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ZECHARIAH

An 8-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 8 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

Return to Me — Zechariah 1:1–17

Scripture Scope: Zechariah 1:1–17 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

PARTICIPANT STUDY EDITION

Synchronized Section-by-Section with the Leader Guide Edition · Includes Group Reflection Workspace

Zechariah — 8-Week Group Bible Study (Participant Study Edition)

Week 1: Return to Me (Zechariah 1:1–17)

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- **The title:** The book is named for its prophet, Zechariah, whose name means "the LORD remembers." He was the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo (1:1), likely from a priestly family that returned from exile (Nehemiah 12:4, 16).
- **The setting:** Zechariah began to prophesy in 520 BC, the second year of King Darius of Persia, two months after Haggai. He spoke to the same returned exiles, the same leaders (Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest), and the same unfinished temple (Ezra 5:1–2). Chapters 1–8 contain dated material from 520–518 BC, while chapters 9–14 are undated and their exact date and literary history are debated.
- **The main theme:** The LORD's return to his people. Zechariah calls the remnant to return to the LORD and promises that he will return to them, dwell among them, cleanse them, finish his house by his Spirit, send a humble King, and one day be King over all the earth.
- **The main characters:** The LORD of hosts, the prophet Zechariah, the angel who talks with him, the angel of the LORD, Joshua the high priest, Zerubbabel the governor, the Branch, the humble King, and the shepherd.
- **The structure (four parts):**
- A call to return (1:1–6).
- Eight night visions and a crowning (1:7–6:15).
- A question about fasting and the promise of a faithful city (7:1–8:23).
- Two burdens about the coming King, the Shepherd, and the day of the LORD (9:1–14:21).
- **Why it matters:** Zechariah contributes several major texts used in the passion narratives: the King on a donkey, the thirty pieces of silver, the pierced one, and the struck shepherd. It encourages God's people that his work goes forward not by might or power but by his Spirit, and it points to Jesus, the Branch, the humble King, and the Shepherd who was struck for his flock.

How This 8-Week Study Works

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, each week of Zechariah invites you to move with a prophet from a call to return, through night visions, to the coming King together through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's chapters inside the structure of Zechariah and the ancient Near Eastern world.
- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV. Zechariah is full of visions and symbols; the study explains what each image means in its setting without building charts or timelines. Some later chapters describe war, slaughter, and plague. The study retells those scenes briefly in its own words and does not read them aloud, so that the focus stays on God's mercy, his King, and his kingdom.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Zechariah:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.
- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 8-Week Zechariah Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**Return to Me** (1:1–17)	Return to Me, and I Will Return to You (1:1–6) / Horsemen Among the Myrtles (1:7–17)	The Lord who calls his people home and comes to them in Christ
2	**Jerusalem Restored** (1:18–2:13)	Four Horns and Four Craftsmen (1:18–21) / A Measuring Line and a Wall of Fire (2:1–13)	A city without walls, glory in her midst, and the nations joined to the Lord
3	**The Priest Cleansed and the Branch Promised** (3:1–4:14)	A Brand Plucked from the Fire (3:1–10) / Not by Might, nor by Power (4:1–14)	Filthy garments removed, the Branch, and the work of the Spirit
4	**Wickedness Removed** (5:1–6:15)	The Scroll and the Ephah (5:1–11) / Four Chariots and a Crown (6:1–15)	Wickedness removed, and the Branch who is priest and king
5	**True Fasting and a City of Truth** (7:1–8:23)	Did You Fast for Me? (7:1–14) / I Have Returned to Zion (8:1–23)	True fasting, justice, and the nations who seek the Lord
6	**Your King Comes Humble** (9:1–11:17)	The King on a Donkey (9:1–10:12) / The Rejected Shepherd (11:1–17)	The humble King and the Good Shepherd who was rejected
7	**They Will Look on Me Whom They Pierced** (12:1–13:9)	A Spirit of Grace and Pleas for Mercy (12:1–14) / A Fountain Opened (13:1–9)	The pierced one, the fountain for sin, and the struck shepherd
8	**The LORD Will Be King Over All the Earth** (14:1–21)	Living Waters (14:1–11) / Holy to the LORD (14:12–21)	Living waters and the King over all the earth

WEEK 1 OF 8

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · ZECHARIAH 1:1–17

Week 1: Return to Me

Scripture Scope: Zechariah 1:1–17 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Zechariah 1:3–4; 1:6; 1:8; 1:12–13; 1:16–17 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: Return to Me (Zechariah 1:1–17)

Opening

In the previous study, Haggai called the returned exiles to rebuild the LORD's house, and the work began. Two months later, the LORD raised up a second prophet for the same people. Zechariah's first word is short and searching: "Return to me" and "I will return to you." Do not be like your fathers, who would not listen to the prophets. Three months later, Zechariah sees a vision in the night: a man riding a red horse, standing among myrtle trees in a hollow, with other horses behind him.

They have patrolled the earth and found it quiet and at rest. But Jerusalem is still in ruins. So the angel of the LORD cries out, "How long?" And the LORD answers with gracious and comforting words: he is jealous for

Jerusalem, he has returned to her with mercy, his house will be built, and he will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Zechariah 1:1–17 (Zechariah's first dated word, the call to return to the LORD with his promise to return, the warning not to be like the fathers who would not listen, the words that overtook them and their confession, the night vision of the man among the myrtle trees and the patrol of the earth, the angel's cry "How long?", the LORD's gracious and comforting words, his jealousy for Jerusalem, and his promise to return with mercy, build his house, and comfort Zion)
Focal Passages	Zechariah 1:3–4; 1:6; 1:8; 1:12–13; 1:16–17
Literary & Structural Anchor	"Return to me" and "I will return to you" (1:3) is a summons joined to a promise, not a bargain between equals. The short sermon (1:1–6, eighth month) is followed three months later by the first night vision (1:7–17, eleventh month). The vision answers the summons: "I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy" (1:16) echoes "I will return to you" (1:3). Lament is not rebuked; "How long?" (1:12) is answered with comfort (1:13).
Big Idea	The LORD calls his people to return to him, promises to return to them, and answers their long wait with mercy, comfort, and a house to be built.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know the Call:** Understand Zechariah's call to return, the vision of the horsemen, and the LORD's comforting answer.
HEART	**Return to the LORD:** Learn that God calls his people home to himself, not only back to work, and answers their "How long?" with mercy.
HANDS	**Turn Toward Him:** Take one concrete step this week to return to the LORD in an area where you have drifted.

Opening Frame: Return to Me

Haggai ended with the LORD's promise to Zerubbabel, the governor of the returned exiles. Zechariah spoke to the same community in the same year, 520 BC, while the temple was being rebuilt. His book is the longest of the twelve shorter prophets and one of the most vivid: it opens with a call to return, moves through eight night visions given in a single night, answers a question about fasting, and ends with two great oracles about a coming King, a rejected Shepherd, a pierced one, and the day when the LORD will be king over all the earth. Some of the visions are hard to interpret, and we will hold the details humbly. Over eight weeks we will follow the book in order. This week the LORD calls his people to return to him, and in the first vision an angel asks how long the LORD will wait to show mercy. The question for this week: what does it mean to return to God, and how does he answer our how long? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): What makes a welcome feel genuine and restorative in a story or community?

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: A Second Prophet for a Waiting People (Zechariah 1:1–17)

Entering the World of Zechariah and the Returned Exiles

1. Historical Background

After Cyrus captured Babylon in 539 BC, the initial return from exile is commonly dated to 538–537 BC, though temple work stalled for years. In 520 BC Haggai roused the people to rebuild, and two months later Zechariah joined him. The Persian Empire under Darius had put down revolts and the world was largely quiet, but Jerusalem remained small and unwalled.

2. Cultural Setting

Zechariah was likely from a priestly family (Nehemiah 12:4, 16). Kings in the ancient Near Eastern world sent riders to patrol and report on their realms. Myrtle was a familiar shrub, sometimes linked with festivity and restoration (Isaiah 55:13).

3. Literary Structure of Zechariah 1:1–17

- **The dated word** (1:1)
- **Return to me** (1:2–3)
- **Do not be like your fathers** (1:4–6)
- **The vision dated** (1:7)
- **A man among the myrtles** (1:8)
- **The patrol's report** (1:9–11)
- **"How long?"** (1:12)
- **Gracious and comforting words** (1:13)
- **The LORD's jealousy and anger at the nations** (1:14–15)
- **Mercy, a house, and comfort** (1:16–17)

4. Key Themes

Returning to God; God's return to his people; listening to his word; lament; God's jealous love; comfort; the rebuilding of his house.

5. Theological Considerations

The LORD's call to return is joined to his promise to return. His jealousy is covenant love, a passion for his people, not petty spite. His comfort comes before the announcement of a rebuilt house.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

The "seventy years" (1:12) recalls Jeremiah's prophecy of the length of exile (Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10). Many interpreters trace a loose symmetry across the eight night visions (1:7–6:8), moving from outer-world scenes toward the center (the cleansing of the priest and the lampstand) and back out again.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: Zechariah spoke to the same people as Haggai, about the same house. Why might God send a second prophet with a different emphasis?

1.2 Q2: The world was quiet under Persian rule, but Jerusalem was still in ruins. Why is a peaceful world not the same as God's people being restored?

1.2 Q3: Zechariah's name means "the LORD remembers." How might that name have encouraged a people who had waited so long?

Section 1.3

Movement 1: Return to Me, and I Will Return to You (Zechariah 1:1–6)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Summary of Zechariah 1:1–2** — In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo: the LORD was very angry with your fathers.
- **Reader 1: Zechariah 1:3** (focal passage) — Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you.
- **Reader 2: Zechariah 1:4** (focal passage) — Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out to turn from their evil ways and deeds; they did not listen.
- **Summary of Zechariah 1:5** — Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?
- **Reader 3: Zechariah 1:6** (focal passage) — But the LORD's words overtook your fathers, and they repented and said that the LORD had dealt with them as he purposed for their ways and deeds.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Zechariah 1:3:** 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.
>
> **Zechariah 1:4:** 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.
>
> **Zechariah 1:6:** 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 has he dealt with us.'"

Teaching Narrative: Return to Me, and I Will Return to You

1. A Second Prophet (Zechariah 1:1)

Two months after Haggai began, the word of the LORD comes to Zechariah.

2. Return to Me (Zechariah 1:2–3)

The LORD calls his people to return to him, and promises to return to them.

3. Do Not Be Like Your Fathers (Zechariah 1:4–5)

The earlier generation ignored the prophets. The fathers and the prophets are gone, but God's word remains.

4. Words That Overtook (Zechariah 1:6)

God's word came true, and the fathers confessed that he had dealt with them justly.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: "Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you" (1:3). What does it mean to return to the LORD himself, and not only to religious activity?

1.3 Q2: Why do you think God joins his call to return with a promise, "I will return to you"?

1.3 Q3: "Do not be like your fathers" (1:4). What can we learn from the failures of those who came before us?

1.3 Q4: "But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD" (1:4). What keeps people today from listening to God's word?

1.3 Q5: The fathers finally confessed, "As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us" (1:6). Why is honest confession an important part of returning to God?

Section 1.4

Movement 2: Horsemen Among the Myrtles (Zechariah 1:7–17)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Summary of Zechariah 1:7** — On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah.
- **Reader 1: Zechariah 1:8** (focal passage) — In the night Zechariah saw a man riding a red horse, standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, with red, sorrel, and white horses behind him.
- **Summary of Zechariah 1:9–11** — Zechariah asked what these were, and the angel who talked with him explained. The riders reported to the angel of the LORD that they had patrolled the earth, and all the earth was at rest.

- **Reader 2: Zechariah 1:12–13** (focal passage) — The angel of the LORD said, O LORD of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem, after these seventy years? And the LORD answered with gracious and comforting words.
- **Summary of Zechariah 1:14–15** — Cry out: the LORD is exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, and very angry with the nations at ease who made the disaster worse.
- **Reader 3: Zechariah 1:16–17** (focal passage) — The LORD has returned to Jerusalem with mercy; his house will be built, and a measuring line stretched over Jerusalem. His cities will again overflow with prosperity, and he will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Zechariah 1:8:** "I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.
>
> **Zechariah 1:12:** Then the angel of the LORD said, '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?'
>
> **Zechariah 1:13:** And the LORD answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.
>
> **Zechariah 1:16:** 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.
>
> **Zechariah 1:17:** 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.'"

Teaching Narrative: Horsemen Among the Myrtles

1. A Night Vision (Zechariah 1:7–8)

A man on a red horse among the myrtle trees, with horses behind him.

2. The Earth at Rest (Zechariah 1:9–11)

The patrol reports that the world is quiet. But quiet under empire is not yet comfort for Zion.

3. How Long? (Zechariah 1:12)

The angel of the LORD himself laments for Jerusalem.

4. Gracious and Comforting Words (Zechariah 1:13)

The LORD answers with kindness before he announces his plans.

5. Jealous for Zion (Zechariah 1:14–15)

The LORD's love for his people burns, and he is angry with the nations who went too far.

6. Mercy, a House, and Comfort (Zechariah 1:16–17)

The LORD has returned with mercy; his house will be built, and he will again comfort and choose.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: "I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse!" (1:8). Why do you think God gave Zechariah visions rather than only plain words?

1.4 Q2: The riders report that the whole earth is at rest (1:11). Why might that report be troubling rather than comforting?

1.4 Q3: "O LORD of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah" (1:12). What does it mean to you that the angel of the LORD himself prays "How long?"

1.4 Q4: "The LORD answered gracious and comforting words" (1:13). Why do you think God's first answer is comfort rather than an explanation or a plan?

1.4 Q5: "I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it" (1:16). How does this answer the call of 1:3, and what hope does it give you?

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: The Lord Who Calls His People Home

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

Like the father who ran to meet his returning son (Luke 15:20–24), God came to his own in Jesus (John 1:11–14); Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44), the church still asks how long (Revelation 6:10), and one day God will dwell with his people (Revelation 21:3). Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. The Waiting Father (Luke 15:20–24)

Jesus told of a father who ran to welcome his returning son—a Gospel resonance with "Return to me" and "I will return to you," rather than a direct fulfillment claim.

2. God Comes to His Own (John 1:11–14)

In Christ, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us—a climax of the biblical presence theme, though John 1 does not directly quote Zechariah 1 or 2.

3. The Church's "How Long?" (Revelation 6:10)

God's people still pray "How long?" and the Lord still answers with mercy.

4. Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44)

The Lord who is jealous for his people wept over the city that did not know the time of its visitation.

5. A Godly Jealousy (2 Corinthians 11:2)

Paul speaks of a godly jealousy for the church, betrothed to Christ.

6. God Dwells with His People (Revelation 21:3)

The story ends with God dwelling among his people forever.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

> **Zechariah 1:3:** 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.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: In Jesus' story, "while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him" (Luke 15:20). How does Luke 15:20 resonate canonically with "Return to me" and "I will return to you" (without serving as a direct fulfillment claim)?

1.5 Q2: John writes, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). How does John 1 climax the theme of God dwelling with his people without directly quoting Zechariah 1 or 2?

1.5 Q3: The martyrs in Revelation cry, "how long before you will judge and avenge our blood" (Revelation 6:10). How does it help to know that God's people in every age have prayed "How long?"

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD

The LORD calls his people to return to him and promises to return to them; he hears their "How long?" and answers with mercy and comfort.

HEART	In Christ, God has come to his people, and he still welcomes everyone who returns.
HANDS	Faith returns to the Lord, listens to his word, brings its laments to him, and trusts his comforting promises.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: In what area of your life is the LORD calling you to return to him this week?

1.6 Q2: How does the angel's prayer in Zechariah 1:12 model bringing honest questions about delay to God without pretending pain is small?

1.6 Q3: How will you listen and pay attention to God's word this week, unlike the fathers who did not hear?

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, Zechariah called the remnant to return to the LORD with the promise that he would return to them, and in a night vision heard the LORD answer "How long?" with gracious and comforting words: mercy, a house built, and Zion comforted again.

Transition: The LORD has promised to return and rebuild. Next, Zechariah sees four horns and four craftsmen, and a man with a measuring line, and hears that the LORD himself will be a wall of fire around Jerusalem and the glory in her midst.

Week 2 Overview — Jerusalem Restored (Zechariah 1:18–2:13): Movement 1, Four Horns and Four Craftsmen (1:18–21), covers the powers that scattered Judah and the craftsmen sent to cast them down. Movement 2, A Measuring Line and a Wall of Fire (2:1–13), covers a man measuring Jerusalem, the promise of a city without walls protected by the LORD as a wall of fire, the call to flee Babylon, many nations joining themselves to the LORD, and the call for all flesh to be silent before him. The Canonical Horizon traces a city without walls, glory in her midst, and the nations joined to the Lord.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Zechariah 1:18–21
- Zechariah 2:1
- Zechariah 2:5
- Zechariah 2:10–11
- Zechariah 2:13

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

Closing Group Prayer

LORD, you call us to return to you, and you promise to return to us. We confess the ways we have not listened to your word. Thank you for your gracious and comforting words. We pray for all who are waiting and asking how long. Thank you for Jesus, in whom you came to your own and welcome every child who comes home. Give us hearts that listen and return. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.