

September 5, 2010

“Return, with All Your Heart, to the Lord!”

Zechariah 1:1-6

I. Understand Israel’s history and Zechariah’s and Jerusalem’s situation –

1. Long, long before they had a glorious history
 - A. Moses had parted the Red Sea
 - B. Elijah called fire from Heaven
 - C. David defeated Goliath
2. Yet, more recently they had failed miserably:

Their fathers had rebelled against God in the most dramatic ways, even worshipping “the queen of Heaven” and other false gods - “The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger.” (Jeremiah 7:18 NKJ)

Consider their fathers (and mothers) STUBBORN REBELLION -

“As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you!”¹⁷ “But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 44:16-17.

²³ “Because you have burned incense and because you have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD or walked in His law, in His statutes or in His testimonies, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as at this day.” Jeremiah 44:23

He commanded Jeremiah NOT TO pray for “this people”

“Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you. (Jeremiah 7:16 NKJ)

“So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear *them* in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble. (Jeremiah 11:14 NKJ)

Then the LORD said to me, “Do not pray for this people, for *their* good. (Jeremiah 14:11 NKJ)

II. God warns them not to be like their fathers –

⁴ “Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds.”’ But they did not hear nor heed Me,” says the LORD.⁵ “Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?”⁶ Yet surely My words and My statutes, Which I commanded My servants the prophets, Did they not overtake your fathers?” (Zechariah 1:4-6a NKJ)

He warns them as “the LORD of Hosts” – the LORD of Armies, using this title FOUR TIMES in two verses, three times in **Zechariah 1:3**

I believe He did this to impress upon them His power to PUNISH them should they not listen and repent –

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.² And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. (Daniel 1:1-2 NKJ)

He was LORD not only over armies of men but over all creatures – What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten. (Joel 1:4 NKJ)

III. Did they need such a warning?

1. They were not worshipping the queen of Heaven!
2. They were a small group who endured a certain level of hardship and stepped out with a certain level of commitment to return to and rebuild Jerusalem...
3. They SEEMED much better than their fathers!

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,² “Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: This people says, “The time has not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built.””³ Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying,⁴ “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?”⁵ Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: “Consider your ways!”⁶ “You have sown

much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages *to put* into a bag with holes." ⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!" ⁸ "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. ⁹ "You looked for much, but indeed *it came* to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that *is in* ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. ¹⁰ "Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. ¹¹ "For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of *your* hands." ¹² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the LORD. (Haggai 1:1-12 NKJ)

IV. Yet, they needed to be MORE than just better than their fathers; God wanted them to draw near!

1. God called them and calls us to a high level of heart and commitment –

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" ⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NKJ)

- A. Their sin was not a blatant sin of commission; they had not worshipped any queen of Heaven ...
- B. Their sin is not even a blatant sin of omission, yes, they were slow to start building God's House, yet when confronted by Haggai they **"obeyed the voice of the LORD their God"** **"the people feared the presence of the LORD"** **Haggai 1:12**
- C. Their sin seems mostly spiritual, it is a heart sin ---

2. God had great things for them –

- A. Marvelous prophecies will they / will we understand these without real repentance?
- B. Many of these prophecies are about Christ and His Kingdom, the Temple they would build, Christ would cleanse! It was time for them to start preparing their hearts for Christ's Kingdom!

3. God has great things for us too and calls us to RETURN fully even when we, like the Israelites, have already returned partially! The LORD wanted their hearts! He wants ours too!

V. We need to be repenting regularly, trusting God's Word –

1. Note there is a general call to TURN – THREE TIMES in two verses (the Christian life involves regular repenting)
2. Note there is a promise of grace if they did return -

The Prodigal Son in the Key of F

Feeling footloose and frisky, a feather-brained fellow forced his fond father to fork over the family finances. He flew far to foreign fields and frittered his fortune feasting fabulously with faithless friends. Finally facing famine and fleeced by his fellows in folly, he found himself a feed-flinger in a filthy farmyard. Fairly famished he fain would have filled his frame with the foraged foods of the fodder fragments left by the filthy farmyard creatures. 'Fooyey', he said, 'My father's flunkies fare far fancier,' the frazzled fugitive found feverishly, frankly facing facts. Frustrated by failure and filled with foreboding he forthwith fled to his family. Falling at his father's feet, he floundered forlornly. 'Father, I have flunked and fruitlessly forfeited family favor.'

But the faithful father, forestalling further flinching frantically flagged the flunkies. 'Fetch forth the finest fatling and fix a feast.' But the fugitive's fault-finding frat frowned on the fickle forgiveness of the former folderol. His fury flashed.

But fussing was futile, for the far-sighted father figured, such filial fidelity is fine, but what forbids fervent festivity? The fugitive is found! "Unfurl the flags, with fanfares flaring! Let fun and frolic freely flow!" "Former failure is forgotten, folly is forsaken! And forgiveness forms the foundation for future fortitude."