

Zechariah 1 Part 1

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[0:00] Great to see you all. We're in Zechariah chapter 1 and so by all means turn there. For those of you who might not know it, it's right near the end of your Old Testament before it becomes the New Testament.

It's the penultimate book or the one before last. Last time we looked at the general setting of the book and we referred to the fact that God brought this word to Jeremiah in the eighth month, in the second year of the reign of Darius, and that Haggai the prophet was two months prior to that, that Ezra is also ministering around this time and so this prophecy is to Ezra as well as others. Zerubbabel the governor was also a famous name in scripture but he was also working on the rebuilding of the temple at this time and so Zechariah is encouraging the rebuilding of the temple. But what we begin to get into today is that Zechariah did encourage the rebuilding of the temple but he then went on to describe what was to him future history.

And so we're going to be reading about things that haven't yet happened as far as he's concerned and as we progress on through Zechariah we'll also be reading about things that haven't yet happened as far as we're concerned.

[1:23] In other words, we haven't got there yet, this still remains in the future. But the fact that prophetic word is so precise about things that are to us in the past but to them in the future means we can trust it and when it speaks of things that are going to happen in our future we can depend upon the fact that they will happen and we might not even live to see it but it will happen.

And we've entered the second section of the book. If you remember the first section we dealt with last week in the first six verses and then we enter this period where in a single night of his life Zechariah has eight visions.

He dreams them. He has prophetic dreams and he has eight in the same night. Must have been a really restless night for him I would have thought. But his visions are full of things that are not on the surface necessarily easy to understand.

And if you remember we said that because of this, because it's apocryphal literature, sorry apocalyptic literature, yeah, very different indeed.

Because it's apocalyptic literature, it's full of symbols and signs that need to be interpreted. And the result of that is that churches generally, they either ignore these passages because they say, can't understand it so there's no point.

[2:54] So they never get studied or they simply make up their own interpretations of these things. And therefore what you get is lots of different opinions and an awful lot of confusion.

God is not a God of confusion. So there is a right way. And pretty much you can get to that by applying a simple principle of allowing the Bible to interpret things for itself.

The Bible is its own best interpreter. And so you will either find, as is often the case here, where there is an angel standing by to interpret for Zechariah and he relays that to us.

Or we can look at the same principle and see how it's applied elsewhere in the Bible. And that tells us how we can apply it here. And today we're just going to look at the first of these eight visions. Each of these visions, as we progress week on week, feeds into the next one. And what you see as we go from vision to vision to vision, is there is more and more and more about their future.

[4:03] Much of which is our past. But they're seeing it. They're being told what's coming. We look on it as things that happened. And some of them have yet to happen.

So the vision we're about to deal with shines a light on the condition of the nation of Israel at the time. And to give you a sort of historic perspective, Israel has been in captivity in Babylon for 70 years.

It's recently come out of captivity. And to be honest, it's a bit low and a bit defeated. And what God is encouraging them to do is to come back to him.

And that's what we covered last week, where God wanted his nation back. We talked a little bit about the use of God's name. And God uses throughout the whole of this, he uses his personal name, which means that he wants to draw close.

He wants to be on first name terms with his people. And if you remember, I said it's a bit ironic, really, because the Jews actually won't use his personal name. They actually say you can't say the name of God.

[5 : 12] So if you read their literature today, it'll have G-D. Or they will simply use the word Hashem, which means the name. And so they won't call him Yahweh, which again is not necessarily the right pronunciation, because the right pronunciation has been lost.

But they won't use that name. They will always just say, oh, it's the name, which is very impersonal when God is trying to be personal. So what we're going to see as we go forward is God's plan to restore Israel and then to judge the nations that have brought harm to Israel.

Now, you might think that's a bit counterintuitive, that God puts people in judgment in Babylon. They treat the Jews atrociously.

And at the end, God judges them for treating the Jews atrociously when God used them to treat the Jews atrociously, if you see what I mean, because he was disciplining them and bringing them under judgment.

But this is a principle we often see in Scripture. And people who finish up exercising power over Israel are expected to exercise a level of compassion.

[6 : 24] And of course, the Babylonians didn't. The Assyrians didn't. The Romans didn't. The Greeks didn't. They were brutal to the Jews. And so when God has used them for his purpose and his purpose is fulfilled, he then judges them for the way they've been too harsh.

So we will look at that as we go. So let's read Zechariah chapter 1, starting at verse 7 through to verse 17.

On the 24th day of the 11th month, which is the month of Shabbat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Edo, as follows.

I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a red horse. And he was standing among the myrtle trees, which were in the ravine, with red sorrel and white horses behind him.

Then I said, My Lord, what are these? And the angel who was speaking to me said, I will show you what these are. And the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are those whom the Lord, that's Yahweh, has sent to patrol the earth.

[7 : 37] So 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 is peaceful and quiet.

Then the angel of the Lord said, O Lord of hosts, how long will you have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been indignant these 70 years?

The Lord answered the angel who was speaking with me with gracious words, comforting words.

The word also means consoling words. So the angel who was speaking with me said, Proclaim, saying thus, says the Lord of hosts, I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am very angry with the nations who are at ease.

For while I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster. Therefore, thus says the Lord, I will return to Jerusalem with compassion. My house will be built in it, declares the Lord of hosts, and a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem.

Again proclaim, saying thus says the Lord of hosts, my cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion, and again choose Jerusalem.

[8 : 52] So, why do we struggle to interpret this, I wonder? So, a few things. First of all, it says it was the month of Shabbat.

Shabbat is an Arcadian. It comes from the Arcadian sabbatu, and in the Hebrew calendar, it's the 11th month of their ceremonial calendar, which would normally begin in the month of Nisan.

So, it's not strictly a Jewish reference, it's a Babylonian reference. And it equates approximately to January, February on our calendar, on the Gregorian calendar.

And then it talks about the 24th day of the month. Now, the thing to understand about God's word is even the dates are significant. We don't always know why they're significant, but it's amazing how many things happen on the 24th of the month.

There were several of them. But the number 12, and of course 24 is 2 times 12. I'm that good at maths. The number 24, well, the number 12, is a number that references completeness in worship. [10:01] And so you have 12 apostles, you have 12 tribes, but you also have 24 courses of priests, you have 24 elders surrounding the throne in Revelation 4 verse 4, and so on.

So, this number is always associated with some attempt to achieve completeness in worship. Now, of course, they've all been in captivity for 70 years. The temple's in ruins, still being rebuilt, and that's been interrupted.

And their worship is in chaos. So, one of the promises here is that he's going to restore them to completeness in worship. And of course, once the temple is completed, that will enable a full expression of worship to resume in Israel.

There's also a repeat of, this is Zechariah, son of Berechiah, son of Edo. It's to remind us it's the same Zechariah, and he has a priestly and a prophetic heritage behind him.

And then, I kind of wish our English translations had made life easy for us. But, it says, I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees, which were in the ravine, with red sorrel and white horses behind him.

[11:20] And then I said, My lord, what are these? And he's speaking here to the angel that's standing by. My lord, what are these? And the angel who was speaking with me said, I will show you what these are.

And the man was standing among the myrtle trees, or who was standing among the myrtle trees, answered and said, These are those whom Yahweh has sent to patrol the earth.

So, this is the intimate name of God, and he has sent people to patrol the earth. He sent people out on a mission. So, let's backtrack a little bit. So, there's a man seated on a red horse.

What on earth does that mean? In fact, I'm going to backtrack slightly further. When it comes to the use of the symbol of 24, In Haggai 1.15, the people began to work on the house of the Lord on the 24th day of the sixth month.

And that was, again, in the second year of Darius. So, it's the same year as we're speaking of in Zechariah. In Haggai 2.10, God's word came to Haggai the prophet on the 24th day of the ninth month.

[12:26] In Ezra, the hand of the Lord was on the exiles as they set out from the Ahava Canal to return to Jerusalem on the 24th day of the first month. So, this number 24 happens a lot.

And that's the only reason I've given it a little bit of time because when things are repeated and repeated and repeated in Scripture, it's an encouragement for us to dig and find out what's this all about. And of course, in all the people who are involved with the temple, they're all being encouraged to get on with it, to rebuild it, because the aim is to restore a completeness in worship. And so, we've got this man on a red horse. Could we have the second horse picture up? So, there's a magnificent red horse. And the colour red, when it comes to horses, is very much associated with bloodshed or with violence or with warfare.

But he's not at war. He's standing among the myrtle trees. And it's not clear whether he's got off his horse and he's standing there or whether he's on the horse and the horse is standing there. It's actually, it doesn't make any difference to the interpretation of the passage.

But he's in the trees. Could we put up the picture of the tree? He's in among the myrtle trees. Now, from that, you'll see the myrtle tree is a beautiful tree.

[13:50] And apparently, it's a very fragrant tree and very hardy. It will grow almost anywhere. And so, he's standing among these beautiful trees.

And he's not at war, but it looks as if he might have been at war. And he's ready to go to war because he's saddled up and he's ready to go. So, if we go back to the other horses.

So, second horse. Well, first horse. First picture. Right, that's a sorrel horse. I don't know if any of you are into horses. But it's a kind of a reddish-brown colour.

So, it's not a white horse and it's not a red horse, but it's somewhere between the two. And then, we read that he has white horses as well. We've got a picture of a white horse.

Now, these, in Scripture, when you chase them down, the red horse, if you look at Revelation 6, verses 3 and 4, you'll find the red horse was involved in battle.

[14:46] It was a battle horse and it was involved in bloodshed. The white is always associated with purity, but also with victory. And the sorrel horse is kind of a general purpose cavalry horse.

Like, if you're, if you've got a military army, we're dealing with the Yahweh of hosts or the Yahweh of armies. So, the majority of the army, I'm suggesting, it's not clear in Scripture, so just take my word for it or don't, but I think the majority of the armies would be mounted on sorrel horses and they are there to do the bidding of the man on the red horse.

So, they are, you know, they'll attack if they're told to attack. They will care if they're told to care.

They will, they will serve whatever the man on the red horse gives them to do.

But what about the myrtle trees? What's that all about? They've come out of captivity, these Jews, and suddenly you've got the man on the red horse who we haven't yet identified but we will in a moment.

But whoever he is, what's the thing about the myrtle trees? And, unhelpfully, this passage doesn't say the myrtle trees are. I mean, there's an angel there, an interpretive angel who doesn't say, I'll tell you who the myrtle trees are.

[16:05] So, we have to look elsewhere for that. So, in Nehemiah 8, verse 15, and you might as well turn there so you can know that I'm not making it up. Nehemiah 8, and the key verse is verse 15.

But, if we start reading at verse 13, you'll see what's going on at the time that the myrtle tree is included in the description. And it says, then, on the second day, the heads of the father's household of all the people, the priests and the Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, that they might gain insight into the words of the law.

They found written in the law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths, tabernacles, during the feast of the seventh month. So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, go out to the hills, bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.

So, the myrtle was associated with tabernacles. And tabernacles is the feast that celebrates God coming and living with his people. God tabernacling among his people.

So, the man on the red horse among the myrtle trees, the myrtle trees are a picture of Israel that God is trying to draw back to him. I hope that's clear.

[17:36] Try Isaiah 41 as well, because they all add little ingredients. Isaiah 41. And of course, as we study these things and we jump backwards and forwards through the Bible, we realize how internally consistent the Bible is.

verse 19. Now, once again, to get the context, you really need to think about verse 17 onwards. And what's happening here is that Israel is in a mess, basically.

And in verse 17, describe some of that mess. The afflicted and the needy are seeking water, but there is none and their tongue is parched with thirst. I, Yahweh, will answer them myself as the God of Israel.

I will not forsake them. So, read on a bit. I will open rivers on the bare heights and springs in the midst of valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land fountains of water.

I will put cedar in the wilderness, the acacia and the myrtle and the olive tree. I will place the juniper in the desert together with the box tree and the cypress.

[18:51] So, the myrtle tree here is associated with the rejuvenation and the restoration of a land that has become desolate and barren. Now, that kind of describes Israel as we find it in this passage.

They've come out of captivity. They haven't got a temple. The city's in ruins. The truth of the matter is when you look at the history of it, of all the people that left Babylon, there was actually about 50,000 that went back to Israel to rebuild the temple and so on.

A lot of people didn't bother. A lot of people stayed back. The majority of the Jews stayed in Babylon at this time. So, this particular group have left Babylon and are really dependent upon the Lord and they've got this barren land and a desolate town and a derelict temple and so it needs restoring and the myrtle is associated with restoration.

Go to Isaiah 55 and verse 13. Now, if you go back one verse to verse 12, it's that famous little passage, for you will go out with joy.

Now, this is speaking to a people who cannot at the moment go out with joy. for you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands.

[20:18] Instead of the thorn bush, cypress will come up and instead of the, and my version says nettle, but I think it should be briar, the myrtle will come up and it will be a memorial to the Lord for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off.

So, the myrtle is going to replace the briar and for those of you who've had Daniel and Amy around ripping briars out of your patch, you'll know what briars do to gardens, they just choke it.

They're not good things to have to deal with but he's saying, the Lord is saying through here, Yahweh is saying, these things will be gone and the myrtle will come up.

So, it indicates a reversal of fortunes for the Jews. So, with all of that, the myrtle represents Israel in need of a reversal of fortunes and in need of restoration and reclaiming by God.

So, I would then from these scriptures, I would describe that the myrtle trees, which what we read, sorry, go back to Zechariah, what we need, what we read, not what we need, we probably need it as well but, the man riding on a red horse, verse 2, was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine.

[21:40] The word ravine means a hollow or its immediate literal translation is the bottom. So, these myrtle trees that he's standing in the midst of are down in a ravine or a hollow or down the bottom of something.

So, it paints a picture of Israel being in a low place and yet, because he's using the analogy of the myrtle, to the Lord they are fragrant and hardy and beautiful but they're in a low place having come out of the captivity and Israel being in such a devastated situation.

And so, in all the associations we've seen, what we're seeing is the man on the red horse is coming to help Israel out of this situation.

So, we need to identify the man on the red horse. I thought you'd never get there, Ray. In verse 10, the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, so this is the man on the red horse. He might not be on the red horse when he did this. He might be standing next to it. I don't know. But the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, these are those whom Yahweh has sent to patrol the earth.

[22:56] So, that's referring to the man on the red horse and all the other horses behind him, the whole army of angelic hosts that are pictured here as riding military horses.

And verse 11, so they answered the angel of the Lord who was standing amongst the myrtle trees and said, we have patrolled the earth and behold all the earth is peaceful and quiet.

So, the angel of the Lord, now it's not specific in this passage, but if you go through the scriptures, you will find that the angel of the Lord is always a reference to Jesus and it's a pre incarnation appearance of Jesus, in this case in dreams rather than physically.

So, it's what scholars refer to as a Christophany. And, bear with me, I need to find a couple of things that will encourage you to understand why we would say that man on the red horse was Jesus.

First of all, the angel of Yahweh indicates, because the word angel means messenger, so you can have an angel, you can have a load of angels, but this is the angel of the Lord, the messenger of Yahweh.

[24:08] So, the first thing is that indicates a kind of intimate carrier of the word of Yahweh, and only Jesus carried the title the word of God, the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.

So, in the New Testament, early chapters of John, in the beginning was the word and the word was God and the word was with God.

What's that all about? The word was actually divine, Jesus was divine, but he was also with God and they were working, if you like, in tandem. Interestingly, Justin Martyr, who was an apostle of John, so the apostle John sat with Jesus, died at the age of 100-ish and he evangelised and raised Justin Martyr, so Justin, you don't get much closer to the original source than Justin Martyr.

Justin Martyr had a dialogue with a man called Trifo and if you've ever got about three days to spare, I could recommend reading it, it's fascinating but very long and very verbose.

But in chapter 56 of that dialogue, he confirms that the commonly held view in the second century church was that the angel of the Lord, when it's portrayed in scripture, was always Jesus.

[25:28] So, what we see then is a heart cry from the angel of Yahweh to Yahweh himself, so you've got God speaking to God, you've got the two persons, or two of the persons of the trinity, expressing a heart cry for Jerusalem to be restored.

And you get this sense as any of us who are fathers will have had with our children from time to time, when our children need discipline. I can't speak for you, I hate it, I hate having to discipline my kids, but at the same time, you know it has to be done.

And you can't wait for it to be over and completed so you can get back to normal father-son or father-daughter relationships. And that's what you have portrayed here, which is why I think it's important that instead of the impersonal phrase the Lord of hosts, we actually embrace this idea. This is Yahweh of hosts saying, I want you back, I want this period of discipline to be over, and I don't only want it to be over, I want it to be over forever if possible.

So the answer that comes when the angel of the Lord who's been on the red horse says, how long are we going to continue this against these people with whom we've been angry for 70 years?

[26 : 47] And the answer comes from Yahweh that is filled with good and comforting and as I said when I read it through, consoling words. That was verse 12 and 13.

The Lord answered the angel, the Lord answered the angel who was speaking with me, so this is not the angel of the Lord but an angel, with gracious and comforting words.

I want my people back. And then he says what should be proclaimed. Verse 14, so the angel who was speaking with me said to me, proclaim, saying, thus says the Lord of hosts, I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.

This is not a confession of the sin of jealousy on the part of God. The word jealous is sometimes translated as zealous and it is simply an indication of God's passion for his people.

And so I am exceedingly jealous or zealous for the Jews, for Zion. So when people disparage Zionists, the Lord was a Zionist, is a Zionist.

[27 : 59] Interesting, isn't it? When we operate our history and don't consult God, we finish up saying all kinds of crass things, one of which was, oh, I don't like these Zionists.

Well, the Zionists, the true Zionist is in line with the Lord. Let's see what I've missed. Okay, so back in verse 11, all of these people say we have patrolled the earth and the earth is peaceful and quiet and that might lead us to think, well, that's a good thing, surely.

The earth is peaceful and quiet. There's nothing to worry about. But when you dig a little bit, the word quiet simply means settled or can even mean lurking and the word quiet simply means idle.

And as we read on, you get the impression that God is saying it's not good enough for you to be quiet or idle or lurking because it means that if you're lurking, then you're ready to oppress the Jews yet again at any moment.

This is not what God is looking for. What God is looking for is active compassion towards his people. And it goes on and it says, verse 12, the angel of the Lord said, O Lord of hosts, how long will you have no compassion for Jerusalem?

[29 : 20] And the cities of Judah, of which you have been indignant these 70 years. And the Lord Yahweh answered the angel who was speaking with me with gracious and comforting words and then said, proclaim, I am exceedingly jealous.

And verse 15, but I am very angry with the nations who are at ease, for while I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster.

So, Yahweh is saying, I am really angry with these nations because they shouldn't just be inert. What we have got is a situation where there is nothing happening in the earth, neither good nor bad, a state of inertia is prevailing.

And the Lord is saying, you are in a state of inertia and my people are desperate. Do you see the offence that God might take at that? Especially as they are now in a state of inertia because God's people have had the stuffing kicked out of them basically.

They are completely depressed, oppressed, and this state of inertia exists which is very unhealthy for God's people. And when you read about the rebuilding of the temple, they were continually at them to stop the building and they tried all sorts of schemes to get them to interrupt the building, which were eventually overcome because of the Cyrus decree.

[30 : 40] But God's angry at these people who, instead of simply taking the Jews captive, have treated them harshly and the phrase that's used here is, I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster.

There's another, has anybody got something written differently from they furthered the disaster? No? Okay. There are other ways it's explained but it basically means that they piled on, instead of just taking them captive, they piled on the oppression, they piled on the persecution, treated them

abysmally.

Yeah, go on. Yeah. So the affliction that the Jews had by being taken captive, they helped it forward, is the sense of what we're getting here. So, now all of this is taking place at a time when God has not yet returned to his people.

So, Zechariah's having these dreams, he's said his initial words to the nation and said, you need to return, the Lord is saying, return to me, and then he's explaining, if you like, the passion and the fervor God has to see his people come back to him.

Now, to me, that speaks to us of God's heartfelt desire that not only that we should come back to him, but all those people who are still yet to hear the gospel or respond to it, that all of us should come back to him.

[32:02] There isn't a single one of us that he doesn't love. And I wouldn't want to be in the shoes of the people in the media at the moment who are trashing everything that has got anything to do with Jesus or anything to do with the gospel.

Because they're doing what these nations did who took Israel captive. They are oppressing them in whatever, in various ways.

Yes, that's a slightly extended explanation. They helped but with evil intent. This is this. So it's a false peace, if you like.

A bit like I suspect is going on in the Middle East at the moment. Yeah, okay, okay, we'll have peace. But watch the sky and see when the next missile comes over. It was a false peace.

Now, as we said earlier on, it's a common thing for God to use Israel's enemies to bring judgment upon them. He's given them clear guidance all the way.

[33:01] As they've read through their own scriptures, they would have been guided to! obey him, turn to him, honour him. And he uses enemies to judge them when they don't.

But then if they overdo their actions against Israel, God will then judge them. Once God has finished with them and his purpose has been served, he will judge them.

He did the same with Assyria. In 2 Kings 17 verse 6, he judged them for being too harsh. But he applied the same rules to Persia and instead of judging them, he blessed them because of the Cyrus decree, because Cyrus helped his people.

So these judgments are always even-handed. If you err towards evil, you get the judgment for evil, but if you err towards good and godly, you get the blessing.

God has always said to the Jews, I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.

[34:04] So a well-known scriptural principle. So if we then go to verse 16, God then introduces a new phase for Israel.

Thus says the Lord, and if you think about them hearing this, there may well be those who were really, really faithful and they took it kind of, oh, that's good. You've got to remember they've come out of captivity and extreme persecution and extreme harsh treatment.

And then through the prophet, God says, thus says Yahweh, I will return to Jerusalem with compassion. My house will be built in it, declares the Lord of hosts, Yahweh of hosts, and a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem.

So they would have either gone, yeah, right, or they would have gone, wow, I wonder what that's going to look like. You know, God's on the move, I can't wait. And the measuring line will be stretched over it.

What does that mean? Well, the measuring line and you think of it, the easiest analogy we've got is a tape measure. It means God knew what he was wanting.

[35:12] He was stretching out a measuring line and he was measuring it out and saying this is what it's going to look like. So this isn't a haphazard thing. It's not something that is just going to, hmm, yeah, okay, we'll chuck a few houses up and we'll rebuild this temple and you know.

It's going to be carefully measured out and plotted so that what we are left with at the end is something that God has ordained. It indicates the precision that is going to happen during the rebuilding and the restructuring of God's holy land and God's holy people.

And in verse 17, thus says the Lord of hosts, again proclaim, saying thus says the Lord of hosts, Yahweh again, my cities will again overflow with prosperity.

Now you've got to remember they're standing among ruins as this is said to them. They will again, it makes me think of our little chapel, you know, it was ready for the bulldozer and anybody looking at it today would say and it still is.

But it's a bit like this. God has envisioned somebody. My cities will again overflow with prosperity and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again will choose Jerusalem.

[36 : 26] Now as we sit here today, God is still choosing Jerusalem. There is absolutely no way that Jerusalem should be still standing. The number of enemies that surround it, the barrage of attacks that have come against it, the hundreds and hundreds and thousands of missiles that have been thrown at it, it shouldn't still be there.

But God is preserving his word, which we read about just here. It's quite a privilege, isn't it, to be able to sit here reading God's word and say, well, it's true.

Tiny little postage stamp of a, I think, I think, I think Israel is smaller than Wales, surrounded by millions upon millions and millions on millions of enemy people and they can't deal with Israel the way they would like to.

So at this point then, the people, God hasn't yet returned to them, but this picture is being painted in this vision that God wants them to and God has plans for them.

And this is only the first part of the plan. Next week, there's a whole different extension of this that goes off into what would be for them future history. But right as we see them now, the people are very much in the situation as described in Deuteronomy 30 19, which says, I place before you this day life and death.

[37 : 48] Choose life that you might live. They have a choice to make. Are we going to obey God and go with it or are we going to not do so and trust that we can make our own way?

The other place I draw your attention to is in 2 Chronicles 7 verse 14, where in a similar situation where they are oppressed, he says, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, I will forgive their sins and heal their land.

So very much their nose is being held to the grindstone. You need to obey God. You need to turn back to God. You need to obey God because as we read in the earlier part of chapter 1, so that he can return to you.

And what we're uncovering now is the plans he has for when he does return to them. this heap of ruins that you're standing amongst will become a prosperous city again.

And this derelict temple will become a place of complete worship again. And I will come and inhabit it and I will be your God and you will be my people and so on.

[38 : 54] I think that's glorious myself. Father, we just thank you for this word. I am so always taken aback by your love for your people and also by the amazing consistency of your word, the Bible, which with so many different contributors is absolutely consistent with itself.

And therefore, it's something upon which we can rely. And as we see your determination to bless your people Israel in this passage that we're reading, we can also depend upon your determination to bless us who are your people in this generation.

And we can apply in principle the grace and compassion and love with which you dealt with them back then. And if we walk in obedience with you, we can expect the same.

So, Father, we thank you for the great encouragement of being able to study passages like this. In Jesus' name. Amen.