

Comfort My People

In Zechariah 1:7-17, the prophet has the first of a series of eight visions that are part of a night-long dream. In this eight-part dream God pulls back the curtain to permit Zechariah a look past Israel's discouraging circumstances and into the very heart of God and His plan for His people. Each part reaffirms that God is sovereign over every event in history and, more importantly, actively engaged in the lives of His people. He is far from being indifferent or callous.

Often referred to as "The Horseman Among the Myrtles", the first vision aims to comfort Zechariah and his audience, Israel. The Jewish exiles had returned to Jerusalem to find the job of rebuilding the temple, repairing the city, and starting a new life overwhelming and challenging. They became discouraged and felt abandoned, trading their initial passion and fervor for apathy and indifference. Through the beautiful and bizarre symbolism of this vision, the Lord reassures them by three means.

First, God reminds Zechariah and His people that **He has concern for them**. The riders that have been sent to patrol the earth, "the Lord has sent" (v. 10). The omniscient Lord is pictured sending His angel armies. He is engaged in the affairs of the world and your life. When people seem to be indifferent and circumstances unbearable, God is keenly aware and presently involved. It is reminiscent of David's description of God - the Great Shepherd of the sheep - who comforts His people with His protective presence. David captures this assurance in Psalm 23:4 this way:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Next, the Angel of the Lord - the pre-incarnate Christ and second Person of the Trinity - intercedes on behalf of God's people. Zechariah hears Jesus plead on behalf of Israel, asking the Father, "... how long will you have no mercy ..." (v. 12). Their repeated disobedience and idolatry had been punished with the destruction of their homeland, followed by exile in a foreign land. Jesus' appeal reminds us that God's "anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime" (Ps 30:5). Even more, it reminds us that **we have both an Intercessor AND an Advocate with the Father** (see Rom 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1). For believers this means that the path home is never beyond reach. God responds to the penitent heart, because Jesus speaks on its behalf.

Lastly, **God speaks encouragement**. In response to the Angel of the Lord's intercession, the Father "answered gracious and comforting words ..." (v. 13). God always knows what to say. He declares that His Word "shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Is 55:11). Listen to God's Word, His promises, His encouragement: "Do not fear, I am with you ... Take heart, I have overcome... I hold your right hand... I will never leave you, nor forsake you... I am making all things new."

God is actively involved, mercifully responsive, consistently encouraging. Be comforted.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV) - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God"