

Zechariah 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?

Analysis

Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? These two rhetorical questions form the climax of the Angel of the LORD's response to the questioning patrol in Zechariah's first vision. The questions are devastatingly simple yet profound. The "fathers" (avotekem, אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם) refers to the generation that experienced exile—those who ignored the prophets' warnings, suffered Babylon's conquest, and died in captivity. The "prophets" (nevi'im, נְבִיאִים) are those faithful messengers who declared God's word to deaf ears.

The parallel questions establish a sobering truth: **both the disobedient and the messengers of their day have passed away, but God's word remains.** The implied answer to both questions is "No, they are gone." Yet verse 6 continues: "But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?" The Hebrew hissiyyu (הִשְׁיַׁע, "take hold") means to overtake, seize, or catch up with—God's word pursued the fathers until it overtook them in judgment.

This passage teaches the permanence of God's word versus the temporariness of human existence. Prophets die, generations pass, but divine truth endures and accomplishes its purpose (Isaiah 55:10-11). The rhetorical questions call the post-exilic community to learn from their fathers' mistakes: **do not presume on God's patience, for though messengers perish, their message remains, and judgment will surely come.**

Historical Context

Zechariah prophesied beginning in 520 BC, during the early post-exilic period when Jewish returnees struggled to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The nation had spent seventy years in Babylonian exile (exactly as Jeremiah prophesied—Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10), and the returnees faced discouragement, opposition, and questions about God's faithfulness. **Zechariah's eight night visions** (chapters 1-6) addressed these spiritual and practical challenges.

The reference to "your fathers" would immediately recall the pre-exilic generation whose rebellion, idolatry, and social injustice provoked God's judgment through Babylon. Despite repeated warnings from prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and others, that generation refused to repent and suffered the catastrophic consequences. Now their children, returned from exile, faced the question: **will you repeat your fathers' folly or heed the word they ignored?**

The prophets themselves—faithful voices like Jeremiah who suffered for their obedience—had also died. Their mortality did not invalidate their message; rather, the fulfillment of their prophecies (exile, destruction, restoration) vindicated their authority. The post-exilic community stood as living proof that God's word accomplishes its purpose across generations. This historical context makes the questions urgent: learn from history or be condemned to repeat it.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What specific warnings from Scripture do you tend to rationalize or delay obeying, presuming you have time to address them later?
2. How does the reality that God's word outlasts both messengers and audiences change your approach to biblical teaching and correction?

3. In what ways has God's word "overtaken" you despite your attempts to outrun or ignore it, and how should you respond?
4. What lessons from previous generations' failures (whether in church history or your own family) should shape your current obedience?
5. How does Christ as the eternal Word made flesh (John 1:14) fulfill and transcend both prophets and fathers, remaining forever to speak God's final word?

Interlinear Text

פָּלוּזֵל מְ וַיְהִי אֶתְזֹתִיכְ מְ

Your fathers

H346

H1992

where are they and the prophets

H5030

פָּלוּזֵל מְ

for ever

H5769

וְיִחְיֶה :

do they live

H2421

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 12:5 (Parallel theme): Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

Ecclesiastes 12:7 (Parallel theme): Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.