

# Return to me, and I will return to you.

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[ 0 : 00 ] At the book of Zechariah. We're going to be taking a look at the first six verses or so. Next week, we're going to be taking a look at two different passages.

! I'd like to point this out. Chapter one, and yes, chapter six. That is not a typo. My secretary did not get that wrong. Okay?

Next week, we're going to be taking a look at those two. So, having said that, our key idea today return to me, and I will return to you.

A little bit of introduction for the book of Zechariah. Zechariah happens to have the same exact number of chapters as the book of Hosea, but Zechariah, he's got more verses.

He's the biggest minor prophet. That's like jumbo shrimp, right? He's the biggest minor prophet. Not by, just basically by the number of verses.

[ 1 : 04 ] Also, Zechariah is quoted over 40 times in the New Testament. It's incredibly prolific for such a minor prophet.

And, as we read Zechariah, it is filled with prophetic imagery. I mean, it's just wild.

Some of the stuff that it talks about, it's not... It's prophetic imagery. All right. Having said that, Cyrus the Great was the ruler of Persia who ordered the rebuilding of the temple in 538 B.C.

His son, Symbus II, he died in Africa. Darius the Great, general who rose...

Sound familiar to anybody? It does? Good. It was supposed to. This is the same introduction we did last week with Hosea, right? Because, or Haggai.

[ 2 : 09 ] Because Haggai and Zechariah prophesied at the exact same time. If you've got... Keep your finger here in Zechariah, but if you go back to Ezra chapter 5, the first two verses there, it says this.

Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judea and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

Then Zerubbabel, the son of Shil and Yeshua, the son of Zodiac, arose and began to rebuild the temple. In fact, they both began prophesying at the very same year.

If you're looking at Haggai chapter 1, the second year of Darius the king in the sixth month, verse 15 says, you know, so Haggai began first day of the sixth month, then he had another one on the 24th day of the sixth month, then he had a prophecy on the 21st day of the seventh month, then on the second day of the eighth month, Zechariah begins to speak.

And then we go back to Haggai, then we go back to Zechariah. So they literally are in the same town, prophesying at the same time. All right.

[ 3 : 36 ] Zechariah dealt with the difference between the people's expectations and their reality.

The difference between what they were expecting to have happen and what was really going on. Turn to Jeremiah.

I promise we'll get to Zechariah eventually, but we got a little bit of work to do here. In Jeremiah chapter 25, verse 11, we read this.

God is talking about what's going to happen to the nation of Judah at this time because of their sin and their idolatry. And this is what we read in verse 11 of chapter 25 of the book of Jeremiah.

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years. Okay?

[ 4 : 44 ] So the prophet Jeremiah said, 70 years you're going to be in Babylon. Then if you turn over to chapter 29, verse 10, Jeremiah says this, Thus says the Lord, When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

Okay? So we've got, we've got, it's going to be 70 years, and he reaffirms it, 70 years, chapter 30, verses 1 through 3, we read this. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.

For behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord. I will bring them back to the land I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it.

Okay. Because of their sins, God had promised that they would be taken into captivity for 70 years, and that at the end of the 70 years, he's going to bring them back and restore them.

That's what their expectations are. But really, it didn't turn out very well for them. Yeah, yeah, they were kind of back, some of them, not all of them.

[ 6 : 20 ] But things really hadn't began to build up and prosper. They were just kind of subsiding. They were still paying high taxes to Darius.

They were occupied. The temple wasn't doing well. They were struggling with the wall. Just, I mean, they were back, but they weren't back. You know what I mean?

What they expected was not what they were experiencing. Oops. Upon the completion of the 70 years, they expected to automatically return to the top.

But the people still had not yet turned their heart fully to God. Let's take a look in Zechariah, chapter one.

Haggai, it was last week. There we go. In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berchai, the son of Iddo, saying, The Lord was very angry with your fathers.

[ 7 : 49 ] Therefore say to them, Thus declares the Lord of hosts, Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out. Thus, says the Lord of hosts, return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds. But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the Lord.

Your fathers, where are they? And prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded, my servants, the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers?

So they repented and said, As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so He has dealt with us. Just in a nutshell, God's message to the nation of Israel was, Return to me and I will return to you.

It's always been that way. When God's people wander away, He says to them, Return to me, I'll return to you. He said it in the past. He says it right now.

[ 9 : 11 ] He said it then. He'll say it again. And then, I love this. By the way, where's your forefathers?

How'd it work out for them? And what's the answer? Didn't work out too well for them because they failed to return to the Lord. My prophets are all gone, but my word came true.

And then it seems like in verse 6, it says, So they repented and said, As the Lord of hosts had purposed, so it came.

That's the problem here. There is a disconnect between their thinking and their reality. Their expectations was a full restoration.

They expected that they would be back on top. You remember King David? Anybody? Did he reign? How about King Solomon?

[ 10 : 09 ] Heck yeah. And that's what they're expecting. They're expecting that God is going to bring them back and put them on top. In fact, he's promised that. Their perspective is, Hey, look, we've done the time.

We did the 70 years. The time is over. We're back. We should be on top. They were on top. But they had a complete failure of paying attention to what was really going on around them.

Right? They expected to be on top. They did their time. But there was a problem. As they struggled, so do we.

As a Christian, does God take away all the problems?

It's news to me. I mean, my life's perfect. Right? I became a Christian and everything worked out just the way I thought it would. Said nobody ever.

[ 11 : 16 ] You know, one of my least favorite verses is, There has no temptation taken you such as is common to man, but God who is faithful will provide a means of escape.

Why is that not my favorite verse? Because it implies I'm still going to be facing temptations. Right? Oh, I used to pray for patience a lot until I read the most intelligent book in the Bible, the book of James.

If you pray for patience, what are you going to get? Trials of many kinds so that you can work on that patient. God says, you want patience? Here, work on it.

Stopped praying for patience decades ago. Then I had kids, no hope there. Being a Christian is no guarantee that life is going to be perfect. In fact, all who live godly will suffer.

But, the perspective that they struggled with and that we struggled with is that we are but frail human people.

[ 12 : 30 ] God's going to accomplish His will, but it's going to be done on His time frame, not ours. I don't know about you, but I am not always in favor of that plan.

Just to be honest, you know, I'd like my timetable. It suits me. The only problem is God's got the whole world in His hands, right?

I remember that song. God's watching over everything. He's juggling everything for He works all things to His glory. my perspective might be just a little jaded and a little bit off because of who I am. And their problem of not paying attention to that they hadn't returned to the Lord yet, if I was honest, you and I face the same struggle.

how often do we honestly take a look at ourselves? How often do we honestly take a look at who God has called us to be?

[ 13 : 42 ] We struggle exactly as they did. Our expectations, our perspective, our self-awareness. That's the problem for Israel then and in many ways the church today is the same.

That one's for you, Sue. But. But. Time and again God has made this promise.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. When we go through life we are going to face issues.

There is going to be hardship. There's going to be times when we turn left instead of turning right.

There's going to be times where we make the mistake.

Where we actually turn and run from God. Even as Christians. Brought up this morning Paul in Romans chapter 7. That which I would do I don't do and that which I don't want to do I'm always doing.

[ 14 : 59 ] And that's the experience of Christians. We know right because we've got the word of God. We can study it. We can read it. We can go yep, yep, yep, yep.

Yep. And how often do we throw it out and go the other way? The answer is too often. Here's the thing. God never will abandon us.

He promises he will never leave us nor will he ever forsake us. Do you know how important that is to think about? Whenever there is a distance between us and God it's not because God went on a picnic without us.

It's not because we're out here working hard and doing everything and God decides to change gears. When there is distance between us and God it is our fault.

I'm so glad I came to church today. I feel so much better.

[ 16 : 09 ] I've been really struggling with my walk with the Lord. I feel distant. I feel cold. My prayers are bouncing off the roof and the preacher just said it's my fault. Yeah.

Certainly isn't the Lord's. And the answer is the same for us today as it was for the people of Israel. It is the same answer that Zechariah wrote down. Return to me and I will return to you.

I don't have a lot of bells and whistles. I don't have a whole lot of hey here's three quick steps for you to be us.

No. I don't have that. I don't need to do that. If you have turned to the Lord for salvation if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and He is going to speak to you.

[ 17 : 22 ] Now you can stick your fingers in your ears and run around going blah blah blah and try and ignore Him. But better than I will ever know the Holy Spirit knows you and He is ready to challenge you and lead you into a tight relationship with the Lord.

Return to me and I will return to you declares the Lord of hosts. That separation that distance is not because God has left us but because we have turned away and no sooner do we turn back to Him than He has promised that He will be right there for us.

If you feel a distance in your Christian walk if you feel a separation between you and the Lord you are not alone.

A lot of us have been there a lot of us may be there right now and God who knows us better than we know ourselves says return to me and I will return to you.

That's the message I got for you today. Don't know where you're at. I don't know how strong and vibrant your faith is right now I don't know how weak and anemic it is but I do know this God is faithful He will never leave us nor abandon us and whenever there is any distance when we turn to Him He turns right to us and restores the relationship Amen.