**The Lord Will Again Comfort Zion And Choose Jerusalem**

Zechariah 1:7-21

Key Verse 1:13

“So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.”

[After reviewing the first 6 verses of this book, we are now getting into the mystical parts. For a long time we will be studying Zechariah’s visions, 8 or perhaps more; we will see how the winds blow and how we can divide these chapters in ways we can better understand them. To begin with, what is the difference between a vision and a dream, since the prophet doesn’t say that he had dreams but clearly he had visions? I am not sure how to best explain it, but perhaps visions are vivid experiences of the senses in waking time, while dreams are more or less the workings of the subconscious in sleep time. I can tell you that the prophet absolutely had visions where God spoke to him in audio visual mode through his waking senses. And that in itself is fascinating because we have here symbolism that no one can interpret as absolute and indisputable gospel truth, and much of it is open for wide interpretation as long as it does not cross beyond any Bible truth into the obscure. What I am saying however, is that we need to be careful how we interpret these visions. There is much of them that are straight forward and we will be looking at them with the eyes of the Scripture. But as for the things we are not sure about, we will be sure to remind each other that we are only speculating.]

Let’s get some background on what’s going on here. We are getting now into the visions of the prophet, and today we will be looking at the first two. If you look at verse 7 it reads: **“On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo.”** A few months ago, God gave another prophet Haggai (if you remember) a harsh message to deliver to these returned exiles and after that to their priests rebuking them for their impurity. They had the audacity to expect God’s blessing even while they were sinning! They had been too busy building their own paneled houses, constructing the town hockey rink, putting a swimming pool in the back yard; and with the time it took to ferry the kids to music lessons and basketball practice they were on a tight schedule; and then with all the overtime at work, rebuilding the temple had to be postponed indefinitely! It didn’t matter that temple was still in shambles. Of course they blamed everyone but themselves for it. And they thought: *“Oh well, it’s not the right time to do God’s work yet!”* (Haggai 1:2) In all this they had also slipped into terrible habits of immorality, you know how things go; when the spirit is idle, the flesh quickly takes to rot. They had taken unbelieving wives (Ezra 10:44), and who knows what other filth had corrupted their hearts, lives and families as well! Haggai had given them such a scathing rebuke that they all repented, and decided to honor the Lord above themselves and above their own human affairs. Then there were hints of the Promised Messiah and his kingdom in the prophesies they were given.

Now it was time for Zechariah to receive his visions. Read  verses 8-11. **“During the night I had a vision— and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses. I asked, ‘What are these, my lord? The angel who was talking with me answered, ‘I will show you what they are.’ Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, ‘They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth.’ And they reported to the angel of the Lord, who was standing among the myrtle trees, ‘We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace.’”** All Zechariah’s visions came at night, in one long and action-packed night. Maybe they were given at night because the night is a quiet time where he might not be disturbed or distracted by anything else. So, we can now turn our attention to contents of his first vision. He tells us that he saw before him a man riding a horse. And from now on we will refer to this “man” as “The angel of the Lord” (11) as it truly befits him, or “The Rider” on the horse. To be perfectly clear, He‘s not an angel, nor is he a man— yet. One day he will be born in a manger, incarnate in flesh and blood so as to become fully man, and to take upon himself our humanity; to assume his full Manhood and to grow among us as the Greatest Man who ever lived. And he will become for us the most important Man who ever lived. This Man-to-be will be for us the God-Man or the Son of God, and Messiah Savior God who shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. He will be the One promised and fulfilled since eternity to redeem our fallen and shamed human race from the devil’s claws and the prisons of sin and to liberate our bodies and souls from the rot of death to life everlasting. This is the Rider on the red horse, the angel of the Lord whom Zechariah saw on that night in his vision. How do we know that this is the very Savior Christ promised to lead humanity to life’s victory? Look at him even in this mystical vision! He commands the Lord’s mighty armies in heaven who stand behind him! All mighty messenger angels riding horses and sent by God to survey the earth reports to Him and to Him alone! And all the cohorts of heavenly angels are at his command! Who else but the Son of God, the Savior King has this authority; No one but Him! Not only that; He stands among the myrtle trees in the valley or ravine. And that itself has a glorious meaning.

God’s people at the time were themselves in the worst sort of ravine or valley one can imagine. The whole world seemed to be on the mountaintop. But the Lord’s people were the one people ever crushed and left to suffer in the valleys and crevices and gutters of this world. Where do we find the defender of the heavenly hosts but in the place where the people of God are! Granted, the symbolic meaning of the valley or ravine isn’t clear, nor is the meaning of the red horse clear either. But when you study the Bible, you find that valleys are often symbolic of low places of shame and humility, places of failure and defeat. *When king David found himself in the valley of the shadow of death he sang he lifted up his voice in song that the Lord was right there with him. (Psalm 23:4)* Israel at the time couldn’t be in any lower place, barely released from their seventy year exile, weak, helpless and seemingly abandoned and left to fend for itself as a nation and people. But in reality they were never ever alone! Throughout history, the angel of the Lord had always been there with them, their protector, their champion, their friend, father and guardian; their Savior and the Redeemer of the firstborn of God. And there he is now riding on his red horse, symbolic of either the blood he is ready to shed for his people, or of the war he is ready to wage against the dark forces in order to liberate them from tyranny. Either way, our champion Rider stands with his people in that valley, unashamed to identify himself with a lowly people, glad to stand and be at their side; always ready to stand with us wherever we are in life; ready to help us; ready to defend us; ready to lead us out of sin, out of despair, out of defeat and failure, and into glorious victory. We call this faithfulness and we call it one sided eternal grace! What a glorious image this is of the beautiful Messiah who’s ever at our side, even in the lowliest of places! Zechariah is watching. And so, if Zechariah is to be a good shepherd for his people, he not only needs to personally embrace this vision, he also needs to know how vast the grace of God our Savior truly is! What was God’s message even to the people who sinned against him and were so terribly rebuked by him? Look at Haggai 1:13 **“’I am with you,’ declares the Lord.”** *Who is the fool who says in his heart that God doesn’t understand me or knows what I’m going through; or God doesn’t even care!*

When Zechariah asked the Rider about the horde of riders behind him on horses of different colors, he obliged him and told him what they were. **“They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth.”** (10) And in turn these messengers report to the Rider himself. And it seems these messengers had a report which went like this: **“We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and peace.”** (11) Oh dear! Imagine a time of such peace on earth! Nations have been at war with each other since the dawn of the human race. And when they couldn’t find anyone to go to war with, they turned on each other just to keep up the practice of war. Even when there was some temporary outward peace, there was always endless war within; I mean that man has been waging war with himself ever since he lost God’s peace in paradise. Why? Because of sin! Sin is the agent that depletes the peace from the hearts and lives of people and fills them within with conflict and struggle and anxiety and with every element of darkness so that they have no peace. In their pain and sorrow and angst, if they cannot find someone to war with, they turn their hostility and hatred and bitterness inward on themselves and their own families until it spreads to consume the family, then the community and society and nation. We see this happening even today, where the teenagers of our own nation, having grown up in a relative time of peace, have begun to turn their frustrations inward towards self-destruction and the destruction of their own families, schools and communities. So whatever peace these messengers were reporting to the Rider and pre-Incarnate Christ, you can be sure it was the kind that won’t last very long. But it’s true that the world was peaceful, and we will talk a bit more about it later.

What is interesting is the response of the Rider to this news. The Rider turns to God and says something to him in response to the news, and in return, the Lord God, the Father gives him an answer which also is amazingly glorious to those who have ears to hear what is being said. Read verses 12-13. **“Then the angel of the Lord said, ‘Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?’ So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.”** What’s the Pre-Incarnate Christ main concern here? You’d think that the news that the whole world is at peace is good news! At least that’s what everyone wants. But that’s not really what the Lord God wants. Worldly peace is useless and meaningless and sinful for the most part, if it has nothing to do with the Lord and his glory, if it has nothing to do with Christ and his Kingdom. People have been trying imitate and replicate paradise peace since we lost it, but they forget that it’s impossible without solving the sin problem. Real peace, or rest cannot be achieved until people have repented of their sins, have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and been transformed within and given to the new birth fit for God’s kingdom. But that’s for another discussion. The pre-incarnate Christ wasn’t concerned that the world was at rest and there were no wars. Sooner or later Satan would incite one nation against another. But his concern was God’s people. Look at him pleading with God. Look at his intercessory prayer. He intercedes with the Lord on the behalf of his people who are still suffering even after the seventy years of exile have been completed. How beautiful he is in majestic intercession for his people. He knows that even though the captivity is over, the suffering of these people continues. And it will continue until when? Until God’s mercy is revealed to them. God has fully pardon them, and then their suffering will end.

The Rider was talking about the time of redemption. Releasing them from their captivity in Babylon is good. It releases their bodies from confinement in Babylon so that they are free to move about and come and go as they please; like a paralyzed man who has been healed from his disease of paralyses, who can now get up pick up his mat and walk anywhere he wants to go. But the Rider Lord also knew that these people were still suffering within from years of oppression from the evils that have been inflicted on them from seventy years of labor to make them believe they were no good slaves, and good for nothing, worthless and powerless, and less than all other nations, and at the beck and call of superior forces. Yes, they were free to walk around and go home, but they were not free in their hearts to worship God and to serve him. They were full of fears and inferiorities, and shames and guilts and senses of failure and all sorts of defeats that rendered them paralyzed at heart and mind and in spirit, even though their bodies were free. The Rider Lord, pleaded with the Lord God Almighty on their behalf “**How long will you withhold mercy?”**. He interceded for them before God who alone held all things in his hands. Our Rider Savior is our intercessor who pleads our case with love. He knows the heart of his people who still suffer from ailments of heart and mind and spirit, who need God’s mercy to be liberated. For this reason he was ready to shed his blood for them on the cross, and rise again from the dead in order to provide that power which is needed to liberate anyone who believes from these kinds of prisons that kept them paralyzed and still suffering even though they were free people. He pleaded for them. That was the God-Man then, interceding. What is the God-Man doing now? (Hebrews 7:25) He is in heaven making intercession for us.

And so when he intercedes for the people of the Lord, how does the Lord God respond to the Rider’s intercession? In **Charles Wesley’s** hymn, *Arise My Soul Arise*, there is a verse that speaks of the Christ’s intercessory prayer and goes something like this: *“The Father hears Him pray, His dear anointed One; He cannot turn away, the presence of His Son.”* Indeed, look at verse 13 again. **“The Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.”** Two things are happening here. God Almighty responds to the Rider’s plea for the people, and then the Rider in turn will respond to the prophet. If God cannot turn away the prayers of this most precious Redeemer, what do you think these kind and comforting words might have been? Of course, we don’t know. But if we know the deepest desire of the Rider and Redeemer of our souls, which is to shed his blood and secure mercy and forgiveness for God’s people and for all who would believe on him, then we have an idea what these kind and comforting words were. But maybe it’s best to borrow the very words of prophesy from Isaiah. Years ago God Isaiah prophesied these words: **“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.’”** (Isaiah 40:1-3). Perhaps if the Rider heard these words, they were the kindest and most comforting words to his ear, for it was time for God’s mercy to be born into the world to redeem the world through the everlasting love of God.

Read verses 14-16. **“Then the angel who was speaking to me said, ‘Proclaim this word: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity.’ ‘Therefore, this is what the Lord says: ‘I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,' declares the Lord Almighty.’”** When the Rider on the horse, the Angel of the Lord” was comforted by the words of “The holy God, and Father of our spirits”, in turn he confidently turns to the curious prophet to give *him* a message of his own. You see, this Rider on the horse has tremendous authority to issue directives and to give commands and to interpret God’s messages in a way that no other is ever able to. And now that he is so deeply comforted by the words the Almighty has spoken to Him and he is full of zeal for God’s people in what he says. So we want to take a very close look at what the Rider says to the prophet, because as much as it had a lot to say to the people of Zechariah’s time, I know it also has much to say to us too. To begin with let’s say the Rider gives our prophet a command— particularly proclamations he’s supposed to deliver to all people. We want to know what these proclamations are, and we also want to know who are the people he is to deliver these proclamations to. When the Rider told him “Proclaim this word” he was basically saying: *“Zechariah, I’ve got a job for you”; “you’ve got to proclaim some things on my behalf.”*

What then is the first proclamation? Look at verse 14 again. **“I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.”** Do you remember what the hordes of messenger angels riding their red, brown and white horses reported to the Rider when they were given the command by the Lord God Almighty to go throughout the earth in verses 10-11? Look again at verse. **“We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace.”** When is this happening? In other words, when did these messengers observe the whole earth to be in such a tranquil state, where there were no wars, no skirmishes, no raids among peoples or nations, and the whole world at peace with itself? In a sense, the historians and theologians may differ on this point, but generally speaking, the world was in such an amazingly peaceful state in real time when Cyrus was king and had a strong grip over all peoples. However, in all the peacefulness that the earth and its peoples were experiencing, the Lord’s people were not! They continued to suffer under persecution and oppression. There was no peace for them save the peace that we spoke of, the only peace to know that the Rider on the horse, the angel of the Lord stands in the valley amongst them in readiness to suffer with them, and to defend them. But this is not the point of the proclamation. Zechariah was to proclaim something else. While the earth was at peace, and God’s people still sorely oppressed, the Lord’s words to them were this: **“I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.”**What kind of proclamation was this then? It was the best kind of proclamation the human heart could ever hear. God is jealous for the city he loves and the people in whom he has put his name; The Lord is jealous for his first born son; he is jealous for everyone who calls on his name, whose hope and faith is in the Lord. That is the message to be proclaimed. It was a message like no other.

God’s message of love for his people has been the central message of the Bible. In spite of God’s anger when they sinned, his discipline when they strayed, the warnings, the blessings and curses, and punishments, God was ever jealous for them with never ending love that was fierce! It was God’s love. And it was necessary now to be proclaimed, and forever to be proclaimed. Zechariah had a tremendous responsibility to tell these people of God’s fierce jealousy for his people, that they might rest in God’s love, take shelter in it, find security and anchor in it. And it is the kind of love that is unconditional. In verse 16, his love for them is reflected in his return to them full of mercy. God’s mercy is the greatest expression of God’s eternal redeeming love for God’s people. He tells the prophet “Proclaim it!” He is returning to Jerusalem with mercy. They deserved punishment upon punishment. But he is returning to them with mercy. Imagine. They had sinned and sinned. Even now they were building their own paneled houses, as Haggai rebuked them instead of God’s house, and they deserved nothing but condemnation for abandoning the Lord and his work, for trivial human affairs. But God loves them. God is still fiercely jealous for them. He is returning to them full of mercy. Look at verse 16 again. And he’s not only returning with the promise of mercy, but he is returning with the promise of his house rebuilt and with a measuring line stretched out over the whole city. In truth, the original language is in the past tense declaring God’s return already with mercy, along with his measuring line over the city. This measuring line when it is stretched over the enemy, it is for the most part indicative of destruction (Isaiah 34:11), but in the case of God’s house, it is indicative of protection. How then can we describe God’s love?

God’s love is the promise of the ages to anyone who would turn their heart away from sin and embrace God’s gift of redemption. In the case of this vision, the prophet was foretelling a time when the Lord will return to his people with mercy, and protection. It was the glorious promise of the Messiah’s coming for he alone is the ultimate expression of the Lord’s mercy. Even as Zechariah proclaimed the mercy of the Messiah, whoever trusted in him received forgiveness through the sacrifice the Lord was going to make with his body and blood to bring salvation to his people, and to give them eternal rest from the oppression of the world, from sin and from the tyranny of the devil. Zechariah surely understood what the Rider of the horse was saying. It was the greatest news any person can ever hear, especially after seventy years of struggle under both human slaver masters and spiritual slave masters. Today people may not have that many human slave masters, but the spiritual slave masters are countless. Their tyranny is legendary. People are oppressed but too blind and proud to admit it. They are in desperate need of redemption, and of God’s mercy. They are in desperate need of hearing this proclamation in their hearts. While they hear it in their heads, their foolishness makes them doubt God’s love and their own need for his mercy. But the promise is still there for whoever recognize their own sinner’s need and God’s fierce and jealous love for them. Yes, God loves you and me. This is the Bible’s most fundamental message. Yes, even when God is angry with us and rebukes us, it is his love. Yes, even his message for us to repent is his love for us to escape what’s coming. Yes, even his discipline is his love. That’s what people do not understand today. When they hear God’s harsh words, they think God is hateful, when God is full of mercy and compassion and all he wants is for them to escape from death to life. That was the first proclamation Zechariah was to make. God is jealous for the Lord’s people. God is jealous for you.

What then is the Second proclamation? Look again at verses 14-16. **“But I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity.”**The second proclamation Zechariah was to make was this: He was to proclaim God’s anger towards the nations who went too far when they were used as God’s rod to discipline Israel. You can’t do evil things, sinful things, bad things in this world, and think you will get away with it! And that is something else people of the world don’t seem to understand. Whether they know it or not, or whether they believe in God or not is irrelevant. All people, and nations, including ours serve one master— sin and its overlord Satan. And what this means is that Satan suggests the evil and the sin that is already there in the hearts of men and nations. [What does that mean?] In other words, no one forces anyone to commit sin and evil. No one takes another’s hand and forces them to commit the sin and evil they commit. Satan plants that seed and men and nations themselves are responsible for watering and nurturing that seed into whatever malevolent evil it becomes, whether in their own lives or in the lives of others or to the world. What I am saying is that, it doesn’t matter that God allowed the nations under Satan’s dominion to go ahead and punish Israel some seventy years ago; The truth is that these  people took their own liberties and pleasure in torturing the people of God in the process, and they went too far. That’s what these words here mean, **“they added to the calamity”**. People may want to blame their evil and evil doings on something or someone else; they may want to convince themselves that *“the devil made me do it”* or they may contemplate other reasons why they do the horrible things they say or do, or think the terrible things they think, or commit the horrible crimes they commit, [even kids are full of hatred and spite these days, thinking they can get away with it] or why they hate and enjoy hurting others without reason, or just for fun , or just because they can! But the truth is, no one can make them think it or do it. It all comes from within. No one can say *“someone else made me do it”*. And neither could these people. And if they thought they were going to get away with how they tortured and enjoyed the anguish they incurred on God’s people, they were in for a surprise. Usually in the Bible when God’s wrath finally fell upon the unbelievers and the complacent who never saw what’s coming to them, all their scoffing and sneering turned to weeping and wailing and shouts for mercy— but mercy never ever comes anymore. That time is gone.

God is merciful now not then but now. He is ever so merciful now. We have a Bible that has been available not only for the Jews but for all the nations, and for whoever will hear his word in every generation. When Zechariah was given this vision, and was told **“Proclaim this word: This is what the Lord Almighty says:”**he had in mind that not only his people know of his love, for he was jealous for them, but that his enemies also hear of his judgment. Why? And what judgment was coming upon them (Look at the 2nd vision) for going too far in their sin, and for taking evil to the limit in their lives and nation, letting their nation revel in sin and evil. How evil they had become the whole lot of them! They deserved no mercy at all. They were brutes. They were agents of Satan, like today’s people, cultivating the devil’s faintest whisperings in their ear into towers of human iniquity. Did they deserve mercy? Not at all! But still the prophet was to “**Proclaim this word”** to them. Why? Because God gives everyone, even them, a chance to turn from their wicked ways, and sins and receive mercy and forgiveness. Proclaiming the message of God’s anger and then later, God’s impending judgment on these vicious brutes who wounded and maimed his people (18-21) was the very reflection of God’s everlasting act of grace and mercy to all undeserved sinners. There will be a time when it will be too late, when no one will receive mercy. But in Zechariah’s time, at the proclamation of his word, and thereafter, whenever any person or peoples heeded God’s anger and took to heart God’s warning regarding his judgment, for them mercy was still available now! As he says to all who would hear, **“’In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ ‘I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.’”** (2 Corinthians 6:2; Isaiah 49:8)

Then there’s a Third proclamation. Read verse 17. **“Proclaim further: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.’”**  He wanted the prophet to proclaim that God’s towns will once again teem with prosperity. The land was desolate, left for seventy years untended and neglected and wild animals roamed where once towns and peoples of the Lord lived and did things that all ordinary towns and peoples do. It was hard to believe that such places would once again prosper and flourish. But God promises, and people of faith must believe the word of God’s promise. Once God promised Abraham his children as well as descendants would inherit this land and it was as hard to believe as it was for these returned exiles to believe God’s promise here. Yet Abraham believed! Later Joshua was to enter and occupy the land when the land was teeming with enemies who already had the land, and it was hard for him to believe that as well. Anyway, Hebrews chapter 11 is rife with men and women who believed every absurd, unbelievable and impossible promise given to them by God in spite of their situation and circumstance. They believed. It is not up to us to question God’s promises. It is up to us to believe it. As for Zechariah, it was his directive, and mission to proclaim the word of faith and not to withhold it, nor to make it believable. He was to say this will happen because God says so. It’s our duty to deliver the word of faith to this generation, and it’s their responsibility to believe it or not to believe it. However, it’s our absolute responsibility as God’s people to trust and obey the word of God that we hear in the Bible. Zechariah proclaimed something seemingly impossible.

Then he also proclaimed to them something else. God’s would again choose Jerusalem. That choosing is irrevocable. That means that once we’re chosen we cannot be un-chosen. It’s a reminder to them and to us that we’re chosen by grace, if we’re chosen, to serve the King and do his kingdom work. We’re chosen and cannot be un-chosen. We need to be reminded and we need to proclaim to one another since we at times are forgetful. You and I cannot be un-chosen. At the same time, it’s a reminder that choosing is a great privilege, a glorious privilege not an enormous burden as some might think. It’s a privilege that we ought to thank God for. Triton is chosen again to be a world mission center. And Triton will once again prosper. And we ought to proclaim God’s message. He is jealous, for us. So jealous that his love disciplines, rebukes, builds up and makes us the disciples and disciple makers that we were called to be. At the same time, we ought to proclaim his message of love through the gospel of his Son, the redeemer stands with us in every situation of life to lift us up and to help us rise up to our calling as the chosen people of the Lord. God bless you.