

## Zech. 1:1-6 “Returning”

**For the Children:** Perhaps you have at some time been punished for not tidying up your room. In addition to the punishment, you still have to do the work you were given. But you don't feel like doing it. You sit in your room sulking. Children sulk either because they don't really believe they deserved punishment, or because they don't believe they're forgiven. God's people who had returned from Exile in Babylon had been set to work re-building God's temple. But they didn't have much enthusiasm for it. They needed to repent of their slackness, and to know that God forgives those who repent. Once they accepted those truths, they would be filled with joy for the task of re-building. **Questions:** Are there any sins so bad that God would never forgive you even if you repented? What is repentance? Why does God show such mercy, even to those who have done terrible things?

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### Introduction:

#### First Point: How Judah Became Estranged from the Lord

- 1) The Sins That Led to Exile: Judah was exiled by the Lord for serious sins, such as idolatry, witchcraft, persecution of the prophets, and murder of the innocent (2 Kgs. 21; Mt. 23:35/2 Chron. 24:20-21). The people and their leaders followed in the sins of Manasseh. They had become worse than some of the nations the Lord had destroyed.
- 2) Not Listening: These sins continued despite many warnings from prophets like Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk. The people were ignoring the prophetic Word of God (Zech. 1:1, 4). Even worse, they were ignoring the grace of God, when He promised mercy and restoration if they would repent (Jer. 24:4-7; 35:15). To reject this grace was, in effect, to reject the Christ. When God's people commit such sins, they must not presume upon grace, assuming that God will never punish His own people. See also Mt. 7:21-23; 25:34f; Heb. 2,3,6; and 2 Pet. 3, for NT warnings against presumptuousness.
- 3) Where Are They Now?: The seriousness of these sins is seen in the history of Israel leading up to the Exile. V.5 directs the reader to consider the fate of the fathers who refused to heed the warnings. Their nation passed into Exile and they perished. Even the prophets who warned them died without being able to prevent the Exile. But the Word of the Lord abides forever. His judgements always overtake sinners (v.6); but so does His grace.

#### Second Point: How Judah Could Return to the Lord

- 1) Listen to the Word: We see from this that those who wish to return to the Lord must listen to His prophetic Word – as it judges our sin, warns of judgement, and as it promises mercy. Even the “return” language here hooks into similar language used by earlier prophets e.g., Jer. 25,35; Is. 44;22, 55:7. True repentance is not mere emotion; it is a response to God's Word, wrought by His Spirit.
- 2) Consider Past Mercies: Repentance can also be encouraged by considering the mercy God has shown to sinners – including ourselves – in the past. Despite Judah's terrible sins, God forgave the fathers in Exile who sought forgiveness e.g., as in Dan. 9. See Zech. 1:6. Consider also David with his sins.
- 3) Turn to the Lord, from Sin: The 2 key (and inseparable) elements of repentance are turning *from* sin (v. 4) and *to* the Lord (v. 3). Turning to the Lord has the priority, because we will never be able to turn from our sins for His sake, unless we first have a heart for Him. This is a matter of His grace, in giving us such a heart. The Lord then graciously helps those who have been given a heart for Him to begin actually turning from their evil deeds. We cannot have either of these elements if we do not have both.
- 4) Trust the Promise: V. 3 gives a strong assurance that if we do “turn” in both of these ways, the Lord will surely show mercy and “return” to us. This does not mean that the Lord will only forgive us if we use our free will to repent and seek Him again; it means that if we repent with His gracious aid, there will be an assured outcome – that He will return to us. See Jer. 3:11-14; 1 Jn. 1:9. Considering Judah's terrible sins, this is amazing grace – won for us by Christ. It shows that *any* sin can be forgiven if we repent. This was a great encouragement to the dispirited returnees; and it should be to us as well. Trusting this promise is vital for motivating repentance.

### Conclusion:

