



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Jewish People, Jesus Christ, and World History

Zechariah 1:1-6

"The Standing Commandment"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the privilege that is ours to have an open Bible and to be able to look into its pages and ponder the things that have to do with the issues that are closest to the heart of the triune God. We are indeed grateful. We are thankful that we have the opportunity and privilege. As we look, Lord, at the history of the nation Israel and reflect upon the way in which, though given great privileges, they turned away from Thee, became hardened, did not even hear the appeals of the great prophets of the Old Testament, were themselves bent on backsliding from Thee. It causes us to fear that we too may follow in the same path.

We know Thou hast said in the New Testament, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, "For it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." And Lord, we pray that we may have that sense of solemnity, that sense of awe, that sense of fear that will enable us to keep before us constantly the claims of our great God, and the weaknesses of ourselves, and the need of turning to Thee, and committing our lives moment by moment and day by day to Thee.

Deliver us, Lord, from turning away and following after the false gods. We ask Lord, as we study tonight that as we think about the history of the nation and think about

the flow of human history, that Thou will give us understanding. In the critical days in which we live, allow us Lord to serve Thee in a way that will please Thee and be fruitful. We ask Thy blessing upon each one present, may our class be a spiritual blessing for us all. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Last week in the calendar of concern I had mentioned to Mrs. Ray, the church secretary that I would like to take the theme of "Israel: The Key to World History." Because it happens to be a theme that I am particularly interested in myself, and I thought some others might be too. When I sat down to work out the details of a series with that general theme, I realized that what I was talking about really was something that would take us all through the Bible, because beginning in the Book of Genesis and going all the way through the Book of Revelation one of the great subjects, of course, is the nation Israel, and the fact that it is the key to world history is referred to in so many places that it's almost overwhelming.

And since we had already undertaken, in the past year or two, the exposition of some of the books that have had to do with aspects of it, it seemed to me that there might be some repetition that was unnecessary. And so, as I have thought about it, I am slightly modifying that theme and slightly modifying what I would like to do. What I would like to do is to take the general theme of "The Jewish People, Jesus Christ, and World History." And so, we are narrowing the study down a bit, not in the title, but in the fact that what I would like to do, which will make it easier for me and I hope a bit easier for you, to take the Book of Zechariah and use that as our text, expounding that text. But throughout the exposition of it, relating what Zechariah has to say to the subject, the general theme "The Jewish People, Jesus Christ, and World History."

Now, some of you were here seventeen years ago when I was giving an exposition of the Book of Zechariah and some of you were not even born then. [Laughter] And some of you were just little kids playing around in short pants, but some of you I know are going to say, "Didn't you speak on that topic once before?" And I did.

I was looking at my notes, and they go back to 1967, and so it was in 1967, the last half of the year, that I devoted Sunday morning ministry to the exposition of the Book of Zechariah. But there have been a number of books that have been written just recently on the subject of the relationship between the church of Jesus Christ and the nation Israel. And surprisingly, they have been written not simply by Christians, but by Jews also. And in fact, in the light of the recent literature, there is some indication of some signs of a rapprochement with Christ and with the church on the part of many Jewish leaders. It's, I think, one of the really remarkable things.

For example, among the important books that have been written recently are these. There is one edited by David Torrance, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, whose brother I studied under at the University of Edinburgh, Thomas Torrance. His book is entitled *The Witness of the Jews to God*, and it's a collection of articles written by very well known, for the most part, British scholars in which they deal with the topic of the Jewish people and Jesus Christ; and of course, ultimately, with the theme of world history. This book is written from different standpoints, because there are about twelve fourteen different authors who write chapters in it. But it is written by some who are conservative and some who are somewhat liberal, but the striking thing about it is the fact that they have united in the common perception of the fact that this is something of a critical time in the relationship of the church to Jesus Christ.

Jakob Jocz, a well know Hebrew Christian, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Toronto, is a man who has written a number of books in which he has sought to unfold aspects of Jewish Christian theology. Well, Professor Jocz, who is an evangelical, not the same kind of evangelical that one would find in some of the most fundamental of evangelical seminaries but definitely a strong Christian man. He has written a book, just two or three years old now, called *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ After Auschwitz*. This is a study of the controversy between the church and the synagogue, and Professor Jocz, and I'll refer to him in just a moment in some things that

he has written in his book; Professor Jocz, in this book, has pointed out that there is something of a amelioration of the views of Jews toward Jesus Christ and toward the church. It's rather startling, and of course an evangelical Christian would be particularly interested in this if he believes that there is an ethnic future of the nation Israel and a turning of the nation Israel to the Lord Jesus Christ in the latter days.

Donald Hagner who is a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary has just issued a book called *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*. A book of almost three hundred and fifty pages in which he gives an analysis and a critique of modern Jewish study of Jesus. He has had a lot of interaction with Jewish scholars, a lot of friendly interaction, and he, as well as some of these other men such as David Torrance, are on various committees both in Britain and in the United States, in which Jewish people are gathering with members of the church of Jesus Christ and discussing the relationship between the church and Judaism. Well, this book, as I say, is an analysis and a critique of modern Jewish study of Jesus, and the interesting thing about it to me is that Donald Hagner, who you might think would hedge a little bit because of his background and because of the place where he teaches, does not in this book as far as I can tell. And he carries on interaction with a number of men who are personal friends of his, Jewish leaders, rabbis, and others; and yet at the same time insists that the ultimate issue is the Jewish rejection and then, of course, the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah.

The latest book that has come to my hand is a book by a rabbi, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, *What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism.*" And incidentally, it's published by Word Books in Waco, which in itself will indicate something of the fact that Rabbi Eckstein is a friend of some men that studied under me some years ago. And again, this is all part of a general movement in Judaism, not of course generally, but nevertheless in Judaism, and also in evangelicalism to try to come together; evangelicals, of course, hoping that the Jews will come to realize who Jesus Christ is, and the Jews manifesting a tentative interest in Jesus Christ.

Let me, for example, read you some things that have been said by some of the men and by some of the men about which they write. Professor Jocz, who is a man who is retired; he's still a very vigorous man, but he has retired and has written this very interesting book. He says, "There is an obvious change in the air in respect to Jewish-Christian relationships. The change is noticeable in the way that Christians speak and write about Jews, and the way Jews reciprocate. On the Jewish side, the changed attitude on the part of Christians has encouraged a more objective view of Jesus and of Christianity. Jewish scholarly research and New Testament studies and in early church history has greatly contributed to a better understanding of the problems and issues involved. The traditional attitude of defense apologetics is giving way, though only slowly, to open study and even self-criticism."

Later on, a few pages after he wrote that, he has this to say, "Unexpectedly, it is not the Jews of the liberal school who are taking a more positive attitude toward the basic affirmation to Christian faith, but the more orthodox, thus the question of Jesus' resurrection." And he mentions two men, both "observant Jews," he calls them, "refused to deny the possibility of the resurrection of Christ. Latide is quoted as saying, 'I would not exclude such a resurrection as within the range of possibility.' Rabbi Mott is prepared to go even further, though as a believing Jew, he cannot affirm the doctrines of the virgin birth, the incarnation, the resurrection, the Saviorhood of Christ, and the trinity, yet he does not feel free to deny them, even the miracles." And these are words from the Rabbi, "Performed by Jesus need not be denied by a believing Jew." "Both Latide and Mott," Jocz goes on, "points to scriptural precedence on the question of the resurrection. Mott quotes the Talmudic dictum, 'He who says that the resurrection of the dead is not derived from the Torah has no share in the world to come.' Even on the hotly disputed question of the trinity, he takes a cautious position, neither affirming nor denying."

He goes on to say, "Many Jews now acknowledge that Jesus is the Savior of the Gentile church, but not the Messiah of Israel. Although, Professor Sherps," Professor

Sherps is a rather liberal man who has written books on the Apostle Paul and on others, but his major field of interest has been in the relationship of Christianity to Judaism, and Professor Sherps has said, "When the Messiah does come, it may be discovered that his face is that of Jesus of Nazareth." Jocz also says, "Many such as Latide see no contradiction in saying that Jesus is the Savior of the Gentile church but not the Messiah of Israel." Isn't that interesting? Imagine the admission, David Roush, Professor at Ohio University, is prepared to accept, "Believers in Messiah Yeshua, as Jews belonging to a radical group deviating from the norm of Jewish practice. We consider them Jews even though they are certainly far removed from our ideal." Now, that's rather interesting, because its historically been the case that if a Jewish man turned to Christianity, he was no longer regarded as a Jew. But here are Jews, such as Jews for Jesus, or those who accept the Lord Jesus as Messiah Yeshua. Yeshua is the name which means, Savior Jesus. Messiah Jesus, they're still considered Jews. In other words, there is a place in the thinking of this individual for a believing Messianic Jew. I think that's rather interesting.

And then finally, Professor Jocz refers to Ferdynand Zweig who spent five years as visiting Professor of Sociology and Labor Relations and the Hebrew and Tel Aviv Universities. He wrote a book just a few years ago called, *The Sword and the Harp*, and it was the result of personal observations by an open and highly educated mind, obviously a Jewish man teaching in Jewish universities. And he says with respect to our Lord, "The figure of Jesus, the Jew from Nazareth, looms large on the Israeli horizon, although, not much is said about him openly, and most Jews cautiously refrain from mentioning his name in public. The reason for the awareness of our Lord's presence is not merely historical," he says. "The biblical sites, Christian tourists, the many churches, but there is a spiritual need which Zweig believes that Jesus could satisfy. His teaching and his injunction to love ones enemies, he regards as most relevant in the present spiritual climate of the nation." And then Professor Zweig raises a question that few have ever dared to ask. Now think of this, this is a professor teaching in two Hebrew universities in

the land. Here's the question he raises, "Were our forefathers right in rejecting Jesus?" And he raises that as a question. So, I think you can see that in Judaism today, some rather interesting things are happening. And of course, the Christians, particularly those who are interested in Israel and who do believe that there is a future for the nation Israel according to the teaching of the word of God, they have become very interested, too, in seeking to interact with the Jewish individuals in hopes, of course, of ultimately finding the proper rapprochement in the teaching of the word of God.

Well, these things, I think, turn our minds to the prophetic word and to the signs of the times. Remember the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 16, when the Pharisees and Sadducees came up to test him, and they asked him to show a sign from heaven, he answered and said to them, "When it is evening, you say, it will be fair weather for the sky is red. And in the morning there will be a storm today for the sky is red and threatening." That has been paraphrased as "Red at night, means sailors' delight. Red at morning is the sailors' warning." You see, the interesting thing about this is that our Lord said that it is proper for us to be concerned about the signs of the times, and when the apostles, later on, asked him the question at the beginning of the Olivet discourse, when he spoke about the judgment that was to come upon the city, and when they asked him, "When shall these things be?" He did not stop and say, "Now, you shouldn't be interested in the future. You shouldn't be interested in the prophetic word. You should rather go out preaching the gospel, and spend your time doing that. And so far as the future is concerned, let's just leave that a kind of hazy blank." Well, as a matter of fact, in answer to the question, he gave the longest answer that he ever gave to any question that was asked him, for the Olivet discourse is our Lord's answer to, "When shall these things be?"

We don't want to set dates. No one, I think, who reads the Bible with intelligence will want to set dates. It's very tempting for some people to do it. We look at the situations about us, and we certain trends that seem to be in harmony with the things that are set out in the word of God, and occasionally Bible teachers and theologians and

others say things that later on they regret saying. But it's perfectly proper, in fact it's scriptural, and in fact I think it's unscriptural not to be interested in the signs of the times. Our Lord is the authority for that.

Zechariah is a very appropriate book for the consideration of just such themes as "Jesus Christ, the Jewish People, and World History." I don't know whether you have realized this in your reading of Zechariah or your reading of the Old Testament or not, but it is, this book contains the most concentrated Messianic material in the Old Testament. It may surprise you to know that in the Book of Zechariah, there is more Messianic material than in all of the Minor Prophets put together. And did you know that in the synoptic gospels, in the unfolding of the passion of our Lord, and remember in the unfolding of the passion of our Lord, the apostles go into great detail, Matthew, Mark, and then Luke, though not an apostle, his book also goes into great detail regarding the passion. Take Mark for example, probably the product indirectly of Peter, if you will look at the three years of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and think of the sixteen chapters and then parcel them out over the thirty-three years, you will find that an abnormal part of that book is devoted to the last week of our Lord's ministry. The reason for that, it seems plain, and there is general agreement on this, is the importance in the eyes of the gospel writers, of the passion of our Lord. Did you know that the book that is most frequently cited in the passion accounts is the Book of Zechariah? That's very interesting. That would indicate, of course, that the Book of Zechariah was rather important.

Then when you turn to the Book of Revelation you will find that it also looms large in the Book of Revelation as well, many allusions there to the Book of Zechariah. So this is, I think, an extremely important book for our critical and somewhat stormy days, because of the concentrated Messianic matter that is there. And if we are going to consider the question of the Jewish people, Jesus Christ, and world history, if you want a concentration of texts in order to develop from it, what this particular text has to say

about that subject, this I think is very appropriate. It also contains one of the most complete pictures of the person and work of our Lord from his first to his second advent. Think for a moment of Zechariah chapter 9 and verse 9, the passage cited in the New Testament in more than one place, where with regard to the first coming of our Lord we read, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King is coming to you: he is just, and endowed with salvation; humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt the foal of a donkey." And as you know, that text is the text which the Lord Jesus used in his triumphal entry, in order to make plain to the nation that he was the one of whom Zechariah was speaking. And he went out of his way to fulfill this prophecy, so they'd make the connection.

Then if you turn over to chapter 12, in verse 10 the prophet speaks of the second advent of our Lord, and he says, "And I will pour on the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: so that they will look on me whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and they will weep bitterly over him, like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." Now, if you'll just think for a moment about the New Testament, you'll remember that this text is cited in three places in the New Testament. It's cited in the Olivet discourse, and the stress there is upon the mourning of the people. It's cited also in John chapter 19, and our Lord, hanging upon the cross, has his side pierced by the Roman soldiers, and John says, "That Scripture was fulfilled. They shall look upon him whom they have pierced." And so, the piercing is the prominent thing that the apostle refers to in John 19. But then it appears again in the 1st chapter of the Book of Revelation, and in the description of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, it mentions that he is going to come with cloud. It mentions also that they will see him coming in clouds, and they will also, of course, mourn. There the reference is most prominently, and the emphasis is most prominently placed upon the fact that they will see him in the clouds of heaven coming.

Now, if you'll turn over just a page or so to chapter 14, and verse 4 we have another text that refers to the events that immediately follow our Lord's appearance in the heavens at his Second Advent. "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which is in front of Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west, by a very large valley; so that half of the mountains will move toward the north, and the other half toward the south." Well, you can see from that that very prominent in the events of the second coming of our Lord is the fact of his coming and his standing upon the Mount of Olives, the prophecy referred to in the Book of Acts chapter 1, but here in the Book of Zechariah. So, we have here then a rather complete picture of the major features of our Lord's work, but also of his person. And we will see as we go through this book that there is a stress here upon the divine nature of this Messianic king. So Zechariah, I think, is rather important from that stand point.

It's not an easy book. As you know, when you start reading Zechariah the first six chapters of the book have to do with visions. There is some interpretation of them, but many people have found them rather difficult and not surprisingly, the Jews themselves found them difficult. Jewish expositors like Barbinel and Yarkie and Christian interpreters as well, such as Jerome have been forced to concede that, to use one of the figures used by the Psalmist in writing Psalm 76 in verse 5, that they have "Failed to find their hands" in the Book of Zechariah. That's a Hebrew metaphor for helplessness. They've failed to find their hands. Yarkie, for example, has made reference to the book and he complained, he's a Jewish interpreter, and he complained that "Its abstruse for it contains visions resembling dreams which lack interpreting." And then he says, "We shall never be able to discover the true interpretation until the teacher of righteousness arrives."

Now, if you've read any of the Qumran, the Dead Sea Scrolls, you'll know that there are sections in it in which references are made to the teacher of righteousness, evidently a Messianic figure that some of that sect regarded as something like a Messianic person to come. The reference is probably to a statement in one of the Minor Prophets.

We need not go into it, but what we are able to do now is to look back upon the book of Zechariah and to look upon the Book of Zechariah with the help of the Holy Spirit who is the real instructor in divine things. For Jesus, now that he has come and offered himself as a sacrifice, and now that Pentecost has come, the Holy Spirit has come and indwells all of the saints of God, and we don't have to wait for a teacher of righteousness. We have the Holy Spirit to lead us into the truth.

As a matter of fact, Jesus said he would guide us in all the truth. And so, he will in effect take our hands, and just lead us into the truth, if we are really willing to submit ourselves to his instruction. That means, of course, we may not be able to listen to the soap operas. Listen to the soap operate update. [Laughter] Give up the soap operas themselves. [Laughter] The soap opera update, we were talking about it tonight at supper, it comes on every morning over KRLD and in three minutes you can hear everything that is going to happen that day. [Laughter] And I understand that there are some things that you can read in the paper or otherwise, and you can get it all and spend that time reading the Scriptures and asking the real teacher of the word of God to lead you into the truth. It's so easy for us to spend our time in things that are not really fruitful and edifying. We all can think of ways in which we waste words, can we not?

Well, tonight we just have about 15 minutes, and what I would like to do now, is to turn to the first 6 verses of the opening chapter, because in these verses we have something of a preface and then an appeal for repentance, which is one of the basic themes of the book. And I would just like to sort of set the historical context out of which the prophet Zechariah is given this message. The first 6 verses then strike the keynote, and the keynote spiritually is this, enjoyment of blessing is dependent upon biblical repentance, particularly for people who are in a backsliding or backslidden condition. So, there is rebuke, there is the appeal for response, and then there follows our response the unfolding of the truth of God. All that Paul speaks about plainly in 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 about the blindness of the natural man, the hardness of heart often of

even those who are believers, but who have not responded to the truth, and then the possibilities of understanding which are unlimited for the mature man. All of that marvelous exposition of spiritual truth could be put right here.

The time when Zechariah wrote his book is 520 BC. I hope you remember that date. I know all of you can remember 1492, maybe when we get through Zechariah you'll remember 520 BC as well as you remember 1492. It is the time of the year, the fall, October to November for the eighth month of the year that is referred to here, begins on about October the 27. And so it is October and November 520 BC. Isn't it interesting, here is a book written by one of the Hebrew prophets, but it's dated by the heathen. "In the eighth month, of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the Prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, saying, The LORD was very angry with your fathers." Israel, you see, is in a very sad state, because they're in a very sad state the prophet dates his book by the things that have happened to them in the past centuries as they have drifted from the truth of God.

Just a brief summary and resume of the historical facts to remind ourselves of where we are; remember the high water mark of the history of Israel in the Old Testament was the time of the kingdom when David and Solomon were sitting upon the throne. The years of about 1010 to 930 BC, not long after that the disruption took place. The northern kingdom separated from the southern kingdom at the time of Rehoboam succession to the throne and Jeroboam became the king of the north, Jeroboam the First, and Rehoboam the king of the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom declined and finally fell to the Assyrians, and we've been just going through the last decades of that, listening to the Prophet Hosea as he appealed to Israel to turn. But in 722 BC, under Sargon the Second, the Assyrians took the northern kingdom.

The southern kingdom after alternate apostasy and reformation finally fell to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. They went into captivity in three stages. At 605 BC, Daniel and the Hebrews went into captivity, then in 597 BC about three thousand

more went into captivity including Ezekiel. And then finally, in 587 BC the captivity is complete, and Zedekiah the king is also taken into captivity. The Babylonian kingdom was succeeded by the Persian kingdom under Cyrus the Great. He overcame the Babylonians in the year 539 BC, and he issued a decree for the return of the Jews in 538 BC. And forty-two thousand, three hundred and sixty Jews returned. They built that altar again. They began the second temple. And remember after they had begun to build the second temple, opposition arose; declination took place again, spiritual declination. In fact, Haggai says, "You're more interested in your pads than you are in the temple. You are building lavish places for yourselves. But you are not concerned about the things of the Lord." And Haggai and Zechariah are prophets that are giving a message to the returning remnant to turn to the things that are truly important, or else ultimate discipline is going to come.

In Darius the Great's reign, the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, then attempted to stir the remnant to finish the temple, to put first things first. And finally, in 516 BC the temple was dedicated. So we're thinking then about a prophet who is writing in the midst of people who have returned from captivity, but having returned have again lapsed into a place where the Lord God does not have priority in their life. The author of the book is called Zechariah. The Hebrew word, *zakar*, means "to remember." And so Zakaryah, you can recognize "yah" as in one of the names for God. So, Zechariah's name means something like, "he whom God remembers," and of course it's designed to represent the kind of ministry that he had. We don't know a whole lot about Zechariah. I guess Zechariah was a name like Johnson. There are, I think, about thirty people in the Old Testament who have the name Zechariah. So, Zechariah was a very common name, but this Zechariah we know was probably a priest.

He, of course, is a prophet. He grew up in Babylon, it seems. He was a young man when he wrote this book, evidently, because in the 4th verse of the 2nd chapter we read, "and said to him, "Run, speak to that young man, saying Jerusalem will be inhabited

without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle within it." And the Hebrew term that is used there, Na`ar, is a term that can mean a relative youth. He might not have been anything more than twenty years of age. So, he probably was a relatively young man when he was called upon by God to give this message. And the name epitomizes that message, because its God remembers Israel. Remember, as Hosea so strikingly points out, God does not give up with the nation Israel. He intends to fulfill all of his promises that he has made to them.

Now, the message that is given in verse 2 and 3, we read, "The LORD was very angry with your fathers." You know, there are people who say that God is angry with sin, but he's not angry with sinners. That's not true. That's not biblical teaching. In fact, there are people who say God does not love sin, but he loves sinners, as if to suggest that he loves all sinners in the same way. All you have to do is read the Bible a little bit to see that that is wrong. The Lord was very angry with your fathers. And in fact the Psalmist says, "He hates all the workers of iniquity." In the sense that God is benevolent toward all, well in that sense that's true. He's very good to those who condemn his name, reject him, care nothing about him, rebel against him, persecute his followers. But so far as the love of God, that is the love of complacency. The love of divine, electing choice, that's his special love, his special redemptive love, his special covenantal love.

But here he's talking about the fathers. "The Lord was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts. Return to me," that's the Old Testament word for repentance. So, the basic message is return to me that I may return to you, says the Lord of Hosts. Now, by the way, lest you think that the initiative is to come from us, if I were speaking to you as Zechariah the Prophet I would say, lest you think that the initiative is to come from us, "Return to me, and I will return to you." Remember, who is giving them the message. It is the Lord God who initiates this by appealing to them to come to him that he may give them the blessings that belong to those who have repented.

Well, the basic background is the unconditional Abrahamic covenant. We've talked a lot about this. There's no need for me to repeat it. You know, of course, that God gave Abraham certain promises that pertain to him, that pertain to a land; that had to do, ultimately, with a kingdom. And these are the blessings concerning which the prophet will speak. And this was confirmed to Abraham as an unconditional covenant. That is, it is a covenant that God guarantees to ultimately fulfill. Now, there were other covenants that were given, and God gave a conditional covenant to Israel. He gave them the Palestinian covenant, for example. But in the Palestinian covenant, which governed the enjoyment of the land, that covenant was dependant upon the nation Israel. And it is specifically set out in the Palestinian covenant that if the nation does not obey him, he will discipline them, and they will not enjoy the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.

And in fact, if they persist in disobedience, he has a long series of disciplinary actions increasing in degree of severity, and the final one is that they would be scattered to the four corners of the earth, which of course, has come to pass. But the basic covenant is the Abrahamic covenant, and it is unconditional and will be fulfilled. The thing that is preventing the fulfillment now is the fact that Israel's disobedience has made necessary judgment, and they're scattered to the four corners of the earth. But he will ultimately initiate activity that will bring them back into the land and into the possession of the Abrahamic promises. So, he speaks about the divine wrath, he talks about the divine grace, and says that they are to return to him that he may return to them.

And in verse 4 through verse 6, he looks at history. This bears on our topic for history, you see, is really the story of God working among men. We often hear people using the cliché, "History is his story," if we're able to climb high enough to perceive the spiritual nature of it. Henry Ford said, "History is all bunk." Well, as I think it was George Santayana, the philosopher who said, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." It was all bunk to Henry Ford, but then Henry Ford did not experience the kinds of things that the prophet is speaking about. Look what he does.

He says, "Don't be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds. But they did not listen or give heed to Me, declares the LORD. Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your fathers? Then they repented and said, As the LORD of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us."

So Zechariah looks back over the prophets, the former prophets, and he talks about all of the things that the prophet talks about and he said, "Look, don't be like the generations that have preceded you." Notice verse 4, "Return now from you evil ways and from your evil deeds. But they did not listen or give heed to me." I like that expression, because Zechariah uses two Hebrew words here. One of them means to hear in the sense of, well you're sitting in the auditorium and you're hearing Louis Johnson expound the Scriptures. But you may really be thinking about the National Open that Fuzzy Zeller won yesterday or the long putt that the Australian sank on the 18th hole on Sunday afternoon and wondering what might have happened if he had not sank that putt. But you are listening all the time to these words, and when you get out and someone said, "Well, what did Dr. Johnson say?" And you'd say, "Well, he was talking about Zechariah." [Laughter] But you really haven't taken much in. You know, there are a lot of people who sit in Believers Chapel who are like that. You know how you can know that? You can know in two ways. By the questions they ask afterwards, often they've got the statements that were made wrong, backwards. And then, of course, you also can know it if the subject comes up and you discuss it.

The second word is a word that means not simple to hear, but to give heed to. Shama means "to hear," but Qashab, which is the word, used here means "to really give heed to it." So, he said, "They did not listen or give heed to me." They were there; they heard the message of the prophets. They could probably have told you what those

prophets said, but as far as really giving heed to them, they didn't give heed to them. That's our problem, isn't it? That's the problem we all have, not simply you in the audience, but those that stand behind the pulpit or behind a teaching desk like this. We know the words, but we don't give heed to them. And this is a warning, and the warning is very severe and solemn. Listen to what the prophet says. He says, "Your father," he's talking about the Israelites who have preceded this generation, "Your fathers, where are they?" Well, they're dead and gone. And then, "The prophets, do they live forever?" Men are passing frail at best. We don't have long on this earth. We rise up. We mature. We fade, and we're gone. Generation follows generation. Generation follows generation. How many generations of men have there been since Adam? Countless generations, and someday if our Lord does not come, we'll read about your obituary in the paper. We do not live forever. There is one opportunity for us to respond, our short lifetime. "You fathers, where are they? The prophets, do they live forever?"

But now, notice that our Lord concludes by simply saying, "My purposes are purposes that come to pass." "But did not my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your fathers?" I warned them over and over again that they would go into captivity if they did not respond. "Did not my words overtake them?" They didn't have to be told that, they knew. He says, "Then they repented and said, As the Lord of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us." And that little remnant of forty-two thousand that came back, they understood that God's purposes came to pass. They understood also that he had been merciful and gracious to them. But the time for response to the word of God is now, and it is urgent.

I wish it were possible to speak more about this, but our time is up. You can see that underlying the history of the nation Israel is the spiritual side to the relationship with the Lord God. And let us not forget, as we think about the prophetic word, that the prophecies have as their ultimate purpose spiritual development on the part of those who

hear them and give heed to them. May God help us to do that. Let's bow together in a closing word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for these admonitions, which we so need. For it is so easy for us to hear, to read, but not really to give heed. Lord, help us to give heed to Thy word. Guide and direct us as we think about the relationship of the nation to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the flow of history which comes from the hands of a sovereign God. For Jesus' sake. Amen.