throughout this letter.

[19 : 23] The very next verse draws these two things together the people have repented or returned to the Lord he's very jealous for them so what will he do? Have a look with me verse 16 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.

So firstly he says it explicitly there I have returned to Jerusalem he returns he comes with mercy he will again dwell with his people God's house construction currently lays abandoned and has been for years it will be completed the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem that is they're going to bust out the tape measure and they're going to start drawing up plans this place is going to be rebuilt this is huge 70 years earlier Ezekiel saw the vision of the glory of God leaving the temple as God abandoned it to be destroyed by the nations now God is promising he has come back and the temple will be rebuilt it will be completed God himself will dwell again in the midst of his people that they might again be his holy people worshipping in his presence and then Zechariah is told to cry out again in verse 17 cry out again thus says the Lord of hosts my cities shall again overflow with prosperity and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem

God will return to his people and dwell in the house among them and it's a return that's going to bring blessing the cities will have overflowing abundance of prosperity Zion the mountain on which Jerusalem sits will be comforted after years of anger and desolation from God God will again choose Jerusalem as his holy city it's going to be wonderful God will come and will comfort his people and by the way Zechariah knows his Old Testament so he knows the prophets that have come earlier and he has stacks of allusions to Jeremiah and Isaiah as he prophesies as well so if you remember Isaiah chapter 40 speaks of comfort comfort my people as God prophesies that they will return well they have returned and they're going we're not very comforted but again as the angel cries out it's echoing these promises that were already promised in Isaiah God will come and will comfort his people so that's that's the first vision and then we have the second vision and there's four horns so four horns the horns in the Bible are a symbol of strength and power and might four is often a symbolic number symbolic of earthly things so you've got the four winds of the earth the four directions north east south west so on

Zechariah asks again this very reasonable question what are these and the angel said these are the horns that have scattered Judah Israel and Jerusalem so these four horns are the might and the power of the nations that have destroyed God's people and in verse 20 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 raises 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 the craftsmen have come to terrify and to cast them down those who scattered Judah will be terrified all their might and strength and power will be brought low by these craftsmen now why craftsmen the word is just the general word for workers including carpenters stonemasons bronze workers and so on right this is your tradesmen and these four tradies of the apocalypse are going to terrify and cast down the might of the nations how by crafting by doing their trade by building

God's temple God will bless his people from his dwelling and will bring down the nations in his anger the temple's not just a building it's where God will dwell he will bless his people it's also where God will dwell to overthrow the nations God being among his people in the temple that is rebuilt is the way that the judgment is going to come to the nations and so that's the second vision and when Zechariah comes preaching and prophesying these visions what happens the temple foundations were previously laid but they've been abandoned for years and years Zechariah comes along and says God says return to me and I'll return to you the people go okay we'll repent and he gives this message of God returning to them of God's house being rebuilt and Ezra actually tells us what happens so Ezra chapter 5 verse 1 says this now the prophets

[24 : 48] Haggai and Zechariah the son of Edo prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Josedach arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem and the prophets of God were with them supporting them here they are in what was once the most glorious city on earth everyone came to Jerusalem for wisdom and to bring tribute and now it's a backwater ruins of a town in a sub-province in an insignificant province in a mighty empire where are God's promises where is God's blessing they needed to peek behind the curtain of history because if you just look at things humanly speaking all you see is well there's world peace and we're irrelevant but actually behind all that God has promises that he is coming to restore his people and Zechariah gives them these gracious and comforting words

God has returned with mercy he's come with blessing and so to encourage them get on building his house he will reverse the fortunes of both the nations and Jerusalem and we know through scriptures that this temple building points us forward not to a building but to the greater temple where God dwelt in all his fullness the Lord Jesus and so in John chapter 19 Jesus said destroy this temple and I will raise it up the Jews then said it's taken 46 years to build this temple and you'll raise it up in three days but he was speaking about the temple of his body when therefore he was raised from the dead his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken God came and dwelt with man as man and that temple the body of the Lord Jesus was again destroyed but God rebuilt that temple in three days through his resurrection and now that temple of the body of the Lord Jesus has been risen up lives forever so that through his blood which is our sacrifice we can approach

God with our sin atoned being washed clean having sacrifice made for our sin through Jesus through his life we can come into the presence of God where Jesus is our high priest is always interceding for us Jesus is the one that we go to to get to God the temple was the place he came into God's presence Jesus is that place we come to to come into God's presence and the raising of Jesus of the temple does two things the same two things that God promised in these visions to Zechariah it brings mercy and comfort to God's people but it also thwarts the nations Jesus is king over all kings and he is lord over anyone who lords it over others and he will execute justice a craftsman a carpenter from Nazareth he is the tradie who terrorizes and casts down the horns of the nations Revelation 15 sorry

Revelation 11 shows us these two purposes of the risen Christ so Revelation 11 verse 15 then the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven saying the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever and the 24 elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God saying we give thanks to you Lord God Almighty who is and who was for you have taken your great power and begun to reign the nations raged but your wrath came and the time for the dead to be judged and for rewarding your servants the prophets and saints and those who fear your name both small and great and for destroying the destroyers of the earth the Lord Jesus reigns and there is a time coming where the dead will be judged and God's servants will be rewarded where those who fear

God's name both small and great will receive mercy and comfort and the destroyers of the earth will be destroyed and even more than this and these promises that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ that he shall reign forever and ever that right now we have been given the Holy Spirit to come and live amongst us and through that spirit God is building us as his temple we are where God dwells so Ephesians 2.19 so then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit that's incredible isn't it

[30 : 40] God actually dwells in us and we're built together as his temple and this is how God works he comes to build his temple and in building it he brings mercy and comfort through the Lord Jesus he blesses his people with his very presence by his Holy Spirit and as a kingdom grows that cannot be overcome or stopped as even though many try God will prevail through his Holy Spirit because Jesus is on the throne and he will comfort his people and he will judge the nations the kingdom of God and the glory of God does not come about through the election of certain politicians but through his temple being built with the risen Lord Jesus with his spirit dwelling in his people as the word is preached and believed so the temple of God is further built so that's to say don't be either too excited or too disappointed about our latest prime minister

Jesus is king over Australia as over every other nation he will build his kingdom and it will come through word and his spirit and God dwells in us by his mercy and comforts us to know there's no nation there's no parliament there's no king there's no regime there's no dictator that can stop him for he's come as a man among men to dwell he's promised to restore his people and to judge his enemies and God is not pro world peace in the sense of he's not for maintaining a status quo of sinful peoples and nations and letting them continue their rebellion against him he will bring justice he will overthrow nations he will come in great jealousy for his people defending and keeping us and he will come in wrathful anger toward those who have hurt his people he will cast down the horns of those who are mighty and proud we look forward to that day when the

Lord himself will return with flaming fire to bring vengeance upon his enemies and when God himself will speak comforting words to us and wipe away our every tear we look forward to the Jerusalem that God has chosen of whom we are citizens the heavenly Jerusalem so Revelation 21 is that wonderful vision doesn't it then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more and I saw the holy city new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for a husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away so just like the people in

Zechariah's day hear the gracious and comforting words of God know that God is exceedingly jealous for you know that his temple is being has been rebuilt forever in the Lord Jesus and we enjoy his presence through the Holy Spirit living within us hear the gracious and comforting words of God who has come in mercy who has chosen you who will both cast down those who are destroyers of the earth and bring us into his presence so that the dwelling place of God is with man fully and finally forever let's pray father we thank you that you are a gracious and merciful God thank you that you are a righteous God but God who has exceeding jealousy for your people father we thank you you returned to your people in

Zechariah's day with mercy and with these gracious and comforting words we thank you that you've returned to mankind in the Lord Jesus with mercy and with comfort thank you that you've given us your Holy Spirit we might worship you in your presence as your people trusting the Lord Jesus for our salvation and looking forward to the ultimate fulfillment of your promises where everything will be made right where those who are destroyers of your people will be destroyed and those whom you love and have chosen will be brought safely into your kingdom forevermore Amen