

## **I Am Exceedingly Jealous for Jerusalem**

Zechariah 1-3

Key Verse: 1:14 “So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.’”

What do you think when you hear the word, “jealousy”? Most people think of something negative. Yet the Bible repeatedly tells us that God is jealous. Zechariah 8:2 also says, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.” So what does it mean that God is jealous for Jerusalem? It is an expression of his passionate love and commitment for his people. This passage shows what God does out of his jealousy for Jerusalem and Zion. These acts point forward to the Messiah and reveal God's passionate commitment to his people, his purposes, and his glory.

Through this message may we have confidence that God is jealous for us through the prophecies of Zechariah fulfilled through Christ Jesus. When we become convinced of God's jealousy for his people, may we share God's heart.

### **1. God's Plea to His People to Return to Him (1:1–6)**

Look at 1:1. This verse tells us that Zechariah began his prophetic ministry in the eighth month, in the second year of Darius. He was a contemporary of Haggai, who began his ministry in the sixth month of the same year (Haggai 1:1). Though they ministered to the same people, their prophecies were different. Haggai's prophecies were direct and practical, while Zechariah's were full of visions and images. Haggai was like a disciplinary father, while Zechariah was like a tender mother. The fact that God sent two prophets to his people reveals his holistic care for them.

What was the spiritual condition of God's people that they needed both prophets? As we learned in the overview, they had returned from Babylon, giving up property and comfort to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Upon their return, however, they built their own paneled houses first. Through Haggai, God called them to repent and make the rebuilding of the temple their first priority.

To their credit, they repented and worked hard. Their enemies opposed them. Famine came. Yet they completed the foundation of the temple. Sadly, it looked pathetic compared to the former temple. They became discouraged. It was at that very moment that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah.

Look at verses 2–6. The Lord reminded them of their fathers who had ignored the warnings of the prophets and suffered the consequences. Then he gave them a simple command: “Return to me ... and I will return to you.”

This must have been surprising. They had already returned to Jerusalem. They had sacrificed much. They had worked hard. They were exhausted and discouraged. Surely they expected comfort and encouragement. Instead, God said: "Return to me." What a shocking message.

There was a Korean poet born paralyzed. After her conversion, she loved spending time with Jesus in prayer, which became poems. She said, "Jesus, I am sorry that I can't do much for you." Jesus replied, "MyoungHee, I love you. I love you." "Why do you love me, Lord? I can't do much for you like my friends," she asked. Jesus answered, "I love you because you come to me and talk with me. Your friends make me lonely." Our Lord desires an intimate relationship with us, to return to him. Jesus says in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

This is the first aspect of God's jealousy. He desires you, not merely your service. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." If we do God's work without drawing near to him, our hands become unclean, our hearts impure, and our minds double-minded. Therefore, out of his jealousy, God pleads with us: "Return to me."

How did the people respond? "So they repented..." (1:6).

For me, preparing and delivering a message should be one of the primary ways I draw near to God. What a privilege and responsibility that is. Yet there have been times when I have relied on head knowledge and commentaries to prepare without drawing near to him. Lord Jesus, forgive my task-oriented, self-glory-seeking life. I return to you with all my affection, thanks, and praise. May your people return to you as well. Amen.

## **2. God's Restoration of Jerusalem and Zion (1:7–17)**

We heard God's plea: "Return to me." Now Zechariah shows us why God is calling his people back. It is because God is exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion. God's jealousy is not passive. God's jealousy moves him to act.

In these visions we see three things God does because He is jealous for His people:

- He watches over His people.
- He defends His people.
- He restores His people.

### **First, God watches over His people. (The first vision: the Lord's patrolling horsemen)**

According to verse 7, Zechariah saw the first vision three months after he began his prophetic ministry. On that very night he saw eight visions. My message will cover the first four visions, related to God's jealousy.

In the vision Zechariah saw a man riding on a red horse, standing among the trees, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. Zechariah asked who they were to the man who looked like a captain. And Zechariah heard the angel of the Lord reporting to the LORD of hosts.

Look at verses 11b–12. “We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest. O Lord of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?” This is the 1st aspect of God's jealousy revealed through the visions. God patrols the whole world through his angels on behalf of his people. He watches over and protects them. He hears your smallest sigh and feels every pain and headache you have.

If so, why hadn't the LORD of hosts done anything for his people and against their enemies? The Lord answered the angel with gracious and comforting words (13). And those comforting words reveal something remarkable about God's heart. Let us read verse 14: “So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.’”

“Being exceedingly jealous,” translated from Hebrew verb *qana'* (qana') can mean “being zealous,” or “to be provoked with the heat of jealousy or zeal.” This is God's divine jealousy and zeal, not man's petty envy. God is red hot!

The Old Testament tells us that God becomes extremely jealous whenever three things are threatened: his relationship, his righteous cause, and his own honor. Here in verse 14, the LORD of hosts is exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.

The question is, why was the LORD so jealous for Jerusalem and Zion?

Jerusalem was more than a city. It was the place where God put his name (1 Kings 14:21). It represented God's chosen people and his covenant purpose for them. Yet God's name, his honor, his covenant relationship with his people, and his purpose through them were all in danger. Therefore, God was provoked with jealousy and ready to act for Jerusalem.

The LORD was also jealous for Zion. Zion was God's dwelling place among his people and ultimately points to the heavenly Jerusalem and the eternal kingdom of God. Israel should have reflected that kingdom. Sadly, it did not. Therefore, God was exceedingly jealous for Zion and works for his kingdom with great zeal (Isaiah 9:7).

Some of us may say, “Good for the city of Jerusalem and the Jews!” As we have studied in Romans, God is not a god only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles who have put their trust in Jesus. If Jerusalem is the place where God put his name, then, so are we who have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The gathering of his people in God's presence, the body of Christ, is Zion, the replica of the kingdom of God. Aren't we, the church, the temple of the Holy Spirit? Aren't we in the new covenant relationship with God in Jesus' blood? The Apostle Peter said to the scattered Christians in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

God has his righteous cause and plan for Christians! If all of these are true to you, you are a spiritual Jerusalem and a part of Zion. When his relationship with you, his righteous cause through you and his name in you are threatened, his jealousy and zeal is provoked, like a hurricane and active volcano! He is red hot for you! Amen.

What then does God do out of his jealousy for Jerusalem and for Zion? Look at verses 15-17. "And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster. Therefore, thus says the Lord, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the Lord of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Cry out again, Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem."

### **Second, God defends His people. (The Second Vision: The Horns and the Four Craftsmen)**

God's jealousy does not stop with watching over his people. God's jealousy moves him to defend them. Look at verses 18–21. In the second vision, Zechariah saw the horns and the four craftsmen. The horns symbolized the powerful nations that had bullied and scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem—Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and later Greece and Rome.

God had used those nations to discipline Israel. However, they went far beyond what God intended. They devastated his people and lived at ease. Therefore, God was angry with them. The four craftsmen represent God's instruments of judgment. One nation would destroy another.

Out of his jealousy, the Lord of hosts punishes the enemies of his people like a husband who avenges his wife. This fulfills God's promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse..." (Gen. 12:3). The Lord defends those who belong to him.

### **Third, God restores His people. (The Third Vision: The Measuring Line)**

God's jealousy not only watches over his people. God's jealousy not only defends his people. God's jealousy restores his people. Now let us move to the third vision, which further explains verses 16–17.

Look at 2:1–2. Zechariah saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. This man, likely an angel, was a heavenly architect preparing for the restoration of Jerusalem. In verses 3–5, the angel declared: "Run, say to that young man, 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock in it. And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the Lord, and I will be the glory in her midst.'"

Out of his great jealousy for Jerusalem, God promised to renew and rebuild her. The renewed Jerusalem would overflow with people and livestock. She would not need walls because the Lord himself would be her wall of fire and her glory. She shall be completely protected from any enemies. What was more, it would be in that new Jerusalem that the Lord God would dwell with mercy and be her glory.

What an amazing vision this must have been for Jews discouraged by the pathetic foundation of the temple. And what a living hope we have while living in a world filled with sin, violence, war, and death!

In this vision Zechariah also heard several declarations from the LORD. Firstly, God's invitation to those scattered throughout the world: "Up! Up! ... Escape to Zion." That invitation is extended to us as well. Secondly, God's coming judgment upon the nations that plundered his people, the apple of his eye.

How then should God's people respond when we see this vision of New Jerusalem and hear God's invitation and promise? We should sing and rejoice. We rejoice because we are marching to Zion where we will dwell forever with our Lord Jesus Christ. Many nations will join themselves to the LORD and become his people. Yet Judah and Jerusalem will remain his treasured possession (12). Why does the LORD do all this? What explains his watching, defending, and restoring? It is his jealousy and zeal. (13).

### **3. God Purifies His People. (The Fourth Vision: Joshua the High Priest)**

So far we have seen that God's jealousy calls, watches, defends, and restores his people. The fourth vision in chapter 3 reveals another aspect of God's jealousy. God wants his people to be pure. While the temple was being rebuilt, it needed a high priest who could serve in it. In the fourth vision, Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

Look at verse 3:2a. The LORD rebuked Satan before he could even accuse Joshua. In an earthly courtroom, a judge allows a prosecutor to present every charge against a defendant. In the heavenly courtroom, however, the LORD silenced Satan, the Accuser. Look at verse 2b. "The LORD said, 'Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?'" A brand is a burning stick. Out of his great jealousy, the LORD had rescued Joshua from the fire of exile. Yet Joshua was still clothed with filthy garments, unfit to serve before the Holy God.

Look at verses 4–5. The angel of the Lord commanded his servants to remove Joshua's filthy garments and clothe him with pure vestments. Joshua was reclothed and reinstated as high priest. The angel of the Lord also renewed his covenant with Joshua by giving him promises and responsibilities to keep (6–7). Through Joshua's ministry, the returned exiles could come to the temple, offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins, and worship God. However, God had a greater purpose in restoring Joshua. Joshua's cleansing pointed to a greater cleansing still to come and someone greater.

Let us read verse 8: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch." The Branch is a title for the coming Messiah. Jeremiah also prophesied that he would be a righteous King who would bring salvation to his people.

Yet in Zechariah, the Branch is not only a King but also the perfect High Priest. God promised what he would do through the Branch in verse 9: "...I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day." How could that possibly happen? Isaiah 53:5–6 answers: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Unlike Joshua and the earthly priests, the Branch would become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). As our great High Priest, he would enter the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood once for all. On that day, when the Branch was crucified for the sins of the world, our iniquities were removed once for all. On that day, every spiritual blessing was secured for God's chosen and purified people.

This fourth vision reveals God's jealousy even more clearly. He wants his people—he wants us—to be pure. Since we cannot make ourselves pure, just as Joshua could not cleanse himself, God himself makes us pure and blameless through Jesus Christ, our perfect Lamb and everlasting High Priest. He reclothes us in garments of righteousness and prepares us as his bride. As Christ is holy, so his bride shall be holy.

## **Conclusion**

The LORD of hosts is exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. And that means he is exceedingly jealous for us. Out of his jealousy, he pleads with us: "Return to me." Out of his jealousy, he watches over us. Out of his jealousy, he defends us. Out of his jealousy, he restores us. Out of his jealousy, he purifies us through our heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ.

God's jealousy is not only for you. It is also for the world he created.

What should we do when we understand God's jealousy for the world? The Apostle Paul gives us the answer: "For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

When Paul became convinced of God's jealousy for him, he developed a divine jealousy for others. May God help us remember that he is jealous for us. May he help us grow as the pure bride of Christ. And may he give us a holy jealousy for others, so that we might shepherd them faithfully and present them as a pure bride to Christ.