

Zechariah Chapters 1-2 – John Karmelich

1. What does our future hold? It's logical to assume we've all had times of pondering that question. That question is the main focus of these chapters and also my lesson title. As Christians, we're all going to live forever, so it's a good idea to understand that ultimate future. Realize the bible does predict every aspect of Jesus First Coming hundreds of years before He came. If that's true, why do we doubt the bible's description of our ultimate future when Jesus returns to rule the world? If you have a "I've got enough on my plate to think about that stuff" attitude, then your priorities are wrong. A reason the bible describes our eternal future is so we won't fret over our problems of the moment. That's why it's important to have a biblical perspective about our future. That is also why Zechariah wrote this book in the first place. With that strange introduction stated, I can now tell you a little about the book of Zechariah.
2. Now that the "why", is established, let me discuss the when, as that helps explain the why. It was written at a time in Israel's history after that nation had been in captivity for 70 years. Israelites at that time were scattered over a large empire. When that empire got conquered by another one, a decree was made by the new emperor, that any Israelite wishing to move back to Israel was free to do so. Only about 50,000 people took the emperor up on that offer. (We know all of this from the book of Ezra). There were three prophetic books in the bible written during this period. The first was Haggai. As I explained in the last lesson, his theme was a "new beginning" as obviously the Israelites were starting over again in that land.
 - a) Zechariah was written around the same time as Haggai. Like that last book, Zechariah is a series of visions. The first of which occurs within the timeframe of Haggai's writing.
 - b) Let me explain this another way: Haggai's main message was to rebuild the temple as to make God the central focus of their lives. A logical question would then be, "Now what?" After all, that small percentage of Jewish people are back in Israel. Now Israel is under foreign control as this major empire that I'll call the Persians for short, is the big player in the Middle East, and what they say goes. The Israelites would wonder how can God say, "I'm going to fix things" when the Israelites are still part of this foreign empire? That's why a logical question for the Israelites would be my lesson, "What does the future hold?"
 - c) The obvious application for us as Christians is much of this book, explains what the future holds for us as well as them. While, some aspects of this book are predictions about Jesus' First Coming, many of them tie to His Second Coming as well. Other than Isaiah, I would say Zechariah has more to say about Jesus Second Coming than any other prophecy book. In other words, this book explains our ultimate future as well as the Israelites.
 - d) For those of you who like dates. This was written around 520BC. Specific dates are given in the text and I'll try to explain them as I go along and the significance of those dates.
3. OK, enough of the when, the "where" is Jerusalem. The "who" is Zechariah. Realize there are 27 or 29 people in the bible named Zechariah depending upon who's counting. This is the only one who is a prophet of God that has a book named after him. We also know he's a priest. There are a few times in the text where Zechariah names his father and grandfather. The point is it ties him to the line of priests in Israel. When the Israelites were taken into captivity, they were allowed to bring with them all the family records. That way, they knew who were priests and descendants of the king as simple examples. Centuries later when the Romans destroyed the temple all those family records got destroyed, which is why Jewish people today for the most part have no idea which of the twelve tribes they came from.
4. Anyway, that's the who what, when and why's of Zechariah. His name means "God remembers". His name is significant in this case, because a big part of Zechariah's message is essentially to say God hasn't forgotten about them. Even though only a small percentage are living there, despite the fact they are part of another empire, an underlying point here is that God's still cares about us in spite of whatever sins we've committed in the past or whatever our background.

5. Now that I've all my background information out of the way, let me discuss the first two chapters of this book and more importantly, why we should care.
 - a) Zechariah starts off by explaining who he is, what's his background (a priest) and why he was called to do: Deliver messages from God to the Israelites living in that land.
 - b) Then he gives a quick history lesson. The essential point given to those Israelites is to not act like their parents and grandparents. In other words, the previous few generations got kicked out of Israel for disobedience to God. The point is "Don't make that same mistake or you'll suffer the same fate". We Christians need to realize that God can come down as harsh on us as He did them. If we fail to use our life as a witness for Him, we too can go in the "penalty box". God could end our ministry work or yes, even our lives. The New Testament book of Acts tells the story of a couple who's lives came to an end when they lied to the church about what they did for the church. What I'm getting at is God's not to be "messed with". If we've given our lives to Jesus, God expects us to live as His witness.
 - c) OK, now that I've made everyone feel guilty, I can get back to Zechariah. He then goes on to give us a series of God inspired visions. That's not the entirety of the book, but all his visions cover the first six chapters, so get used to them. We're only cover the first few in this lesson. These visions are sort-of "Revelation like". It's not that they echo what is written in that book, but just as Revelation's filled with all sorts of strange predictions that cover the end times, so Zechariah is filled with strange visions that in effect cover the span of human history. There are both short term and long term fulfillments of those visions.
 - d) Understanding what these visions mean requires a little knowledge of history, references to other books in the bible and the advantage of hindsight since it's been 2,500 years since it was written. My point is these visions are not weird stories that can be interpreted any old way we feel like it. By some simple deductive reasoning combined with knowledge of history, we can figure out where Zechariah's going with this.
 - e) Finally, let me say a few words to those of you who loathe "Revelation" type of stuff. First, realize Zechariah is the second to last book chronologically in the Old Testament. It will be about 400 years before God "speaks again" through John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus. Therefore the Israelites needed to understand what the future holds while God's going to "go silent" for a long time. More importantly, most veteran Christians will tell us that they've experienced times where it seems like God's gone silent on them. If we know our ultimate future and trust in it, it can keep us going through such silent times. Finally, simply realize that whatever we're dealing with now is at the most a "blink of an eye" in comparison to our eternity. Bottom line, it's necessary to have glimpse of our ultimate destiny as believers as this is our future whether we like it or not.
 - f) With that strange introduction completed, time for the verses themselves.
6. Zechariah Chapter 1, Verse 1: In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:
 - a) As I stated when I started the book of Haggai, the prophets after the Babylonian captivity, mark time by the lives of the Persian kings. It's a not so subtle reminder that the Israelites are now living in the "Times of the Gentiles". Jesus said in Luke 21:24 that Jerusalem will be "trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled". That refers to the long time-period where Jerusalem was under the rule of non-Jewish kings. That time is from the Babylonian captivity until 1967 when Israel took control of the city again. That's a long way of simply explaining why Zechariah dates the book the way he did.
 - i) To book date in our vocabulary is late in the year 520 BC.
 - b) So why does Zechariah list his father and grandfather's name? For starters, it tells us he is not one of the many other Zechariah's named in the bible. It proves he comes from a line of priests as those men are named in the bible. It's like listing one's family history as proof of who one is. All of their names are "God inspired" as in "God predicts" and "God sees".

- c) The point of all of this is Zechariah is effectively announcing that he's not only a priest by birth, but God has also called him to be a prophet. Not all prophets are priests nor vice versa. The ones called to be prophets, are just those, whoever God calls and that's that. While prophets are named in the New Testament, in effect the "books are closed" as far as what's part of the bible, so don't apply for that job as there are no more openings. With that said, anyone can prophecy in the sense that Revelation 19:10 tells us that, "For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus". It just means anyone who's accurately tells us what Jesus does is in effect prophesying so it's not as big a deal as one thinks.
 - d) Anyway, God called Zechariah to this role and he time stamps his first message and gives us his family background to start this book.
7. Verse 2: "The LORD was very angry with your forefathers. ³ Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty. ⁴ Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. ⁵ Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? "Then they repented and said, 'The LORD Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.' "
- a) OK time for a big hunk of verses: I'll make this simple, after Zechariah introduces himself in Verse 1, he gets down to business in Verse 2. He essentially said, "Hey everyone, we all know that God allowed the Babylonian Empire to conquer Jerusalem and destroyed the temple because our fathers and grandparents messed up. Well, we have two choices now that we're back in the land: We can learn from our history and not make the same mistake or we can suffer the same consequence. Therefore, all of you who'd like to live, please pay attention to what I have to say so we avoid the same mistake.
 - b) Given that only a small percentage of people returned to Israel, we can assume they're the "religious ones" as they made the effort to travel back there. Zechariah's talking to those who're willing to live as God desired. The reason for this "be tough on them" speech is in effect for the same reason Haggai was encouraging them in the last book. Those Israelites were being harassed by the locals and came to the conclusion it wasn't time to rebuild the temple. Haggai's message was essentially, "Come on guys, despite the harassment, lets do what God expects us to do". Zechariah's message is essentially, "Hey, if you don't want to end up dead or dragged into captivity again, I suggest we get to building that temple!"
 - c) Yes, Zechariah's tougher than Haggai, but sometimes we need both the encourager and a person who's reminding us of the tough truths that come with the responsibility of being a witness for God in the world. That's why we get both in view here. Zechariah reminds the Israelites that the prophets sent to warn the Israelites about the Babylonian invasion are now dead. (That'd be Jeremiah and Ezekiel as prime examples).
 - d) The main point of this whole paragraph is the previous generation or two of Israelites did not listen to the prophets God sent to them, and now they're all dead. We can't change the past, only learn from it as the old saying goes. Therefore Zechariah is saying, "Everyone, it's now your turn. Are you going to learn from your past or make the same mistakes?" It is a tough lesson that all of us need to learn.
 - e) So does this mean that if we Christians fail to live as God desires, He'll destroy our nation or our city? A better question to ask is since we believe in the same God, why should we be held to any easier of a standard? Since Christians are scattered all over the world, what is more likely to happen is He can take away our ministry opportunities or even bring our life to an early end. As I like to remind everyone, the issue isn't salvation, that was done at the cross. The issue is our witness for Jesus. If we're not somehow using our life for His glory, what good are we? Yes, that's a tough point, but that's what's at stake here.

- f) Anyway, as Zechariah implies in Verse 6, nobody lives forever on earth, His word will live on from generation to generation. All I'm saying is life is short. What greater purpose is there then to use our lives for His glory? I know that for many of you, I'm "preaching to the choir", but as we start this book, it's necessary to get that point established.
 - g) By the way, let me take it a step further and talk about what we should be doing. I'm not saying, "The line forms behind me, follow me." I'm saying that the secret of life is to pray in the sense of telling God, "My life is Yours. What is it You'd want me to do as Your servant today? Make it obvious to me how You want to use me as Your witness". It does not mean God's going to write across the sky a big message. It means over time He'll make it obvious what He wants you to do. In the meantime, do what's logical assuming it is not a violation of His laws. If you can, do what you believe you have a talent to do and you enjoy doing and use that gift somehow for His glory.
 - h) Meanwhile, it's time to go back in history as Zechariah's about to give another vision.
8. Verse 7: 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) Here we get another time stamp (early in 519BC) and Zechariah gives his family's history again in case we've forgotten. So why is Zechariah so precise in his dating? Part of it is so we can compare what was happening historically with what he was predicting. We have other biblical books such as Ezra and Nehemiah as well as non-biblical sources. My point is this time in history in the Middle East was well documented. That'll become important as we unravel Zechariah's next vision that begins in the next verse:
9. Verse 8: 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.
- a) Let's begin with a warning. It's about to get weird. Like reading Revelation, we should be aware that we're reading visions. Interpreters vary on this. Me, I try to focus on what is a logical explain. I pray that God guide me to interpret it correctly and I read a good bunch of classical commentaries to make sure I'm on solid ground. All I'm saying is my views on these visions is nothing new, but a very classical interpretation given about them.
 - b) The vision begins simple enough, a man riding on a red horse. We don't know why this man's horse was red, but it was. Does it mean blood red, or "darkish red" like horses that we can see today? Don't know. All we know is it's red. Anyway, in the vision the horses being shown are riding in a ravine (think ditch). By the way, the verse does not say there are four horses. It just says the lead horse with the rider was red and following him were more horses of three different colors.
 - c) Realize are seminary students who've written papers with theories on why there are three different colors. Some are interesting and some are just plain weird. The one I like is the three different horse colors represent three different ranks of angels. I've no idea whether or not that theory is correct. I just thought it was interesting. If you buy it, use it. If not, maybe God just wanted to show him a multitude of horses and Zechariah noticed that the three different colors. OK, enough of that nonsense. Back to the text.
 - d) Let me explain myrtle trees: They're not huge. They only grow to about eight feet in height and sprout leaves year round. I believe the point here's that between the fact the horses were riding in a ditch and riding between low trees, it'd be hard to see them as they travel. The idea appears to be that whatever they were doing, it was in secret. Since Zechariah didn't know what the vision meant, he asked that question in the next verse.
10. Verse 9: I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are." ¹⁰ Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth."
- a) I don't know about you, but if someone just told me that these horse riders were traveling all through the earth, I'd say they are either very special horses, or not really horses.

- b) I'm reminded of a biblical proverb that goes, if the literal interpretation makes literal sense seek no other sense. If the text says these horses were traveling all over the world, I'd say we should accept the text as is. In Verse 11 coming up tells us that the man giving us this interpretation is "The Angel of the Lord". I'll explain that better in a moment. All I need to say at this point is to understand this is something "supernatural" and not just a bunch of people out for a country horse-ride somewhere!
 - c) Before I move on, pause to remember at that time, riding on horses was the fastest means of transportation available. If Zechariah wrote today, he might have said, there were very fast low flying jets that circled the world today. I'm just saying remember the time period when we discuss these horses traveling all over the world!
 - d) OK, the weird stuff is just beginning, let's move on and tackle them in bite size pieces.
11. Verse 11: 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."
- a) There is "a" view that whenever we read the term "The Angel of the Lord" it refers to Jesus in an incarnate state. The counterargument is the King James Bible version describes "the" angel as speaking to Joseph in Matthew Chapter 1. Other translations say "a" versus "the" angel in Matthew so the debate goes on whether or not all the Old Testament references to "The" Angel does refer to Jesus in His pre-incarnate state. Whoever this "the" Angel is, he is obviously an important entity sent from God. This angel has the power to send what is mostly likely a group of angels to patrol the whole earth and find it at peace.
 - b) Here's my other support for the argument that these horses represent angels. In the book of Job, Satan reported that he too was roaming throughout the earth (Job 1:7). My point is simply that horses that can search the whole earth must refer to some supernatural being. Just as Satan can't be everywhere at once, but can travel all through the earth, so God gave power to angels to search the whole earth to accomplish some mission.
 - c) If this isn't weird enough so far, let me ask a stranger question: Is it possible for the whole earth to be at peace and it not be God's will? Wouldn't a world at peace be something we should desire? The issue isn't peace, the issue is peace (here it comes) with God as being a center of that peace. It's as if we said, "The whole world is ignoring God and there's not any major problems in the world at this moment". That'd be a bad example of peace.
 - d) Remember what God desires: A relationship with people. He wants people to realize He rules over the world and wants relationships with people. He doesn't want a world with us ignoring Him. That's why "peace" is a bad thing in this context.
 - e) Let me also describe this with a little historical context. Because the Medo-Persian Empire ruled from Greece to India, they covered a large territory. They'd have horse riders to ride through that land to deliver messages and scout. I'm just saying the people listening to Zechariah's message could relate to horse riders covering the "earth" as they knew it.
 - f) Meanwhile, since we established the fact the world's at peace without God being a center of that piece, I present the next two verses:
12. Verse 12: 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?" ¹³ So the LORD spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.
- a) Let me start with the reminder that the Israelites were kicked out of that land for exactly 70 years. It is stated here in Verse 12. The prophet Jeremiah said it'd be exactly 70 years as well. (Jeremiah 25:11). The reason it was 70 years, was because one of the requirements in God's law was that the Israelites were not to farm the land 1 out of 7 years to let it rest. Apparently, the Israelites failed to do that for 490 years they were there, so effectively the Israelites owed God "seventy" and off they went. (This is from 2nd Chronicles 36:21.)
 - b) By the way, the way modern Israel "gets around" that requirement today by "leasing" all the farmland of Israel to a non-Jewish person they trust for \$1 and they can technically say they don't own the land for that one year. Whether or not that counts, that's the deal.

- c) By the way, this is a good example of the fact that some of the Old Testament laws apply to Christians (such as murder and stealing) while others do not such, as the food laws and sacrifices at God's temple. My point is simply don't worry if you're a farmer and you're not letting your farm "rest" for one year out of seven.
 - d) Meanwhile, back to Zechariah. The underlying point that Zechariah wanted to get across here is that God's no longer angry with the previous generations of Israel. The fact they're willing to come back to the land and start again, is an indication that God's always willing to try again with anyone willing to come to Him no matter how much or how often we've messed up in life. Yes, the nations of the world were at peace at that moment. Most of the world the Israelites knew of, was part of that Persian Empire at the moment. What God's trying to get across is life without Israel being "God's land" won't go on forever. A day is coming when Israel will be under God's rule alone and not part of any other entity.
 - e) That leads to the modern nation of Israel. Are they the fulfillment of prophecy? It's both yes and no. Most Israelites living there are secular. They have a presidency as the view of the religious Jewish people living there is there won't be any kings there until "The" King shows up to rule from there. As the classic joke goes, the Israelites will ask Him, so is this your first visit or your second? As I stated earlier in the lesson, Jesus said that Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled. That's my paraphrase of Luke 21:24. Some scholars argue the times of the Gentiles is not over as the Messiah isn't ruling there yet. Some say it is, because Israel's under self rule. Personally I don't care either way. Israel is back in the land and whenever Jesus returns to rule there, I will be happy with that future. Meanwhile, back to Zechariah.
13. Verse 14: 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,¹⁵ but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity.'
- a) Speaking of God focusing on the future of Jerusalem and Israel (Zion is a nickname for the mountain on which the temple stands on or "all of Israel"), I present these two verses.
 - b) The key point is that God still cares about His people. Remember what God desires of us: A relationship with us. I could see the Israelites thinking, "Hey God kicked us out of this land and even though the Persians said we can come back here, how do we know if God's still interested in a relationship with us here? That's why God sent prophets to Israel after the captivity was over. The message to us as Christians is no matter how much we have messed up, we may suffer in this life for our mistakes, but that never ends God's desire to draw close to us. That's why the book of James reminds us to draw near to God and He'll draw near to us. (James 4:8, paraphrased.)
 - c) The rest of the verse states that God is "very angry" with the nations that led the Israelites out of captivity. Yes, those empires stood for a long time. Think of it this way: The great empires that conquered Israel: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, Greeks and the Romans all no longer exist as empires, but Israel still stands today as a nation!
 - d) If all of that is true, why didn't God move sooner? Those empires all lasted for hundreds of years. Why did God let them last so long if they're guilty of harming His people? The issue is God's always seeking people to repent and turn to Him. The time of the Gentiles (which may or may not be over depending upon your perspective about Israel) lasted for a very long time as God through history has always looked for people as James puts it to draw near to God so He'll draw near to us.
 - e) That leads to the self-explanatory Verse 16:
14. Verse 16: "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.
- a) The next set of verses will give us more details. The short version is God's promising that His house will be rebuilt. The "measuring line" will be discussed in a few verses.

- b) Let's remember that prophecy is "patterns". That just means there is often a short-term as well as a long-term fulfillment of many bible predictions. For example, the temple that we read that Haggai and even Zechariah is encouraging the Israelites to build, will be built. It was completed within a few years of when this was written. However, the bible in both the Old and New Testament is very clear about this temple being built for The Messiah (Jesus at His Second Coming) to rule over the world from. My point is this verse hints of Jesus Second Coming as well as the short term fulfillment.
- i) The reason I'm sure about a double-fulfillment is the temple built at that time did not last forever. Plus it was built when Israel was part of the Persian Empire. Even if I never read what Isaiah, Ezekiel or even Revelation predicts about a temple for God Himself to rule from, somehow I can't see a "this is it" interpretation as if God would only rule over Israel when that land is a part of a foreign empire.
- ii) Speaking of the eternal future, let's look at Verse 17:
15. 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.' "
- a) Remember that the Babylonians leveled Jerusalem. Only 50,000 people returned to Israel and let's assume some percentage of them lived in Jerusalem. My point is at that moment in time, one can't say Jerusalem was prosperous in any way. It's always been amazing to consider that Jerusalem has no natural resources and water is piped in, yet it's been one of the most fought over pieces of real estate in world history. God's promising that it will be famous and prosperous again. If you visit it today, it has outgrown its ancient walls and it is a prosperous city, mainly built on tourism and as a government center for Israel.
- b) My point is that we're reading both short term and long term fulfillments in this verse. In a short time after Zechariah, Jerusalem experienced major growth when the Greeks ruled that area. It stayed well populated until the Romans destroyed that city about 600 years later. The walls were built again in the Middle Ages and continues to be a tourist center for Jews, Christians and even some Muslims to visit. Although the Babylonians and later the Romans destroyed this place, God says in effect, "This is My world headquarters. I'll make it famous and when I "set up shop" there, it'll be the key place to be!"
- c) On that positive note, it's time to move on to another vision by Zechariah:
16. Verse 18: Then I looked up--and there before me were four horns! ¹⁹ I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these?" He answered me, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem."
- a) Just when you think Zechariah can't get any stranger it does. As I said in the introduction, Zechariah is "revelation like" in that it deals with strange visions that we have to consider cross-references within the bible, plus a little understanding of history in order to realize what is Zechariah is trying to teach us. Speaking of understanding, we need to grasp that the bible is generally consistent in its metaphors. For example, because God rested on the seventh day from creation the number seven in the bible is fairly consistently associated with "rest" and "completion". The point again is the bible is consistent in its metaphors.
- b) I bring up that strange but consistent rule, because "horns" in the bible are consistently associated with power. Just as animals with horns use those horns as their power source, so the bible will usually associate "horns" with power. The idea is to create word pictures that people can relate to. Anyway, we've got four horns pictured here. We don't have to wonder what they mean, because Zechariah himself asks "The Angel of the Lord" what it is they refer to. The answer is "these are the four horns (sources) of power that scatter the Israelites: (Northern Israel Kingdom) Judah (Southern Israel Kingdom) and of course the capital, Jerusalem.
- c) What scholars debate about is what do the four horns represent? Some say it's the great empires that scattered Israel over its history. That'd be the Assyrians, Babylonians, then I would say Greece and Rome as they're the one's who did the scattering.

- d) As of that date in history, only those first two empires did the damage, so some disagree. Others will say that the four horns is a metaphor for powers that scatter people in all four directions. I don't know which interpretation is right. I just know Zechariah saw "four horns" scattering all of Israel. Whether it's a figurative reference or literal one to past and future events that we know from history came true, can be argued either way. What is important is that God is aware that "dark forces" exist that scatter His people away from where God wants them to be. That's why this chapter focuses upon the fact that God will punish those who work to draw His people away from Him.
- e) OK that's a bit confusing. Let me explain this another way: There are two things that keep us from doing God's will: Our own desire to turn from God (sin) and demonic forces that work to prevent God's will from being done. Both exist due to free will. The argument for "free-will" is self-explanatory. We ignore God out of our free will and our priorities get out-of-whack. The trick is understanding Satan's motivation for a lack of a better term. First, we need to accept the fact that God allows Satan to "do His worse" to prove to us that His power is greater than demonic power. We need not fear our salvation if we're trusting in Jesus for that. I admit, I ponder why would Satan want to oppose God's plans? I'm sure Satan believes God will win in the end. What I suspect is because he doesn't want people to be more important than him for all of eternity, he's doing his best to delay the inevitable from occurring.
 - i) What all that means is demonic forces do all they can to delay Jesus return. That is including making us ineffective witnesses for Jesus. It also means trying their best to prevent Israel from being a country as to delay Jesus setting up shop there. Why do you think nonbelievers are so "hell-bound" on Israel's destruction? If you know it's part of Satan's plan to work to delay Jesus return, the Middle East makes sense as to why political forces battle over that piece of real estate.
 - ii) But didn't God ordain the Assyrians and Babylonians to win there as to punish the Israelites for disobeying God? Sure. However, those empires glorified themselves and that was their inevitable downfall. All I'm saying is if you want to understand why Rome destroyed Israel or why the Holocaust occurred, we must understand the spiritual warfare that battle's God's plans to rule the world Himself one day!
- f) Anyway, all that "weirdness" leads us back to the four "horns". God allowed four powers to destroy Israel. Whether that number is symbolic or literally referring to specific powers, is debatable. Either way, it's referring to dark (demonic) powers that want to delay what is inevitable of Jesus ruling from Israel one day.
- g) Meanwhile we got some good "strange news" in Verse 20:

17. Verse 20: Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. ²¹ I asked, "What are these coming to do?" He answered, "These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head, but the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people."

 - a) Remember that Zechariah didn't understand God's whole game plan the way I explained it a few paragraphs back. He just saw visions that we have to interpret.
 - b) The word used in this translation is "craftsmen". It's not a bad translation. It's Zechariah's way of describing good angels who fight the demonic powers so God's will gets done.
 - c) OK John, I'll bite. If all of this is true, why not just say good angels or bad angels? Why is Zechariah describing warfare and counter-warfare as "horns" and "craftsmen" As always, a good question.
 - i) For starters, it gets us to think about the visions and contemplate it's meaning.
 - ii) Next God is using images Zechariah can relate too. He understand that horns on an animal represent it's power. As a priest, Zechariah would also know that bible books to this point do use that horn reference to represent power.

- iii) The idea of "craftsmen" is someone who can work with that power and overthrow it. It's the idea that these craftsmen are more powerful than the horns.
 - d) I warned you Zechariah is a weird book, and we're only on Chapter 1. If you can handle the symbolism of Chapter 1, you can stomach the rest of the book, and yes, learn things of our future, which is the underlying point of these verses. In the meantime, what we need to realize here is whatever forces work against God's plans can do damage and can win at times, but God will win in the end. It's the "good conquers evil" principal that occurs in all of history. Still God won't do for us what we can do for ourselves, so He expects us to make a difference for Him and yes that involves spiritual warfare.
 - e) Remember you're preaching to a bunch of Christians. I can assume most people reading this believe Jesus will return and will win one day. What do we do until then? Begin by realizing people are both the pawns and the prizes in this world. We're the pawns as both sides use whoever we're trusting in. We are also the prizes as God desires relationships with those that turn to Him. I'm not saying we have to panic or see demons behind every door. I'm saying realize that if we're going to make a difference for Jesus, realize stuff will happen. Ask anyone who's making a difference for Him at any moment! Then realize we have the "craftsmen" on our side and their greater than the "horn power" that works to not let God's will be done.
 - f) The good news is we can now climb out of this strange theological hole. Chapter 2 starts a new vision and something more positive and yes, much easier to understand.
18. Chapter 2, Verse 1: Then I looked up--and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand! ² I asked, "Where are you going?" He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is."
- a) Zechariah's next vision beginning in this verse, he sees a man with some sort of tool used to measure a city. As someone who spent a good portion of my life measuring buildings, I own tools that measure distance and I'm sure measuring tools existed in Zechariah's day. My question is why would the man Zechariah saw want to measure Jerusalem? Zechariah was wondering that himself so he asks that question in Verse 3.
 - b) Remember I said in my introduction that only about 50,000 people came back to Israel? If that's all there were, why measure the city's size? The answer's in the next verse.
19. Verse 3: Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him ⁴ and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. ⁵ And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the LORD, 'and I will be its glory within.'
- a) The first thing we learn here is the "measuring man" was an angel. That angel then left to do the job God wanted him to do, which was measure the city's size. Lucky for Zechariah another angel shows up on the scene to explain why God wants this measuring job done.
 - b) Before we move on, this would be a good spot to quickly discuss angels. I've never liked the images of angels as "chubby babies". When you read of angels in the bible, they either look like men or they are powerful creatures that can travel great distances quickly. What I'm getting at is they are powerful creatures not to be messed with. God created angels to accomplish specific missions. Besides encounters with bible characters, people claim they have seen angels all through history. I don't believe I ever met one, but the bible also tells us that they come as people and it's possible I met one and didn't know it. Just as demonic angels are those who chose to ignore God's will (because they don't want people to be the central focus of God's love for eternity), so there are angels who accept God's will who are willing to work on His will, ultimately for our benefit. This lesson began with angels who travel all over the world and reported the "world is at peace". Here we get an angel who's job it is to measure a city. All I'm saying is they have a variety of jobs in the bible. We can not force God to show us one. They work at His discretion, not ours. They don't know all things like God, but they come in and out of our world to do His will at any given time.

- c) OK enough of all of that. The point here is one angel took off to go measure a city. Then another angel effectively said to Zechariah, don't go follow him, my job is to explain what "Angel #1" is doing. The essential point is the second angel's predicting Jerusalem will one day be "so huge", that walls won't be enough to fill it up.
- i) The short version of Jerusalem's history is it grew as Israel's population grew. By the time of the Romans, it was one of two major cities there besides a port city. It's the capital of the Israel "area" of the various empires that ruled there. It eventually became a city again after Rome destroyed it. In the Middle Ages, (11th century or so) walls around the old city were built again. That city today is much larger than what is behind those walls. My point is Zechariah's prediction came true for both the short term as well as the long term as the city grew beyond what were those traditional wall boundaries of that city.
 - ii) So why should I care how big Jerusalem is as a city? I seriously doubt there is any geography test when we get to heaven. The point is God wants us to understand that He Himself is a "wall of protection" around that city. Since I told you that the Romans destroyed it centuries later and there have been many battles fought there since that time, how can Zechariah say that God's a "wall of fire" around it?
 - iii) For starters, the city still exists and is considered the central location for both Jews as well as Christians as God's "home on earth". Part of what Zechariah is saying is the idea that Jerusalem will always exist. Even though it has no natural resources or things of value there, God has said, "this is my home spot on earth, deal with it".
 - iv) It's also obviously Messianic in that both the Old and New Testament predict how the Messiah (who Christians argue is Jesus) will rule the world from there. That is the eternal future I talking about to start this lesson. I'd also argue that future time is what Zechariah is focusing upon when he says God will be a wall of fire around that city. The last statement in Verse 4 says that God's glory will be in that city.
- d) Let me come back to the topic of our ultimate future. Whether you realize it or not, we're all going to live forever. We're either going to live in God's presence or away from it, for all of eternity. If that's my two choices, I'll pick in His presence, as from what I can tell by reading my bible, heaven seems like a much better choice than hell. I also believe we will exist in more than three dimensions, which is how many people will draw close to God at the same time. Anyway, whenever all this begins, we must live in a world where we don't wear out, get tired or traveling distances are not an issue. My point is eternity is going to be some sort of "real world" and not some imaginary place. Jerusalem will be the center of this eternity. I don't know why God picked that particular place on earth to be His eternal home, but I accept that's what my eternal future will hold, so I accept it as the truth. As I said in the introduction, if all the Old Testament predictions were 100% accurate on Jesus' First Coming, it gives us reasons to trust the bible as to what it says about His Second!
- i) Now that we've established that Zechariah tells us that Jerusalem went from being a "nothing" of a city at his time, to being the place where God will rule the world from one day, we can move on.
20. Verse 6: "Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north," declares the LORD, "for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven," declares the LORD. ⁷ "Come, O Zion! Escape, you who live in the Daughter of Babylon!"
- a) Remember that the vast majority of Israelites were not living in that land. The one's who survived the Babylonian invasion were relocated and scattered all through that empire. In these verses, God's essentially saying to the scattered Israelites, "Come back. Yes I'm the one responsible for the scattering, but I want to have a relationship with all My chosen".
 - b) A few more words on geography. Babylon was technically more "east" than "north". They conquered Israel coming from the north. To come to Israel from the north is easier for an army as one crosses a fairly flat area as opposed to trying to cross over low mountains.

- c) The main point here is God's calling His people to "come on home", punishment time has past. I God want to gather my people together to get close to Me.
 - d) So does this mean God wants all of us to move to Jerusalem now? No. I had the chance to see that city a few years back as I was curious where Jesus will be based one day. If you get the opportunity, one should visit there to help visualize history as well as see the place where Jesus will rule one day. Back to the question: In the early chapters of Genesis, God commands us to fill the earth and multiply. I'd argue until Jesus "wrap up" party begins, to "fill the earth" is still in effect. Asking the Jewish people in Zechariah's day to come on back to Israel is to say, "God's still here. God's still in charge. Yes He's responsible for the fact the Israelites were scattered all over the Middle East in the first place, but that time is now over and they should come on back home and be a part of God's movement there at that time". So should all Jewish people move back to Israel today? I believe there are still more Jewish people in the United States than Israel. It's a nice place to live if one chooses to do so, but the "fill the earth and multiply" command is still in play. Anyway, until God makes it obvious to me that I should move somewhere else, I'm staying put.
 - i) However, I accept the fact that Jerusalem will be God's "headquarters" one day in spite of the effort of many Muslims to want to destroy that place. Whenever Jesus does return to "set up shop" as I'm fond of saying, I want to be a part of God's plan for that eternal rule and however that works practically, I accept it as my future as well as the future of anyone who trusts that Jesus is God and paid the full price for all our sins.
 - e) One more technical note before I move on. The term "four winds of heaven" simply refers to the fact the wind can blow in all four directions. In Hebrew, the word for wind is also the word for God's spirit. All I'm saying is just like we don't know which way the wind will blow, we don't know who will be saved. God's still calling people to be a part of His plan for eternity and that can be expressed as the "four winds" blowing as it does here.
21. Verse 8: For this is what the LORD Almighty says: "After he has honored me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you--for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye--⁹ I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me.
- a) We get a bunch of references to "you", "me" and "he" in these verses. I should start here by explaining who these pronouns refer to.
 - i) Let's start with "me". Reading in context, it can refer to Jesus. Verse 8 says that he (God) sent "me" to fight against the nations that harmed Israel. One can argue that "me" refers to a powerful angel. Whoever "me" is, God the Father (the term Lord Almighty) is the one who commissioned to fight on Israel's behalf.
 - ii) Let me pause here for a quick word on "apple of his eye". Here it applies to the "me" (Jesus?). That term "apple of his eye" refers to one's pupil. It's the most sensitive part of the body. Try touching one's eye and see how the body reacts to try to protect that eye. One reason I happen to believe the "me" is Jesus is because of that "apple of my eye" reference. It's the idea of whoever is messing with God's chosen is messing with the most sensitive aspect of who God is!
 - b) With that said, I can now stand back to focus on the bigger picture here. God's saying He cares about His people and He protects His people as much as we protect our eyes! Given all the martyrs who've died for their faith, given all the Israelites who were killed because they believed in God, how can Zechariah say God "cares" for them? As I've stated many a time, if this life is all that there is, yes, this world is a very unfair place to live. However, if we are going to live forever, and if God's going to rule the world one day from Jerusalem, I want to be part of the winning team. "Heaven" isn't going to be any fantasy that we can imagine. It's going to be God ruling from Jerusalem, so we might as well accept it. All I'm saying is what we're reading is our eternal future, so let's accept it and move on.

- c) Coming back to the text, the key point appears to be that after "he" (that I'd argue is Jesus in His pre-incarnate state) was sent by God the Father against the nations that harmed the Israelites and "he" will plunder them as in take whatever value they have.
 - i) I'm the first to admit, that's a tough thing to digest. The Israelites feared they were no longer significant since they're now part of the Persian Empire. Most Israelites were scattered all over the Middle East. God's reassuring them that they will win in the end as God's going to plunder all those nations that harmed them.
 - ii) In a historical context, all those empires that have harmed the Israelites no longer exist and Israel still stands. What about say the Germans in World War II? Their leaders were all killed and that empire died. The "people" still exist just as say the Roman people exist as well as Persians (Iranians) and Babylonians (Iraq). The text says God will plunder the nations that attack His people. Whatever riches each of those empires had, was plundered by whoever beat them, so one can say, they did get plundered.
 - iii) However, all of that is "past tense". What about the future tense? Isn't this another example of God saying His people will win in the end? Of course, the bible states that the riches of the world and people will flock to Jerusalem as being it's center one day. The last few chapters of Isaiah teach us that. I see Zechariah as echoing that sentiment. The "ultimate future" for the Israelites is they'll win in spite of all the suffering they've had through history.
 - iv) OK how does that affect us non-Jewish Christians? We've effectively joined up to the winning team when we accept Jesus. Our ultimate future involves being part of God's eternal plans. Just as there is joy in serving Him in this lifetime, that joy is going to be part of our eternity. We don't sit on a couch watching television for all of eternity, we will have a joy filled eternity being used by Him as we'll "win" just as the Israelites who trust in God back then did. Now if that isn't good news about our ultimate future, I don't know what is. OK then, three verses to go.
- 22. Verse 10: "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD. ¹¹ "Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. ¹² The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. ¹³ Be still before the LORD, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling."
 - a) Remember this is not the end of the book. It's not even the end of Zechariah's visions. It'll go on until we finish Chapter 6. He's got a lot more to say to us about the details of Jesus' First and Second Coming in those visions. After Chapter 6, Zechariah's going to explain to us more of God's ultimate plans for us. However, I'm jumping ahead of the story. These last few verses remind us that the ultimate victory I've been describing in this lesson isn't just for the Israelites who trusted in God and waited for the Messiah to come. It's also for other nations (that's where us Christians come on the scene) to be joined to God so we can all work together to make a difference for Him.
 - b) Let me quickly discuss salvation and the Jewish people. I'm positive God will judge all of us fairly based on what we know about Him and know about Jesus and what we did with all that information. That's why God's standard for an Israelite in Zechariah's day would not be the same as a knowledgeable Israelite living today who rejects Christianity. I point this out to realize who will and who won't benefit from this ultimate future for those of us who are trusting in God's grace and realize He paid the full sin price for us. God wants us to accept that fact and out of gratitude use our lives to make a difference for Him. That's what our ultimate future holds.
 - c) I hold the view that what can be interpreted literally in the bible should be taken literally. That just means Jesus will rule the world from Jerusalem one day as the text says here.

23. I know that seems like a strange way to end a lesson. Realize Zechariah has fourteen chapters, so in a sense we're just getting warmed up. God wants us to know our ultimate future so we can get our perspective right as we face whatever we're dealing with at the present time. If we accept the fact that by our trust in Jesus paying the complete price for every sin we'll ever commit, and trust that He's God and in charge of our lives, then and only then can we live the joy filled life that He desires for us. God desires we then use our lives for His glory to make a difference for Him. The rewards for this commitment is He'll win in the end, be a part of His rule over the world one day and we'll be a part of the winning team.
- a) As I said earlier in the lesson, if that is "heaven" and the only other choice is hell, I'll take what God has planned for me, and live accordingly as that's the way life for humanity is going to ultimately play out so we might as well accept it and be part of His winning team for all of eternity. On that positive note, let's close in prayer.
24. Let's pray: to Heavenly Father, As we learn and comprehend what is our ultimate future, help us to "keep our eye on the ball" and realize what's important as we go through our lives. Help us to continue to commit our lives to You by showing gratitude for what You've got planned for us as we use our lives for Your glory. Help us to keep our present lives in perspective. Yes we do need your help in whatever is our problems of the moment. At the same time, help us to have a good perspective about what is really important and what our eternal future holds. Help us by Your power to use our lives to make that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.