

“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts”

New beginnings! It's a New Year once again. I believe it was A.W. Tozer who said “The key to the Christian life is starting over; over and over again.” God built into Israel's personal and national life a continual series of new beginnings. He began it at creation with the command “Let there be light”, followed by the ending of the day and the start of another new day. He continued it in Eden with the Sabbath, the ending of a week of work with a day of rest in preparation for a new week. With the nation of Israel He instituted the Day of Atonement every year with a new year starting with complete forgiveness the *Sabbath year* every seven years with a break from planting and harvesting and a renewed energy and focus to start over; and the year of Jubilee every 50 years when every slave was to be set free, every debt cancelled, and every inheritance restored! Starting over, over and over again, is an important part of our walk with God. I am not referring to the impotent “resolutions” instituted by man's own pitifully weak might or power. I am referring to the new beginnings brought about by the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

Zechariah's Message

The exiles from Babylon had returned under Zerubbabel the governor (of the seed of David) and Joshua the High Priest. They had begun the arduous task of attempting to rebuild the temple out of the rubble of the devastation 70 years before. They had no sooner begun than political antagonism and a decree from Persia shut them down. For fifteen years the temple sat unfinished. Then God sent two prophets, Haggai first, and then a couple of months later Zechariah joined him. The two books should really be read together.

REBUKE - both prophets rebuked the leaders and the people for letting outside circumstances keep them from complete obedience. The sum of their message is simple: ***You can always obey!*** The people had focused their eyes on their circumstances and settled for excuses instead of pursuing obedience to their God.

They were detained by opposition - the decree of the King of Persia to not rebuild
They were discouraged by difficulties - few workers, a hard life, a huge mess left by the devastation 70 years earlier
They were distracted by other priorities - they were focused on building their own houses instead of God's house

Chapter 1 PROBLEM - Not Listening	PROMISE - My house shall be built in Jerusalem Zech 1:16
Chapter 2 PROBLEM - Guilt and Shame	PROMISE - I will dwell in your midst Zech 2:5,10,11
Chapter 3 PROBLEM - Sin and Uncleaness	PROMISE - I have taken your iniquity away Zech 3:4
Chapter 4 PROBLEM - Mountain of Obstacles	PROMISE - Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit Zech 4:6

God wanted Israel to know His love for them was unchanged. In spite of their past failures, shame, guilt and sin, He was cleansing them, present with them, protecting them, and sending His Holy Spirit to enable them to overcome every obstacle (mountain) in their way. As they began the work, so by His Spirit they would see it completed. They didn't need military might, or unattainable ability, they just needed the Spirit of God. Through the Holy Spirit they would complete all that God commanded.

By the Spirit's power we can always obey!

The book of Zechariah is filled with glorious messages of God's mercy, forgiveness, power, protection, and the keeping of His promise in sending Christ to redeem His people. (The Branch 3:8)

The prophecy of Zechariah begins with a rebuke. The *real problem* was not outside opposition or circumstantial difficulties. ***The real problem was spiritual.*** As it was 70 years before, so it was now. The fathers went into captivity because they did not listen to God's word. (Zech 1:1-6) So now the Lord was chastening them (see Haggai 1) for the very same reason. They were not listening to God's word. Oh, they were in the synagogue every Sabbath. They gathered before the Priest on the feast days. But they really

weren't *internalizing and obeying* the Word of God. Their "listening" wasn't really "listening" at all. The word for "listen" in Hebrew is Shema. This word is found in 1072 verses in the OT. It is commonly translated as "hear", "listen", "heed", and "obey." The command to "listen" is the most oft repeated and most oft neglected command of the Bible. Jesus repeatedly ended his sermons with this admonition: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Each of the seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3 ends with the same command. Nothing is more important than hearing... really hearing and doing... the Word.

The problem was spiritual. The solution was spiritual.

The solution was listening and beginning to immediately obey the Word of God.

EVERY STEP OF TRANSFORMATION BEGINS WITH LISTENING!

As we begin a New Year, let's begin it with a renewed listening to God's Word. Find a place, a time, and a plan to daily listen to God's word. Let me encourage you to read a chapter of Proverbs every day (day of the month) along with 3 chapters a day starting in either the Old or New Testament. Ask yourself three questions as you listen:

WHAT? - what does it say? Look carefully. Listen closely. Read to understand. Don't let your mind wander. Focus!

SO WHAT? - what does it mean? What is the main point? What do I need to remember?

NOW WHAT? - what do I do? This is the result of Shema - doing the Word. What do I do today to obey what God has said?

Self-Check

- 1) Am I starting over this New Year with a renewed passion for God's Word and real change in my life?
- 2) Have I been letting circumstances be my excuses for not fully obeying God in any area of my life?
- 3) Will I embrace the truth that by God's Spirit I can always obey? Memorize Zechariah 4:6

For Further Study

Read the following verses and note the emphasis on listening.

Deut 6:4, Proverbs 2, 1 Samuel 3, Isa 48:18, John 6:63, John 15:1-7, Galatians 3:1-5, Romans 10:17, Revelation 2-3

"Lord, You are the God who speaks. From the first page of Your Word you show us that Your word is true, powerful, active, trustworthy. Give me a heart that listens to Your word carefully, humbly, and intentionally for the purpose of obeying what You say. Make me new this new year. Give me a renewed passion for You, for Your will, for Your word, for Your work. Forgive me for blaming my circumstances and settling for excuses for not obeying You in all things. By Your Spirit I can always obey. Thank You for Your Presence, your provision, Your protection and Your power. I yield myself to you anew today, in the Name of Him who makes all things new, My Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN."

Remember, you are very special to us and we pray for you.

Living with leaving in view.... John 9:4

Ron & Val

Seeing The Invisible, embracing The Unapproachable, declaring The Unexplainable,
changed by The Immutable, running after The Irresistible
with inexhaustible joy in our inexpressible sorrows,
spending our time on eternity,
owning nothing yet possessing everything
that matters and lasts.
We are Pilgrims in Paradox.
Welcome to THE JOURNEY