

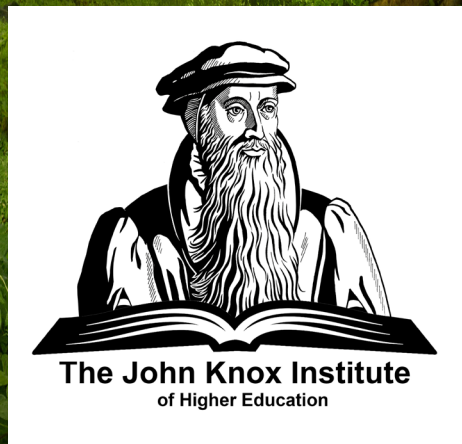
# *The Visions of Zechariah*

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

*by Rev. William Macleod*

Lecture #1

**Introduction: Turn to Me  
and I Will Turn to You**



**John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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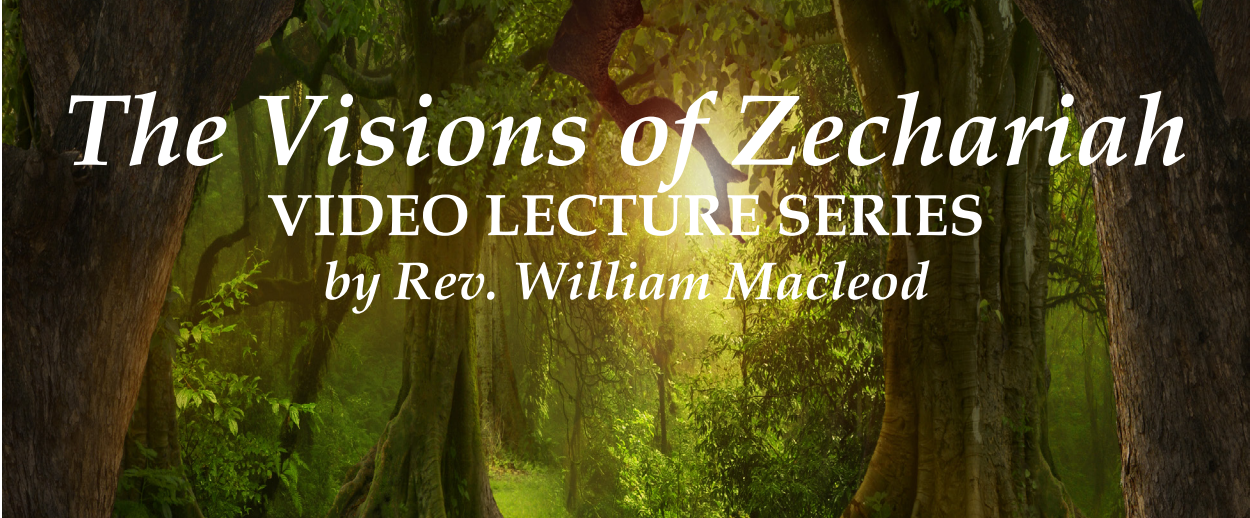
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# *The Visions of Zechariah*

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### Lecture #1 – Zechariah 1:1–6

## Introduction: Turn to Me and I Will Turn to You

This series of lectures is on The Visions of Zechariah. These visions are to be found in the prophecy of Zechariah, chapters 1 to 6. Our first lecture today, entitled, “Turn to Me and I Will Turn to You,” is based on Zechariah chapter 1, verses 1 to 6.

Recently someone asked me which was my favourite book of the Bible to preach from. I replied that it was the prophecy of Zechariah. Why would this be the case? Zechariah is not a well-known book of the Bible. It has some passages which are difficult to interpret. There are strange visions in it. However, there are many things in this book which are plain and easy to be understood. Also, this prophecy of Zechariah is full of Christ. There’s nothing more important for the Christian than Christ—getting to know him, trust in him and love him is the way to be saved. And once we have been saved, this becomes the passion of our lives.

In all our preaching, pastors are especially to preach Christ. The Bible, both in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, is really all about him. The Old Testament prepares for the coming of Christ. From the third chapter in Genesis onward, there are prophecies of the coming Messiah. The priesthood, the tabernacle, and the sacrifices were types of this coming Savior. The Gospels tell us of his actual coming, his death, and his resurrection. The book of Acts describes the growth and spread of his church. The Epistles explain who Christ is and what our response should be to his atoning death. And then the book of Revelation describes the future and Christ’s second coming.

The prophecy of Zechariah is to be found at the end of the Old Testament dispensation. It is the second last book of the Old Testament and is anticipating the coming of the Messiah. It was a dark and difficult time for God’s people. They were in a low state spiritually. The visions and words of Zechariah were given to encourage God’s people to persevere through these dark times. God, through Zechariah, presents an optimistic view of the future, valuable not just to the Jews two thousand five hundred years ago, but also to us today. The book calls on the Jews to return to God, and God will return to them. It proclaims that God is in control. He is ruling the nations and the future for his church is bright and encouraging. Eight wonderful visions are given to us in the first six chapters. I would like, in this series of lectures, to consider these visions with you. I believe they will be a great encouragement and blessing to you, as they are also to myself. This lecture will

be an introduction then to these visions.

The very name of the prophet who wrote this book is significant. The name “Zechariah” means “Jehovah remembers.” That is wonderful. We are tempted to think that God is far away. We feel at times that he has forgotten us. In our unbelief, we fail to see that he actively delivering his church. The cause of God in some places is very weak. We maybe feel almost that God is asleep. But no! Think of the name of the prophet— “Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God, remembers.” How could he ever forget? He is the God that cannot lie. He has entered into covenant with his people and is bound to save them and bless them. “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee,” said Isaiah—Isaiah 49:15. “He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4). He has his plan, and he is working it out.

It is important to remember that there is basically only one way of salvation, both in Old Testament and in New Testament times. It’s only through the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, that any sinner can be saved or ever could be saved. There is only one covenant of grace and, although the administration of that covenant in the Old Testament was somewhat different, yet essentially, sinners are saved in the same way. The one condition of the covenant of grace is faith. People are required to repent and believe the gospel. Men and women needed to be born again in Old Testament times just as in the New Testament times. None were saved by keeping the law or performing ritual. Paul tells the Roman Christians, “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”—Romans 3, verse 20. The law can only show us our sins and condemn us. In this sense, it is our schoolmaster driving us to Christ as the only hope for guilty sinners—Galatians 3, verse 24. The church of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament are one, composed of elect sinners who have put their faith in Christ and are saved by grace. Stephen reminds us of this when he names God’s people journeying from Egypt to the promised land as “the church in the wilderness”—Acts 7, verse 38.

Zechariah’s day was something like our own. It was discouraging times for the people of God. The church was very weak and in a depressed condition. Judah had been in captivity in Babylon for 70 years but in 539 BC, Cyrus, the leader of the Medes and Persians, conquered Babylon. The following year, as the new emperor, he decreed that the Jews could return to their own land and build the temple again. Many had prospered and were comfortably settled where they were, so that only a relatively small number did actually return. Very soon the altar of the Lord was set up again in Jerusalem, and the public worship of God resumed. They began rebuilding the temple, but it was a big job. They were few in number, and their resources were small. They faced opposition from the people who lived round about them, especially the Samaritans. The Jews were soon discouraged and gave up the work of building the temple. They were more concerned to build and beautify their own homes and develop their own lands.

Twenty years later, on the first day of the sixth month, in the second year of the emperor Darius, 219 BC, God addressed them through the prophet Haggai. He said, “This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built”—Haggai chapter 1, verse 2. How often we procrastinate! We know what we should do, but we say, “Not yet.” We say, “I will do it later when I have more time.” God challenges the Jewish church with strong words in verse 4, “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?”—Haggai chapter 1, verse 4. They were living in beautiful, panelled homes, while the temple of the Lord was a heap of stones. God calls to them, “Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is

none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes”—verses 5 and 6. These are powerful words. The Jews were not enjoying God’s blessing. Instead of prospering economically, their harvests were small. When they earned money and put it in their purses, these purses seemed to have a hole in the bottom. Money just disappeared, and no matter how hard they worked they were not getting richer, but rather poorer. Thankfully they listened to the word of the Lord, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of that month, the sixth month, they started again building the house of God.

Two months later, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah. Just like Haggai, he had been given a ministry of encouraging the building of the house of God, the temple. It took another four years for the temple to be built. Their financial resources in the days of Haggai and Zechariah were very limited in comparison to that of Solomon. They were few in number. It was easy for them to be discouraged but God said to them through Haggai, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts”—Haggai 2, verses 8 and 9. The glory of the second temple would be greater than the first, because the “Desire of all nations,” Haggai 2:7, the Messiah, would come and preach in this temple and fill it with his glory.

Now Zechariah joins Haggai in this ministry of encouragement, but he also goes further. He is given visions which reveal so much more. He has a great deal to say not just to the Jews of 519 BC, but also to us today. Studying these visions will make us optimistic Christians who will labour for the Lord in our day, looking for the spread of the gospel through the world, the conversion of the Jews to Christ, and following that, the promised life from the dead coming to the Gentile church of which Paul speaks in Romans 11:15. It will not be the mere work of man. God will do it. The spiritual temple, the New Jerusalem, will be built, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts”—Zechariah 4, verse 6. Christ shall rule the nations with a rod of iron, and all shall bow before him: “All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him”—Psalm 72, verse 11. So then, let us now consider the introduction to the visions and, indeed, to this whole book.

God speaks, in verse 1: “In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying.” Here in verse 1, we are told of the coming of the “word of the LORD unto Zechariah.” What we have in the book of Zechariah, as in all scripture, is not the mere dreams, imagination, and reflections of a prophet. It is divine revelation. Many today, even in the leadership of churches, think of the Bible as simply a human product. No, as we see here in verse 1, it is “the word of the LORD” that came to Zechariah. Peter tells us, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”—2 Peter 1, verse 21. These prophets were carried along by the Spirit of God, so that what they wrote is the actual word of God. It is vitally important to grasp this. All other religions are the mere reflections of men. They imagine what God is like and what God requires. However, in the Bible, the true God really does speak.

Paul explains what we have in the Bible. He states: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”—2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17. “Inspiration” means that all scripture is, literally God-breathed. *Theopneustos*, the word that’s used, it’s just that—it’s God breathing out the scripture. What we have here is not the thoughts of Zechariah, but a message from God. It was addressed to the people in Jerusalem in 519 BC, but it is also addressed to us today. It is a divine revelation to us. Further, all of it is profitable for us. It

teaches, rebukes, corrects and instructs us. Jesus often said, “He that hath ears to hear let him hear.” For Jesus, “It is written”—for example, in Matthew 4:4—was the same as “God said,” and came with all the authority of God, and was therefore final. Christ accepted the authority of scripture, and so should we. Jesus asserted, in John 10:35, “The scripture cannot be broken.” It will stand forever. The Bible is the word of God, and it is infallible and inerrant.

Actually, God still speaks to us today, but he does it through the scriptures. His Spirit illuminates our hearts. He impresses the truth upon our minds. Everything we need to know for our salvation is there in the Bible. It declares to us, as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* states in the answer to question #3: “What man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” We are to treat the Bible with all the respect which is due to God. It calls upon us to repent of our sins, believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, and so to escape from the wrath of God, which will descend without mercy upon all who persist in unbelief. We must obey and flee from the wrath to come, to the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Savior. Also, with regard to faithful preaching of the gospel, we must remember what Jesus said to his followers, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me”—Luke 10, verse 16. When the preacher preaches the word of the Lord today, it must be listened to as if it was spoken by God himself. So first of all then, in verse 1, we notice that the God of heaven is speaking and we must pay attention.

Verse 2, God Was Displeased with Your Fathers—“The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers.” So in verse 2, we see that God was very angry with our fathers. This was really obvious. Everywhere there are the charred remains of destroyed houses. The walls of Jerusalem are broken down, her palaces are burnt with fire. Her temple in ruins. The land is a wilderness. Thorns and thistles have taken over.

The old prophets had warned of the coming judgment if the people would not repent. But they had been ignored. However, their words were not empty threats. Jeremiah told the Jews that they would spend seventy years in Babylon, and his words were fulfilled. God saw the idolatry, the immorality, the Sabbath breaking, and the oppression. He is a holy God, and he hates sin. He wants his people to be a holy people, to love him, and to obey him. They show that they really love him by keeping his commandments. Disobedience is the result of a lack of love for God.

It is the same today. We are grieved that the church is so weak. Here in Britain, relative to past years, few attend church. Many large church buildings lie derelict. Others are used as warehouses. Some have been transformed into public houses and night clubs. Some have been converted into flats. Not so long ago most people went to church. Christianity in the past was respected and honoured by society. Today, sadly, it is despised. The church of God is forsaken. The only churches which appear to grow are those which provide worldly music and entertainment. The world has invaded and taken over these churches. The worship is not for the glory of God, but for the pleasure of man. God has withdrawn himself from our churches. There is no power with the preaching of the word. Few are truly being born again. The church, it seems, has been forsaken by God. It has been left to die. It is in ruins. Do you feel this? Are you troubled at the low state of the church? Is it a burden to you? Are you concerned for the future of the church?

Verse 3, Turn unto Me—“Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts.” Here in verse 3, we have a great call from God, “Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts.” Essentially, God is saying to the Jews that they are on the wrong road. They are like lost sheep. They are going away from God. They are in a state of rebellion from him. They are like sheep going astray, turning everyone to his own way. They are pleasing

themselves instead of God. They are backsliding from him. Sadly, this problem continued at that time among the Jews. The exact same message is proclaimed in the last book of the Old Testament, the prophecy of Malachi, which was written around seventy years later, Malachi says, in chapter 3, verse 7, “Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of Hosts.” So it’s the same message.

And is this not a highly relevant message for us also today? The fear of God seems to have disappeared from our country and even from our churches. There is no reverence for God. There is little love for him. We have become lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God. We are far too much taken up with our jobs, our families, our homes, our friends, and our entertainments. God is not central in our hearts and lives. There is a huge amount of hypocrisy around. We draw near to God with our lips while our hearts are far from him. We say we are Christians but are not as earnest and sincere as we should be. We pretend to be good, real Christians but it is all so superficial. We forget that the eye of God is upon us. God does not judge by the outward appearance. He sees our hearts. He is aware of our thoughts. He sees the rottenness inside us.

So here, there’s a call to repent. The Jews were to return to the Lord. We too need to return to God. Search your heart. Consider your ways. Measure yourself in the light of God’s word. Examine yourself by the law of God and its searching demands. Think of Calvary and all that Christ suffered for our sins. See the wonderful love of Christ. Remember that it was your sins that nailed Christ to the tree. How horrible sin is!

Turn unto me, says God. Repent of your sins. Hate your sins. Turn from them in sorrow. Grieve over how you have failed to serve God. Let the love of Christ constrain you to new obedience. Take Christ as your Master. Show your love for him by your repentance. Seek his grace to help you. Some think that repentance is something that they do only at the point when they are converted at the beginning of their Christian life. Actually, repentance is something we should be doing every day. Every day we are to be repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus afresh.

We have here, in verse 3, A Promise—“I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.” So here, in verse 3, a promise is made, “Turn unto me saith the LORD of hosts, I will turn unto you.” It is a great promise. We want God’s presence and blessing, don’t we? Why did the exile take place? It was because God left them. And when God left them, they were unable to fight successfully against their enemies. Like Samson without his hair, they were weak and like other men. When God was with them one could chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight—Deuteronomy 32, verse 30.

Now they have returned to Judah. God has been gracious to them. They are allowed back to their own land again. But it seems that they have not learned the lessons of the exile. God has chastened them but they have ignored his rod of discipline. It is true that they are no longer worshipping Baal. They have given up their physical idols but they have made gods for themselves out of their families, their homes, their fields and their money. Instead of concentrating on God, and serving him, and building his temple, they have been busy with their own houses, farms, businesses and pleasures. But they are earning money to put it in a bag with holes. Their money is disappearing as fast as they earn it. There is no blessing in their labours.

Further their enemies are threatening them on every side. When God was with Israel the Egyptians could not hold them in slavery. The army of Egypt which came against them was drowned in the Red Sea. When God was with them the walls of Jericho fell down flat before them. All they had to do was walk round the city seven days, blow their trumpets and shout. With God’s help, young David could overcome the mighty giant Goliath just with a sling and a stone.



Today the church is weak and despised. It has no power. It has few genuine converts. But here is a great promise. Turn unto me and I will turn to you. God will return. If only we would repent, then we would be greatly blessed. How different things would be if God returned! Try to see this for yourselves. Prove him and you will see how he keeps his promises.

Do Not Be Like Your Fathers, verse 4—“Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.” In verse 4, we have the words, “Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets cried.” The old prophets called your fathers to repent but they refused. Your fathers ignored the prophets and carried on in their sin. They came to Jeremiah asking him for a word from God. They said they would obey God whatever God said. But when Jeremiah gave them the word from God, they refused to obey. They had made up their own mind—Jeremiah 42. Their fathers came to listen to Ezekiel. But they treated him as an entertainer. He was to them as a musician—his words tickled their ears. Again, they listened but they did not obey—Ezekiel 33, verses 31 to 33.

You and I must not be like our fathers. No doubt we today suffer for the sins of our fathers. It is at least partially because of their sins that we are afflicted and weak. God was grieved at their sins, their outward profession of faith but their inner lust. Their hypocrisy angered God. He saw their pride, greed, envy, strife and immorality. He noticed their failure to train their children in his ways. He noted the respect they gave to the liberal scholars who denied the full inspiration of scripture. They let clever, unbelieving men take over the theological colleges, and train men for the ministry. But they trained them in doubting the Bible and in undermining the full gospel. Do not copy them.

Your Fathers Are Gone, verse 5—“Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?” So here, in verse 5, the prophet asks where are their fathers? These fathers ignored the warnings of the prophets, and so judgment came upon them, and they are gone. The sword took some of them away. Famine and disease in the siege of Jerusalem led to the death of many others. Those who were left were carried away into captivity. The wages of sin is death.

Our fathers have died too. They allowed liberalism into the pulpits, and worldliness into the pews. Doubt was cast on the word of God. Ministers were allowed to criticise the truth, deny creation, and reject the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and still remain as ministers. Instead of following the directions of scripture regarding worship—the regulative principal of worship—they changed the worship into that which was pleasing to man. Churches became “seeker-sensitive,” rather than God-sensitive. Their concern was to offend no one, but the result was that they offended God. Your fathers have now gone to meet the Judge, and to render their account.

The prophets who warned them are gone too. The faithful preachers, who stood against the tide of unbelief which was coming in, have passed on. Those godly men who warned of the spiritual danger the church was in have now gone to their reward. They warned against sin but they were ignored and despised. Life is short. A day of reckoning is coming.

Verse 6, God’s Word Remains—“But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.” So verse 6 makes it all plain: “Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.” God’s word is true and has been proved so time and time again. Every word of God will stand. The scriptures cannot be broken. The Jews hated Jeremiah and ridiculed him, but they have to admit now that all that he said was true and came to pass. They thought that Jerusalem would never be destroyed. They felt

sure that God would never allow his temple to be burnt. But it happened just as Jeremiah and the other prophets had warned.

God's threats are not empty words. We must listen to what he says. Turn back to God. Put away your idols. Humble yourself before him. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double minded"—James 4, verse 8. Return unto the Lord and he will return to you.

Today I warn you from God. Remember what happened to the ancient world. For one hundred and twenty years, Noah was a preacher of righteousness calling sinners to repent, but the people of his day would not listen. The ark was built, but they would not enter into it. They carried on with their godless lives. Then the flood came and destroyed them. It was too late then to go and knock on the door of the ark. God had shut the door, and no man could open it. When Lot warned his sons-in-law of the coming fire and brimstone, he seemed to them as one that mocked. It all appeared as a joke. But the fire came the next morning and destroyed them.

Jesus was told of the tower of Siloam falling on eighteen people and killing them. He warned the people, Do you think those on whom the tower fell were greater sinners than others? No, he said, but unless you repent you shall all likewise perish—Luke 13, verse 5. Whatever we witness of accidents and tragedies should be seen as coming from God—it's a voice from him. It's not that those who suffered were greater sinners than those who did not. Rather we all deserve to suffer and if we do not repent we will suffer something far worse. We will suffer an eternity in hell.

Are you saved today? If you are saved, you are in a safe position indeed. But if you are unsaved, you are in a dangerous position. How important it is for you to repent! This world is doomed. Hell is real. Make your peace with God. Turn from your sins and trust in Jesus. Flee from the wrath to come and cast yourself on Christ for mercy. Fellow Christians, let each one of us repent of our own personal sins. Let us turn back to God. He has promised to turn back to us. If we repent, we will experience his blessing. We as individuals need God with us.

As churches let us examine our ways in the light of scripture. Let us return to the Lord. Let us repent of our sins. Let us maintain high standards of holiness in our churches. Let us teach the whole word of God. Let us practise proper church discipline. Let us worship God exactly as he has laid down for us in the scriptures. We long for revival. If we will repent, the Lord has promised to return to us. Amen.