

Kings and Prophets 17-09-14

This is Thursday, September the 14th, 2017. We continue our study of kings and prophets. Tonight we are in the book of Zechariah.

We began this last time and looked at the introduction in chapter 1, verses 1 through 6, and then took a look at the beginning of this first vision that is given in the latter part of that chapter. Let's take a moment to focus our concentration, dedicate our time, sanctify our fellowship, and prepare our hearts for the ministry of God's Holy Spirit as we look together at God's Word. Father, we thank you for this time of fellowship and study of your Word.

We realize how important it is to assemble ourselves, to experience the blessings that come from the gifts that you've given to each one of us. Much more than just the time of teaching, it is an opportunity for us to fellowship in your Word and in the power and cleansing presence of your Spirit. We pray that these things will take place.

For all who join us in this study tonight, we pray that the fruit of the Spirit will be in evidence for each one of us, that we can more clearly see where we stand in your plan and purpose, and that we can more fully reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus as we live out the days that you've allotted us here on this earth. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, Ed, you can't help but be sort of struck by the perspective shift that is really characteristic of the life of a believer. We experience the same mundane circumstances and face much the same challenges and slings and arrows of outrageous fortune as everyone else, but by everyone else I mean those who are either not believers or aren't paying attention to the fact that they are believers. But it is always a challenge as we move back and forth between the literal and the physical versus the intangible and the spiritual.

And honestly, that's what we have here in Zechariah. If you remember last time we were looking at the difficulty that Zerubbabel and his companion Joshua the high priest were having in getting this mission accomplished of rebuilding the temple according to God's command. They had been given everything, but there just seems to be a lack of commitment, for lack of a better word, on the part of the people who return and they divert their attention and the resources to other places.

And so after it languishes, God sends these two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to call the people back to the mission, but not in and of itself. God isn't just hot to have a temple rebuilt in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. He could drop one out of heaven.

He could do any number of things. He could have kept the first one from ever being knocked down. But this is an occasion.

And one of the things that we constantly remind ourselves of is the circumstances we face, the challenges that come up, the opportunities that come our way, exist in and of themselves. But

because we are children of God, they have a higher purpose. They fit in a bigger context.

It's not just the details of the story problem. It's the classroom in which we sit. And it is the life we're going to live, hopefully using the skills that we learn in the classroom, working those story problems, that is the bigger picture.

You wouldn't want to get immersed in your textbook and think that you really are on a train traveling from Chicago. You don't, for long, want to be lost in the plot of a book or a movie. It serves a purpose.

Reading is a wonderful thing. Adventure stories, especially for children, are a great way to unconsciously teach grammar and syntax and vocabulary and structure and expand their thinking, expose them to experiences they could never have in their mortal body. I traveled a whole lot further via books as I rode the school bus out here on this road than I've ever traveled, even during my time in the military, going overseas in both directions.

It's a wonderful thing to have your thinking informed and improved and expanded. And that's what God does with us. The situations that we encounter have reality on their own, but they are set in the context of the plan and purpose of God.

That is at the fore. That is one of the big points where we are right here, right now, in our Kings and Prophets study, because as the people have come back with Zerubbabel, with all of the loot and all of the authorization, and they've got the space, all they have to do is build it, they have a wonderful celebratory start, and then it all kind of grinds to a halt. God sends these prophets, Haggai begins, and we saw the two chapters of his prophecy and the timing of those, and then also Zechariah.

And so Zerubbabel and Joshua get a fresh fire lit under the people, and they are going to get this thing done. But in the middle of Haggai's prophecy, you have Zechariah speaking up. Now, see if you can picture this.

What is the immediate issue? Everybody has come back, and there's a physical task at hand, right? Got paperwork, the decree from Cyrus has been researched and reaffirmed, and here's the resources, here's the manpower, here's the location, let's get busy and do it. And then it grinds to a halt, and so the prophets come and say, these people are in paneled houses and my house is not built. And so you think, oh, God wants His house built.

But look at the content of the prophetic message. It isn't about, don't you see that you lay one brick on top of another, don't you know how to stir mortar, don't you know how to follow a plan, don't you know how to cast and melt down and create the different implements and caches and rings and staves and shovels and all the rest that are the accoutrements of worship. This isn't what the message says.

In the same way, when we are all embroiled in circumstances, what is the message of God to us? Yes, we need to negotiate the obstacles, navigate the course properly, but that's not the

end. This is the means to an end. God sending the people back to rebuild the temple is not so He can have a temple.

He's got a wonderful, great dwelling place in heaven. What is His purpose? This is sort of an exercise. It's a training mission.

Can you cooperate? Can you come together? Are you united as the covenant people of God? Can you be obedient? Can you be faithful? Can you be consistent? These are qualities, these are characteristics that God is looking for. It is a matter of the heart. The temple is trivial.

God told David this when he first had the idea. Right? He says, you're silly if you think you're actually building me a dwelling place. Why did He let David and Solomon build it the first time? Why did He fill it with His glory the first time? Because it was done in the right way.

This is back when Solomon was in his spiritual prime. Remember? He had that wisdom from God. He had his priorities straight.

And God blessed him and the people who worked with him with His glorious presence. That is the potential here. But the glory is not going to show up and it isn't going to happen because although they complete the physical task, they make it an end in itself.

It's a little different than God saying, bind my words on your hand and on your forehead and so they physically wrap them on with the phylacteries. Nail them to the doorposts of your house and so they physically do that. But it isn't actually in their minds and in their actions.

It's not actually the hallmark of their home. And God says, you've missed the point. The physical is just a means to an end.

So watch for that now as we go through Zechariah. We pick up in chapter 1. And what was the message? The Lord has been very angry, chapter 1, verse 2, with your fathers. This is what God sends Zechariah to announce.

Remember, Haggai has already prophesied. They're already starting to gather their tools and build the house. And God sends Zechariah to say, now listen to me.

This is not a construction project in terms of physical carpentry. This is a repentance project in terms of spiritual restoration. Right? So look at the message.

The Lord has been very angry with your fathers. And this is a wonderful doubling of a word in Hebrew. This very angry, it actually says, He has *katsof eketsef*.

He has angered an anger. You remember Dying Thou Shalt Die and some of the other doublings. Well, this is *katsof eketsef*.

He has angered an anger. It has gone from a verb to a thing. It goes from verb to noun.

And the two together form this binary pulsar of divine wrath. Very angry. And I could tell you a lot about the Hebrew here.

It's so much fun. Do you remember in, I think it's Job chapter 32, maybe. Forgive me if I'm off a little.

But I think it's 32. Where you have Elihu, after the three friends have expended all remaining. And Elihu says, I've been sitting here listening to you guys.

But he gets incensed because Job seems to be justifying himself rather than the Lord and so on. And you remember when we went through that, it literally said his nose was red when it was talking about his anger. Elihu's nose was hot.

Well, the word for nose is af, A-P-H. Well, that's the last half of this word for God's anger. Katsof.

The A-P-H syllable is there. And so I ask myself, well, what's the first part mean? So if you take af off, what is the first part of the verb? What does it mean? And so you get to the kof and sade portion, the Q-T-S. Well, katsof means to end a thing, to terminate.

And its cognate noun is the end. And it comes to be used for either cutting a thing off because that's where you want it to end, you've got a piece of line and it's long enough and so you cut it off, or it is the end itself. So katsof, if you're thinking back to Job a little bit, may have originated, and this is my backwoods etymology, it looks to me like it is having somebody at the end of your nose.

You know, you're craning forward and they're right at the end of your nose. The nose seems to mean something in terms of anger in the ancient Near East. And so when it says God has angered a great anger, He looked at their fathers and He poked His nose right down in their face to see what they were doing and it made Him angry.

This is why it's such a wonderful thing when in the New Testament you go to Hebrews and we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace, to come into God's presence, to come pros eukomai, to come before God in prayer. We can come before the Lord and we're not at the end of His nose. The Lord Jesus has been stricken and has borne our iniquities and paid the penalty for our sins.

He has restored us. He has made us family so that it's not just a covenant relationship like God had with Israel. It is a personal relationship of familial love and we're not at the end of God's nose in anger, at least not to start.

But of course, as goes the nation in the Old Testament, we can put ourselves back in that position if we live too much in this world, if we get caught up in the physical circumstances and forget the spiritual lesson. So Zechariah is calling these people, led by Zerubbabel and Joshua, to their spiritual heritage and he says, look, your fathers had a similar calling. God called them in Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and gave them the name of Israel and formed them into the

twelve tribes and gave them a land and eventually gave them a king.

And God was very angry with your fathers. When they got to the end of his nose, that was the end, period. Cuts off.

Therefore say to them, now look at verse 3 just for a minute, because language, as I mentioned in my introduction, talking about reading books, language is in that realm that science can't really touch. Ideas. Scientifically prove that I've got an idea or a set of ideas in my head right now.

I want science to prove that ideas exist in my head right now. Okay science, get out your beakers and your flasks and your gram scales and all the rest of it and prove the existence of my idea. Well, it's not in the realm of the physical.

Science doesn't apply to things that are non-physical, non-temporal, non-universe based. Obviously they can deal with radio waves and things that are invisible to the eye, but they have some level of measurability and tangibility. And just saying, well I see electrical impulses in your brain does not show an idea.

It can be static. So here, look at verse 3 at the words that talk about saying. If God was concerned with the building, thus says the Lord, pick up your hammer and your shovel and your trowel and your building materials and let's get on with it.

But look here. Say to them, that's one. Thus says the Lord of hosts, that's two.

Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, that's three. And I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts, that's four. Do you need all of those says and all of those Lord of hosts in there to get the simple point across? Why doesn't it say, at most, two verbs of saying.

Thus says the Lord, say to them, return to me and I'll return to you. But you have this tremendous emphasis not on what is done, but on what is said. And it has the signet seal of an oracle, of a prophecy, of a divine ordinance.

And it's right in the middle. See where it says, thus says the Lord of hosts? Say to them, thus says the Lord of hosts. That verb is amar.

This is the common Hebrew word to say, to speak, to tell, to relate, to give out with some speech. Amar, right? Thus says. Then it says, return to me, says the Lord.

That second says is in no way related to amar. This is naum. Naum is not a verb.

Naum is a noun. And this is, the easiest way to explain this is, keep your finger here, and you'll see why I'm emphasizing it as soon as we go to this passage. Keep your finger here and turn back to Jeremiah 23.

Jeremiah 23, 31. This is God making a case against false prophets. Jeremiah 23, you go up to

verse 28.

The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream. He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat, says the Lord? Remember this, we went through Jeremiah.

Is not my word like a fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces? If you get the spiritual reality, if you are sensitive to the spiritual situation, and the divine prerogatives, and the divine purposes in our life, that invisible higher and greater reality will smash the rocks of this life into pieces. God says, my word is like a fire, and like a hammer that smashes rocks. Don't content yourself with trying to roll the rocks, and trying to drop the rocks, and trying to beat your head on the rocks of circumstance in this life.

Go to God, God's word, those invisible realities surround, transcend, and control the physical realities that we face. Always, inevitably, for us. So look at verse 30.

Therefore behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who steal my words, everyone from his neighbor. If you've got people masquerading, or posing as spiritual advisors, or as gurus of what to do next, and there's a lot of that now on your little rectangular device that connects you to the internet. Everybody's got an idea how to do something.

Everybody's got a better way. Everybody is trying to entice you in with, here's how to get it done. I am against the prophets, who steal my words, everyone from his neighbor.

God's words should define our reality, control our reality. That is where we go to find out what is truth. Patty and I have been going through this little study put out by a particular outfit, and they kind of try to lay out the whole notion of what is truth, and how should we then live, and whatnot.

If I say too much about it, you'll figure it out. Since I'm about to criticize them, I don't want you to know who it is. But one thing that just is about the only part of it that I can't quite sit through is when the presenter talks about God and says that God makes truth claims, that we have to interact with God's truth claims.

And the world, with its deceit, and its lies, and its satanic origins of ideas, and so on, has truth claims. And other religions have truth claims. And God has his truth claims.

I can barely say the words myself. God's truth is not a claim. God isn't claiming anything.

God is truth. God's word is truth. It's not a claim.

The truth is what everything else is measured against. I can make a claim, and if you want to know if it's true or not, go to God's truth. Circumstances may appear hopeless.

They may appear challenging. They may appear easy and straightforward. It may appear that the will of God for us is lighted with neon signs through a great open gate.

You can't go by appearances. You have to go by the word. There is a way that seems right, and it leads to death.

Remember our verse. Just because it looks easy, just because it's all lit up, and there's a broad, wide way, I believe the Lord said something about the wide way. Wide is the way, and broad is the gate that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.

Narrow is the way, straight is the gate that leads to life, and few there be that find it. That gate is God's truth. It's not a truth claim.

It is truth. It is the word of God. So how angry do you think God is going to be? How close to the end of his nose do you think some prophet is going to be if he takes God's word away from his neighbor? Now, how would a guy do that? Well, he's a prophet, so he claims to be a communicator, but what he is presenting is something other than God's word.

You can't have them both there at the same time. It is either this or that. Eve is either going to believe the word of God that says, in the day you eat thereof, you will surely die, or she's going to believe the lie that says, you won't surely die.

God knows if you eat this fruit, you'll be like him, knowing good and evil. They cannot coexist in the same space. It is either the truth of God, or it is the lie from somewhere else.

And anything that gets pitched by any communicator that is not the truth of God from God's word, as best as human fallible communicators can do it, prayerfully, hopefully with the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit, both in the communication and in the reception, but that's what it has to be. And that prophet, that fourth teller, that teacher, that preacher, that talker who says anything other than God's truth is right here. God is against them.

There's a lot of things you can have against you. Cards can be stacked against you. Man can be against you.

Circumstance can be against you. The odds can be against you. We don't want God against us.

And it is a sobering thought for anybody who has a call to communicate that if you do it wrong, God is against you because you are taking his word away from those who need it and are looking for it. It's a very big responsibility. That's why we're in God's word looking at it tonight.

I am against the prophets who steal my words from his neighbor. And this is a theft. They have a right to it.

It belongs to them. It is a gift of God to them. And someone has slipped it away and put something else in its place.

Look at verse 31. This is our target. Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord.

Now, the says the Lord up in verse 30, that's Ammar. I am against the prophets, says the Lord.

Here is Naum.

I am against the ones who use their tongues and say Naum. Isn't that interesting? Remember now, Naum that we have in our Zechariah passage, this is the imprimatur of the word from heaven. It's a noun.

You could substitute here the oracle of God, the pronouncement of God, the word in all caps of God. It's not says the Lord. That's a verb.

Saying of the Lord. Declaration of the Lord. So where it says that, every place you find Naum, you can cross it out and put a declaration of the Lord.

That's what it really says. So in verse 31, God says I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say declaration of the Lord. Their stuff.

Have you ever heard somebody on TV say, well, you know, the Lord gave this to me last night. I laid awake and the Lord told me thus and so. You know, the Lord gave me this word.

I got it in a dream or vision or whatever. A lot in your more charismatic Pentecostal, the old gifts are still current crowd, where people say, well, you know, God laid this on my heart. God gave this to me to give to you.

Need to be really, really careful. If you ever hear me say that, you'll know the pod people have landed and I've been replaced. Because God says, don't say that.

Don't use your tongue. The apostle Paul says, not the Lord, but I. This is my suggestion about marriage and so on. And then in other places, he says now, not I, but the Lord.

He distinguishes when he's talking out of his own hat. And I try to tell you when I say, I would suggest, I think this is what it means. This is how it appears to me.

But if somebody comes up to you and says, God says, double predestination. Well, better be careful about that. God is against people who do that, who use their tongue and say, that's a declaration of the Lord right there.

Well, that's the language we have over here. Back to Zechariah now. Thus says the Lord of hosts, return to me a declaration of the Lord, and I will return to you.

I thought the declaration of the Lord was, go build the temple. Wasn't that what Cyrus said? Wasn't that what God affirmed when Darius looked it up and they found the old dusty decree someplace? And when they sent Zerubbabel and all the loot and everything? What is the declaration of the Lord? Return to me. He doesn't even finish the sentence.

He doesn't say, return to me and I will return to you, declaration of the Lord. He says, return to me. That's the declaration of the Lord.

It's almost like Selah in a song. Stop and ponder that. God says, return to me.

What a tremendous thing. God was so angry with the fathers that he revoked all of their blessings, all of their possessions, sent them into captivity, fulfilled all of the Deuteronomic warnings and the cycles of discipline and all the rest of it. And what is the declaration of the Lord? You descendants of your fathers who basically slew the prophets, return to me.

It's a declaration of the Lord. This is the way we have to think. It's not about the circumstance.

It's not about the issue of people or places or things. The declaration of the Lord is, move in my direction. Whatever the distance is, close it.

And notice the order. Bless the hearts of all the folks that are trapped in Calvinism and or Reformed theology, but it does not say, I have returned to you, so you're going to return to me. That's the divine decree.

God here, and the argument, and I understand the desire to protect the, not that we need to protect the character of God, but your Calvinist thinks, well, this belittles God. If God is sort of waiting for man to do something and then he's going to respond. God shouldn't respond to man.

Man should respond to God. And with all due respect for that idea and that point of view, it's not what God says. The declaration of the Lord here, the Naum here is, God is in heaven with these people at the end of his nose and his arms folded and he says, return to me.

That's my declaration. And I will return to you. I will respond when you respond.

Right? That's what the Bible says. And anytime somebody tries to run you down the reformed theology road, there are innumerable passages, but none better than this one. Why does God say that? He doesn't say, well, I've pulled a string, so you're going to return to me, and then I'm going to return to you.

God is up there pleading with his people. Return to me. That's my declaration.

I'll return to you. Now look at the doublings here. I already talked about the anger being doubled with the fathers.

Look at verse 4. He's going to talk about the fathers some more. Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached. Former there is from Rosh, the earlier, the beginning ones, the head prophets, so to speak.

The ones who were at the beginning. When they said, thus says the Lord of hosts, turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds. What did they need to turn from? Two things.

Look at this closely. This is really amazing to me. Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds.

Remember we've been talking about the invisible truth, the truth of God, and the physical universe, and the other circumstantial, quote, realities that we face. He says, turn from your evil ways. This is Derek.

Derek is the word in Hebrew that means road. If I talk about Route 66, well, we're not talking about where am I on that road yet. We're not saying where it goes, or you can get your kicks, or anything else.

It's Route 66, and it's a road. It's a Derek. It's a way.

It starts, depending on your point of view, in California, and goes east all the way to where it ends. But it's a Derek. And so there's a sense in which it is a concept.

If I have a flat, and I call you up and you say, oh, great, well, I'd be glad to come help you. Where are you? And I say, I'm on Route 66. It's not a tangible location, right? It is a path, and you can be anywhere on it.

Derek, this is in the realm of ideas here. Turn from your path. Wherever it is you are, that road is leading somewhere, and you need to get off of that road.

You might be at the very beginning. You might be real close to the end. But it's more conceptual.

The road, if I know you're on that road, and you've been on it a while, and you like that road, I can sort of figure out where you've been and where you're going. Yes? Where have you been? I always travel Route 66. Okay, well, I know where you've been, and I know where you're going, if I can figure out where you are.

Your deeds, this is a different word. And this isn't a-sa or ba-ra, or any of your common doing, making and doing words. This word always has a negative connotation.

The closest I can figure out, and I tried to think of a bunch of different potential translations, but machinations. These are self-serving deeds. These are deeds for your own purposes and ends.

It always occurs. It's like a word that has the evil ion in it. Everywhere you find this word, it ends up having a bad smell.

It even sounds bad when you say it. It's ma-a-leel, like malpractice. It's practices, but it's malpractices.

And if you want to spell it out, it's M-A-A-L-I-L. Ma-a-leel. And it's variously translated as inventions.

The lexicon says practice, parentheses, usually bad. Bad practice. And that's really what it is.

But notice, you move from the road, which is sort of the climate and the general direction, to these actual deeds and practices. This is what happens in the physical world. You've got your belief and you've got your practice.

You've got your way and you've got your deed. See the balance there? You've got your philosophy and you've got your actions here. Turn from the evil philosophy and the evil practice.

And the ma-a-leel is just made worse because it's got ra with it. It's an evil malpractice. And it's an evil Derek.

Turn from those. That's what your fathers were told by those beginning prophets. What was the result? Two-fold.

They did not hear. This is the Derek. This is the way.

They didn't listen to the words. They didn't think about the truth that was communicated to them. And they did not heed.

They did not do. They did not have an action. So, you see how these line up? You start with the intangible and you move to the physical result.

You move from the way to the deed. You move from the hearing to the heeding. Not only did they not hear, they did not heed.

You really can't heed if you don't hear. But even those who took time to hear did not heed. They did not hear or heed Me.

Capital M says the Lord. Your fathers, where are they now? And the prophets, do they live forever? That was then. You have that as an example.

Those prophets are not around anymore. Your fathers are not around anymore. This is history from which you should be learning.

This is example written for your instruction. You should be living in the light of this past experience. It is known.

But guess what? The prophets and the fathers have moved from the realm of being here and being in the physical world to the intangible realm of ideas. They are now a part of the word that God is speaking. They are part of the idea frame of reference.

You can't go ask the fathers, they're dead. You can't go question the prophets, they're dead. How do we know about the fathers and the prophets? It's this intangible word.

So if you're looking for your answers in the physical realm, even the warning is no longer in the physical, it's in the immaterial world. You have to think. You have to process ideas.

You have to start in the intangible world to establish your goals and values and priorities in the light of Truth, capital T. Then the physical is going to follow. Make sense? It's genius from God that Zechariah is communicating here. Your fathers, where are they? The prophets, do they live forever? Yet surely My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants, the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? My words and statutes are intangibles.

But did they not tackle your fathers and put them in physical difficulty? Did those words and statutes, those promises, those covenant requirements not intrude and intervene into the physical world and change everything for your fathers? They absolutely did because that spiritual dictates the physical. You can't reverse that train. You can't push the engine with the caboose.

The physical follows from the spiritual and the intangible. My statutes and My words, God says, My truth, overtook your fathers. So they returned and said, Just as the Lord of Hosts determined to do to us according to our ways, Derek, according to our deeds, Ma'aleel, so He has dealt with us.

The intangible unseen God has, and when it says dealt, that is one of your make and do words, that's Asah. So He has made us. He has manufactured our physical outcome.

Asah always deals with the tangible. You manufacture a thing. Well, this is the introduction to the whole book.

That's why I've slowed down a little bit to look at it. This sets up the ten visions Zechariah is going to have. We saw the timing in verse 7 there.

And in verse 8, Zechariah sees by night, Behold, a man riding on a red horse stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow, and behind him were horses, red, sorrel, and white. Then I said, My Lord, what are these? So the angel who talked with me said to me, I will show you what they are. And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, Different guy, these are the ones whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth.

So they, third source of a voice now in the vision, remember there's the one that Zechariah is talking to, there's the man at rest in the myrtle trees standing, actually he's sitting on a horse which is standing. Now the three horses behind, who we have to assume it is implied that they also have riders, because horses don't typically talk. They answered, the angel of the Lord, who we now know is man number two, among the myrtle trees, on the red horse.

I had to draw myself a picture, you probably can't see this, but I had to do, my brother Matt used to make little stick drawings of hordes of armies, scaling embattlements and so on. Well I made myself a little stick drawing, so you can't see it, but I've got on the far left, here's Zechariah, next to him is an angel, so I've got a little stick man with wings. Then I've got the myrtle grove over here, which I didn't really draw in, I know these guys are in the myrtles.

And then here's a guy sitting on a horse, a red horse. Behind him are three other horses, with

guys sitting on them. And the guy next to Zechariah, anytime it says, the angel who spoke to me, that's the guy on the left.

Anytime it says, man in the myrtle tree, or angel of the Lord, he's the guy in the middle, on the red horse. And the ones, the only time they really speak, is in verse 11, they answered, the angel of the Lord. These guys on the right answer the guy on the horse in the middle, the angel of the Lord, slash man, standing.

So, you've got this vision mapped out here. Now, I ask myself, I ask myself a lot of questions, this is one of the questions I ask myself, why so many people and speakers? Couldn't Zechariah just go into vision mode in the middle of the night, and behold, I saw a grove of myrtle trees, and three horsemen, and they said, we go up and down in the earth. But you've got all these extra guys, you've got the angel of the Lord in front of them, and you've got the guy explaining to Zechariah over on the left.

So there are a total here of six people, Zechariah and five more. Makes a total of six, right? And they are evidently all angels. They're all of a piece.

Your New King James capitalizes the A in angel, assuming that it is a Christophany that could be. I would not die for it one way or the other, but I do not believe that Jesus shows up in the Old Testament in bodily form, or even as a speaker in vision form, because of what Hebrews chapter 1 says. God communicated a lot of different ways, it says, but in these last days, He has spoken to us by a son.

Many parts, diverse manners, God spoke to us. Latter days, it's a son. But if it's the Lord Jesus, I will know better one day soon.

At any rate, the Bible says it is man-slash-angel. You remember Jacob wrestles with a man-slash-angel, obviously some sort of heavenly personage, when he gets his thigh withered and gets his new name. But these personages speak for God sometimes, other times God speaks.

And we're going to see here in the remainder of chapter 1, God is going to speak for Himself, and we're not real sure if that comes through the angel or if it's a voice from heaven. Well, what's going on with this first vision? This is the first of four visions we're going to see in these two chapters, and there are a total of ten visions here. These first seven of them all apparently occur in the myrtle grove.

Well, one way to begin is to realize that it's symbolic. So why is it not an olive grove? Why is it not a pea patch? Why is it not a vineyard? Why is it not any other thing it could have been? It is a myrtle tree patch, and it's in a ravine or a hollow. It's in a depression.

Well, we have basically angels are real, quote-unquote. I mean, they are personages from the other civilization that precedes and is higher and greater than us. So what are the symbolic elements? We've got the myrtle trees, we've got the hollow ravine, and we have the horses.

Okay? The angels sit on them, but it's kind of like when you see people in a symbolic role. Something has to be real or you don't know what the heck is going on. So what do horses represent in Old Testament Scripture? Unlike agriculture in America and in Europe in the last several hundred years, horses in the ancient world had one purpose.

They did not use them in agriculture. They did not use them to farm. They didn't use them for transportation per se.

They were an implement of war. They carried cavalry. They pulled chariots.

They were part of an army. That's what they were used for. They were impractical for other purposes in Israel.

So when you see horses, you figure this is part of some sort of military environment in the Old Testament, and that's universally how they are portrayed. So that's a little bit of background. Secondly, these aren't just any old trees.

These are myrtle trees. You remember the time that we're in, and you remember that we are now in the Ezra-Nehemiah time, after the time of Esther, right? Esther has already taken place. Do you remember Esther's Hebrew name? Hadassah.

The Hebrew word for myrtle is hadass. Hadassah. Queen Myrtle, basically.

She was named for this tree. The characteristics of the myrtle, it is a very slow-growing, dense tree, and it will often exist as shrubs. In a hollow such as this, over a long period of time, it can grow to become a tree.

But it is used in Isaiah. You can look this up with a concordance. Myrtle only occurs about eight times in the Old Testament.

So if you want to find these in Isaiah, and of the eight times, most of them are here in Zechariah. But it's also used in Isaiah in two places, and it says, where there used to be the thorn, the acacia tree will grow. And where there used to be the briar, the myrtle tree will grow.

Thorns and nettles and briars are temporary. They're weeds. They're unhelpful.

They're useless. They're trash, right? Where all of these temporary, useless, trashy things were valuable, stable, long-term sign of prosperity trees will grow. So this location, and this appears to be a meeting place, and that's why I suggested to you this drawing, this visualization, because the angel of the Lord is in charge of this team behind him.

They don't speak unless he speaks. They don't talk directly except at his behest. He explains who they are because they're his guys, right? What do they do? They go to and fro in the earth.

They were sent by God. We know Satan goes to and fro. He says that in Job chapter 1. Jesus reminds Peter that Satan roams the earth like a lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Angels have the ability to roam the earth. What does Satan do when he's roaming the earth, seeking someone to devour? How would he know if somebody is devourable or not? He's got to gather some information. He's got to do some observation, right? This going to and fro is observation and information gathering.

It's intel. It's reconnaissance. It's a military setting because of the horses.

God has detailed this team of three, three different colors of horses. It would be speculation on the colors. But the angel of the Lord is riding a red horse.

One of the three is also on a red horse. I'm guessing he's the fire team leader. The red horse is evidently the leadership horse.

Then you've got the brown horse and the white horse, the sorrel and the white. And this distinguishes them because, evidently, they do different kinds of observation, different mission. It would just be speculation to guess, but maybe the guy on the white horse is looking for what is good.

Maybe the guy in brown is looking for the, you know, if you've got a 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold field, maybe the white horse guy is looking for those 100-fold fields. The brown horse guy is looking for the 60-fold field. Red horse guy is like, well, we may have to take some action here.

And the angel of the Lord is sitting on a red horse. He is going to return the results of the mission to God in heaven who will then decree the action to take on it as we see as the vision goes forward. And you can look in more detail at the interplay between these personages.

But here's the point. This symbolism, what does it tell us? I doubt that there are literally invisible red horses and so on. What does it tell us, though? There is a plan in heaven, and it operates based on observation and information.

What did He say at the beginning of the chapter? What did the fathers learn? According to our ways and according to our deeds, He has dealt with us. Now this vision says, you know how God knows your ways and your deeds? You're under observation. There's a team of angel observers that God has sent, and they're going to give a report.

There's nothing they don't see. These are the eyes of the Lord. It's like the Holy Spirit, you know, the seven-fold Spirit that we're going to see a little bit later in Zechariah.

There's a rock with seven eyes on it. It's all about observation. Don't think that because you're waving a shovel and a trowel down by the temple that God doesn't know your heart.

Don't think that just because you're doing the physical mission, God doesn't observe your ways as well as your deeds and know what the invisible component is that is actually driving the visible. God knows those things. This is an invisible recon team.

Only Zechariah sees them, right? But where have they been? Throughout the earth. They see

everything. They report everything.

It's a detailed reconnaissance report. But they're invisible. People tend to forget.

Well, if I knew that God was watching, I'd have acted in a completely different way. Well, He is. This is a reminder of that.

It's a graphic illustration of that. So once this is declared, the recon team says, We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly. All the earth is resting quietly.

They've been looking at the nations as well. Good nations, so-so nations, and hostile nations, you could imagine. But they're all resting quietly.

Well, isn't this a good thing? Peace on earth? Goodwill toward men? Why are they resting quietly? They have conspired together to ravage and to destroy and to take captive the people of God, to pillage, plunder, and otherwise desecrate everything and everybody associated with the Lord God, and their mission is accomplished. So they're resting quietly. When are they not resting quietly? Can you think of a passage of Scripture where the nations are raging and imagining vain things? Psalm 2. Why do the heathen rage? Why do they imagine vain things? Turn real quickly back to Psalm 2. This is the opposite.

This is what the nations are not doing. During this time, the angels would have given a very different report. Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed.

Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us. Do you hear that anywhere in America today? Let's get rid of those Ten Commandments hanging on the wall. Let's get rid of these Judeo-Christian values and assumptions and objections to making wedding cakes for gay people and all the rest of it.

Let's take away these cords that bind us and say that girls and boys get their own bathroom. Let's throw off the moral strictures that say you shouldn't cohabit until you've got a stable environment defined by a marriage where you can raise children with stability and with provision. And you don't have to snuff out their lives before they're even born because you've been irresponsible and interested only in your own pleasure and in your own circumstance instead of the fabric of the society in which you live and the structure of the nation in which you dwell.

Oh no, it's all about me. Let us throw off these cords. That's why they rage.

That's why they imagine vain things. Well, they've succeeded. The pagans are in control.

The heathen are running things, so they're quiet and at peace. So verse 12, The angel of the

Lord answered and said, Now this is one way I know the angel of the Lord is not the Lord at least in this context, in my view. Notice I said, in my view.

I'm not saying Naum. I'm just saying as near as I can tell because the angel of the Lord is going to talk to the Lord right here. The angel of Yahweh answered and said, O Yahweh of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah against which you were angry these seventy years? And the Lord answered the angel who talked to me.

Remember the diagram? The angel of the Lord speaks from between the recon team and Zechariah and his angel guide and he says, How long, O Lord? But God doesn't answer the angel of the Lord. Why? It's something of a rhetorical question. The angel of the Lord already knows the answer.

Have you ever seen a teacher in the classroom call on a student and say, Well, Johnny, what is 2 plus 2? Because the teacher wants Johnny to say 4 but the teacher already knows the answer to the question. He just wants somebody else to say it. Well, in a reverse manner, the angel of the Lord says, The angel of the Lord already knows how long.

He's in charge of the recon team. He's informed. He got the five-paragraph order.

But he says, for Zechariah's benefit, O Lord, how long? It's been these seventy years. And the Lord answers the angel who talked to me. Why is that? This is something by way of interpretation.

I'm very sensitive to this with Elizabeth and her ASL skills for the deaf community. But you will notice that Zechariah doesn't seem to be able to comprehend anything without this angelic interpreter. So when God speaks, I don't think Zechariah grasped it could have been thunder in his ears like the people on the road to Damascus when Jesus spoke to Paul.

But God speaks to the angel who speaks to Zechariah. The Lord answered the angel who spoke to me with good and comforting words. It wasn't lightning and thunder and blasting trees to splinter and everything didn't go up in flame.

It was good and comforting words, but he could only get the tone, not the specifics. So God spoke to the angel with good and comforting words. So the angel who spoke with me said to me, here's what you need to proclaim.

If Zechariah had understood the Lord, the angel wouldn't have to repeat it for him. You see how this is working? The heavenly, the invisible, the divine from God's throne is coming down by a process into the realm of the visible and the audible and the doable. It's the theme of this whole chapter.

It's the point. It's why God has left it here in his word for us. We have to never lose sight of the invisible truth, the invisible reality.

God speaks. Through intermediaries, it becomes understandable to us and now we've got a mission. He says, proclaim.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, I am zealous for Jerusalem and Zion with great zeal. I'm exceedingly angry with the nations at ease. Now remember, the work has stalled out.

Haggai and Zechariah are prophesying to people who have not yet finished the project. But he doesn't say I'm angry with you because you haven't got my house built, does he? What is God doing here? He's not beating on them to get that phylactery tied onto their hand a little tighter and nail those commandments to the doorpost a little more firmly. That's what would happen if he gave them a physical encouragement to finish the temple.

He's already been there and done that. They've got that. And they're going to do that.

What is he doing here? Same thing Haggai's doing. The same thing you see in the book of Ezra. They've got to get their heart right.

And so he says, look, let me give you some motivation. I am going to deal with these nations that I used as a scourge. Assyria, the rod of my anger and the staff of my indignation.

Babylon, the head of gold. The Medo-Persian empire, the bear with the ribs between its teeth and so on. I'm going to deal with them.

I'm going to take them out of the way. The time of your discipline, remember in Isaiah chapter 40, speak comfortably to Jerusalem. Speak words of comfort.

Warfare has ended. She's paid double for all her transgressions. Remember that? The big turning point, the hinge in the book of Isaiah.

Same kind of thing here. And God says, look, here's your motivation. It's in the invisible realm.

It's in the realm of promise. It's in the realm of what I am going to do. And you've got to trust me on this.

I am zealous for Jerusalem and Zion. I'm exceedingly angry with the nations at ease. I was a little angry, and they helped, but with evil.

They were implements of God's wrath but they are evil implements. This is the baggie with which you pick up what your dog did on the walk, and now you're going to throw it away. It is useful for the purpose, but you don't want to keep it.

Right? That's what the nations are. And God says, you know, I used them for my purpose, and they accomplished it. Now I'm angry with them.

By the way, they could have learned from the example of God dealing with His people, and they had plenty of witness among people like Ezekiel and Daniel and Hananiah, Esther, Mordecai.

These people have had plenty of witness. They can do like Rahab.

They can do like Uriah. They can do like Ruth. They can do like so many others.

Hear about the God of Israel and come to Him. They have had that witness. They have not responded to it.

So now God is angry with them just as He was angry with His own people for not responding. Therefore, thus says the Lord, I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.

You're going to finish this temple, and then I'm going to measure. Is this a physical measure? Is it a physical line? God says, once you've negotiated this physical circumstance of getting this house built, I'm going to stretch out my spiritual measuring line. I'm going to see if you have heeded what Haggai and Zechariah are calling you to.

I'm going to see if you've learned the lesson of this chapter or not. Have you connected to the spiritual truth that defines and undergirds all of these immediate circumstances, whether it's the next brick to put in the house of God or the nations that surround you? Do you understand that God is in control? Do you understand that God has a plan and purpose and that it is all about Him? I'm going to stretch out a line and see. God stretches out that line on us.

It's easy to get caught up in the story problem, but with passages like this before us as a reminder of who we are and why we're here and how much greater it is for us in Christ with the indwelling, the availability, the sealing, the filling, the gifting, the enablement that God's Holy Spirit gives us to remember what God's Word says, to see its pertinence and its applicability in our lives. If you think the fathers didn't have an excuse and if you think the children, looking back on the example of the fathers and the nations who surrounded the fathers didn't have an excuse, how much less we. Have we got an excuse? All these things having been written for our instruction in God's words.

The fathers and the sons and the prophets and all the rest of those people, where are they now? We have a more sure reality. Remember John says that in his epistles. He says that which our hands have handled and our eyes have seen and we declare to you and what you have is better than what we had.

When we were with the physical presence of Jesus, it was limited in time and space and duration. It was limited in access. It was limited in scope.

You have a better revelation. That's us. That's what we have.

So how much further are we going to fall if after all of this we blow it? We miss it? We goof it up? Well, thankfully we have come to Zachariah and we have this very memorable set of visions. And this is just the first. Wait till we get to Joshua standing there in his dirty robes.

Wait till we get to the horns and the craftsman. Wait till we get to the rock with its eyes. Wait till we get to the lamp stand with the olive oil flowing.

It's powerful. It's better than a movie. And it's all coming up in the next few weeks of our study.

But we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how powerfully it addresses us.

It convicts us. It rebukes, corrects, and instructs us. It encourages us where we are doing right.

And it whispers in our ear when we begin to turn to the right hand or to the left. We pray that your Holy Spirit will take these things and make them meaningful and real in our thinking. That we will be ever mindful of those realities that are so clearly portrayed to us here in this great portion of your word.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.