

Kings and Prophets 17-11-16

This is Thursday, the 16th of November, 2017. We continue our study of Kings and Prophets. We are in Zechariah, the penultimate book of the Old Testament.

You don't get to use that word very much, so I like to work it in, you know, two or three times in a conversation. Penultimate, second to the last book of the Old Testament, and we are in chapter 9. Let's take a moment to dedicate our study and our time of fellowship to the glory of the Lord Jesus, and then we'll begin.

Father, we do thank you for this time we have together to share the treasures of your Word, to find our appreciation and our gratitude renewed for the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, our connection to you, the one in whom we have so many benefits and so many privileges and wonderful opportunities.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word tonight, that your Holy Spirit will guide us and teach us and impress on our hearts the truths that will enable us to live a supernatural life, to live a life that is dedicated to the plans and purposes that you have for us, that we can fulfill the potential that you have given us in Christ, and that we can be drawn closer together and closer to you as we do so. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

You'll remember that the setting is post-exilic. People have returned with Zerubbabel. They began to build the temple, laid the foundation.

That kind of went fallow for over a decade and a half. God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to spark completion of that physical second temple, to replace the one that Solomon had built that was utterly destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians a century and a half earlier. The impetus is twofold.

On the one hand, God is interested in there being a temple, but that's really not primary. It is more a work that is designed to anticipate the future and final temple on earth, and in the same way that when the Lord Jesus comes in his earthly body, it is not the fulfillment of all of God's purposes and promises. It is in many ways a harbinger and a foreshadowing of what God will do when Christ returns in triumph and glory the second time.

But he had to come the first time, and he had to be torn down, if you will, in the crucifixion, in the atoning phase of his work. This temple needs to be standing so that it can be torn down in anticipation of the millennial temple that Ezekiel describes in such great detail. So one thing you can definitely say about Zechariah and his place in the writing prophets of the Old Testament is he is, if not the most, he is, that there is no one more Christological, no one who more fully anticipates the Lord Jesus in both his first and second comings than Zechariah.

This is an intensely Christological book. It anticipates the Lord Jesus in many, many ways. If you want to see the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, there's no better place to come than Zechariah, especially if you're sensitive to that fact and you know what to look for.

It would be easy to miss it, much as the Pharisees stared directly at the Lord Jesus and missed it. We don't want to miss it. We want to get it.

So the book, as I mentioned when we introduced it some time back, and it may be worth reviewing, this book falls into three parts, and in some ways it's like the book of Isaiah. You remember we had a front cover and then a binding and then a back cover for Isaiah, and God seems to often do this because it partakes of sort of a chiasmic structure. You have something on this side, something on this side, and something in the middle, and Zechariah is actually a very, very characteristically divine design because it has three parts, and those, which makes a chiasm, you want to look at the center part, but then each of the parts is also chiasmic.

So it's a triunity of chiasms, and the first part of the book is so different from the second part that many scholars—you know, we say scholars almost with a bit of trepidation or caution because scholars seem to so often try to go down some weird path—but many are persuaded that what we are entering into at chapter 9 through the end of the book in chapter 14, that this part was not written by Zechariah or even in the time of Zechariah, that it's some later material that got tacked on to the end. Why would they say that? Well, because it partakes of a lot of differences, and this is why a great number of people believe that Hebrews was not written by Paul because of its differences. I'm fully persuaded that it was written by Paul, and the differences are accounted for by the different role that that book plays.

It's got a different audience. Paul is wearing a different outfit when he writes it. When he is writing—I almost said Acts—when he's writing Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, he is talking to largely Gentile audiences, right? When he gets to Hebrews, this is Romans chapter 9: I would give up all of my future blessings for the sake of my people Israel.

And his heart is with his own people, and it is as though a missionary has been out on the foreign field for years and years, but he has the chance to come back to a family reunion and there's a number of unsaved people at the reunion, and he wants to do for them what he's been doing for so many others who aren't as physically close to him, as related to him. And so in Hebrews, he returns to the language of Semitic scholarship and of Old Testament allusion and of the kinds of persuasion that were a commonplace in those circles. And so it ought to be different.

I would be suspicious if Hebrews looked just like all the other epistles. It's a completely different culture, a completely different audience with a different background, and he has a different purpose. He's not trying to evangelize in Hebrews.

And if you'll notice, he doesn't say, "Y'all people need to come back and get saved." He says, "There remains a rest for the people of God that you have not yet entered into. Your fathers fell in the wilderness. Don't make that same mistake. While it is called today, don't let a promise of entering his rest go unclaimed." And then he goes on to talk about the Lord Jesus in terms of priesthood, and he brings up that there is a higher priesthood.

You're all hung up on the Levitical priesthood. Think about Melchizedek and about the parallels to the Lord Jesus. He's a high priest in a similar way as Melchizedek. He and Abraham bowed down before Melchizedek in the same way that the whole Levitical priesthood should do. And of course, Paul is talking to priests and elders, and we're going to see a little bit of that in our Corinthian study, oddly enough.

It should not surprise us that because the second half of Zechariah largely is occupied with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in a time that is still yet future even to us, it is going to be different than the first part which largely anticipates his first advent. And it ought to be different. Look at the prophecies and the differences in the prophecies that deal with the suffering servant versus the conquering king. Even within the same book, look at Isaiah.

No form or comeliness that we should desire him. He's wounded and bruised for transgressions. He's despised and afflicted and so on.

And then you've got these tremendously triumphant and victorious pictures of conquest, and he comes with clouds. He's got the lambs in his arms and so on. Well, it is always a dangerous thing to take a conclusion and run with it and not ever come back and revisit it and say maybe there's another reason for this.

One of the thoughts I had in deciding to belabor this point a little bit is many times we don't see the reason for something usually circumstantial in our lives, and it seems to partake more of the suffering side than the conquering side. It's a setback. It is a tribulation. It is a challenge. It is a difficulty.

And it, for some people, it has thrown over their faith. And we, some years back, looked at some of the writings of Bart Ehrman, who used to be one of the most respected conservative biblical textual scholars in the world. Nobody with better qualifications.

And he had a personal setback where he lost a child, and he got to looking so closely at the suffering that he became convinced that it didn't make any sense, that there couldn't be a God who would allow this kind of thing to happen. And then he began to find other analogs. You know, why is there hunger? Why are there tortured children? Why are there typhoons? Why are there hurricanes? Why is there disaster and suffering and death in the world?

And he just decided that there couldn't be a good God that would allow that to go on, and he raised his elbows up and decided, "Well, then I'll just decide what is and isn't." And he threw all of that over.

And there have been many others like him, both prominent and not prominent. We have to look at examples like this, the examples in Isaiah, the example in Zechariah, and remember, you've got to step back. There's a bigger picture.

Think about the followers of John the Baptist. He, nobody was more faithful. He's wearing that Elijah coat. He's eating bugs and wild honey. He is telling all of the legalists in Jerusalem and Judea how the cow eat the cabbage and where they are wrong. He's telling Herod that he shouldn't have taken his brother's wife. I mean, he is the voice of truth.

And what happens? He gets arrested and incarcerated. He languishes in a prison for a long, long time. And then he's finally beheaded at the whim of some woman, the woman that he implicated in this nefarious marriage. And he's gone.

Well, as a follower of John, you could say, "What's the upside?" Because remember, John wasn't preaching heaven and kingdom. What's John preaching? The Lamb of God is going to come and take away the sin of the world. How does the Lamb of God take away the sin of the world? Does the Lamb come marching as to war, you know, trampling out the vineyards where the grapes of wrath are stored and all the rest of it? How does the Lamb take away sin? He dies.

John is the last great Old Testament prophet, and he proclaims the coming death of the Lord Jesus. He also talks about that he's going to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, but that's very nebulous. And when they see John locked up, totally neutralized, and then slain, that could be very discouraging if you don't step back and see the rest of it.

What we're getting into in the last half of Zechariah is the part you don't want to miss after having covered the first part. God's not just saying, "Hey, you people in Haggai and Zechariah's day, get this temple going again." He's saying, "You've got to raise your eyes beyond the immediate."

And he talks to the remnant. He says, "You know, this temple is actually going to get knocked right back down again. This is never going to approach the glory of the former temple. Don't be—I've already had to tell Daniel this—don't be looking for a great restoration and Israel is a dominant nation. You've got to take the long view. You've got to raise your eyes and look to the end of the race and don't get so bogged down with the hills and the obstacles here that you just give up and quit running."

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher, he began it and he's going to end it. There's peaks and valleys in between. Don't forget the destination.

So that's what's coming up. But let me remind you a little bit about the structure of this book, because there is the call, of course, to return. It is evidenced by their apathy and this whole temple project falling to the ground.

But really Haggai and Zechariah both use this as almost a metaphor for their spiritual condition. If their spiritual condition was healthy, that thing would be done. Would have been done, you know, over a decade earlier.

But it's emblematic. It's symptomatic of a deeper problem. And neither one of these prophets call the people to finish as though if you just finish the building, everything's going to be right as rain. God calls them to finish the building, but he calls them to the attitude and the heart and the hope that will motivate them to do it in the right way.

And we have to remember when we realize that we're failing in some area of life or we're falling short or we're up against it, that we want to succeed and we want to overcome in our circumstances, but we want to heed the call of God through these prophets to first and foremost make sure our heart is right and that we have got in our day that triad of Christian virtues of faith and hope and love so that everything we do is going to be a success regardless of how the world judges it, regardless of how it looks to the naked eye.

There was never a more triumphant day for John the Baptist than when he lost his head. His work was done. God says, "Time for you to come home. Well done, good and faithful servant." And to the world, it looks like a terrible defeat. It could be a tragic discouragement to his followers. And yet the Lord Jesus says, "Man born of woman, none greater than John." What a, what a fitting tribute.

And we want to do the same thing. So the call here is to Judah to return. They're returning physically from captivity. He says, "Your heart needs to return. The fact that this temple project is languishing is sad, but the fact that your hearts are languishing is much, much sadder."

And he says, "Look at the previous generation. Do you remember the judgment that brought about the captivity in the first place? You don't just think of that as a terrible historical happening. Think about why. Their hearts weren't right. And because their hearts weren't right, their actions weren't right, and judgment came."

So you've got thoughts and intents and motivations of the heart leading to bad actions in the physical realm. God judges in the physical realm and gives them these 70-plus years to think about that so that when he repairs the physical circumstances, hopefully they will draw the conclusion, "Well, now my heart needs to get right," so that it makes this chiasm: right heart, wrong heart, wrong actions, judgment, fixing of the judgment, right actions, right heart. You come back out on the other side of this in a mirror fashion.

And history is that way. Adam and Eve, God coming to the garden in the cool of the day, the breeze of the day, in the kingdom of the Father, those who qualify themselves because they catch the—you want to talk about the people perishing for having no vision? That's the vision we ought to have, is can I qualify for the city that is built four-square to be actually looking with my own two eyes at the river of life and the trees that grow on each side? That I can be somebody God can depend on to serve, carry baskets of leaves out to those who didn't catch that vision, who didn't catch fire.

So the judgment is supposed to be a reminder, and God used that judgment, a very signal and calamitous and memorable judgment, hopefully in the same way that corporal punishment for a child. I was talking to a lady and I did not, I was tactful enough not to correct her, but she said, talking about child rearing and spanking and all that versus withholding of rewards, and she said, "Oh no, I absolutely believe in capital punishment for children."

I knew she meant corporal punishment, as in spanking your corpus, your corpus delecti, your gluteus maximi or whatever, but she said, oh, just the most sincere look, straight in the eye, "I believe in capital punishment for children." Okay, glad I got the mom I got at the issuing station, because how many kids did you start with and how many actually made it?

But that sort of discipline for children, it's supposed to be memorable. That's why it inflicts a moderate amount of pain in a safe place. You remember, I remember several spankings I got as a child, well-deserved, and they stick with me to this day.

And this is what the judgment on Israel was supposed to do, but already the lack of teachability is beginning to show, so these prophets come. Judgment is designed to cause them to remember the causes for it and to repair their hearts. What is the fuel for a renewed heart and to maintain some momentum and some stability in this right motivation? It is hope, hope.

That's why Zechariah is leavened with these views of the future. He says you've got to finish this temple, and the hands that build this temple are going to build an ultimate temple, and the view of Joshua and of Zerubbabel and here pretty soon of Zechariah himself as anticipating the Messiah and God's permanent restoration, God's wide-scale universal restoration begins to come into view. And so it's not just correction and rebuke.

But the instruction in righteousness that they receive here partakes prophetically of the future, and it is designed to create motivation. You got to have a reason to do a thing. I've never been so impressed with our human ability to mess up as—I mean, aside from looking in the mirror—but if you've noticed in recent years and recent weeks and recent days, there's been a rash of failures on the part of prominent men who are now being accused of misconduct of various kinds, but generally toward either women or boys or whatever it may be, but there's just, there's a litany. Every day some new person is being accused.

And you think back in your own experience of pastors who've lost their pulpit, leaders who have lost their leadership, people of all sorts of attainments and prominence in various fields that have been pulled down and have wrecked a lifetime of accomplishment because of their inability to get married, stay married, and have fidelity and propriety in that area of life.

And you think, look at what you sacrifice, look at what you lose. I mean, how powerful is this draw that will wreck not just the life of the perpetrator, but the people upon whom these abuses—and, and, and those others

who are implicated within it or are participants either willing or unwilling—all it does is destroy. It is such a toxic, poisonous, cancerous malignancy where an inability to discipline your thoughts, discipline your body—you know, remember Paul says, “I bring my body into subjection. I keep myself between the stripes on the edge of the road lest I be disqualified.”

It's just like a runner on a track. You know, how many times have you seen this? They go back into slow motion and, and here's a runner. He makes a 99-and-a-half-yard touchdown, but he stepped out back on the three-yard line and they call the whole thing back. It doesn't matter how brilliantly he ran, how many great blocks were thrown, how athletic and, and impressive the run was. One quarter of an inch of contact with the chalk back at the three-yard line and it is all neutralized.

Well, God says, “I can restore you, O Israel, O Judah. I can renew you. I can wipe away your transgressions and your sins. I will take that remnant who is interested in that and is motivated by that and who wants that more than anything else, wants a relationship with God without the impediment of sin and the, the thick curtain that separates God's presence.” God says, “I will do that.”

Well, there's people who are interested, people who aren't. There's people who say, “I like the party life. I like the danger. I like, you know, the risk is part of the thrill,” and, and there's people who will never learn. They are repeat offenders. They get caught, they get a slap on the knuckles for something, a rap on the knuckles. Slap on the wrist. You got to keep your, keep your saying straight.

And it does not, it does not correct their behavior. They don't correct their behavior when it's caught early and it just gets more and more egregious. We want to learn the lesson looking at these people.

So God turns the corner here in Zechariah between recounting the judgment and showing the filthy garments that are removed and the clean garments that are put on Joshua the priest. But he says you've got to look ahead. This has to make a difference to you. And for those of us for whom it makes a difference, it is really going to make a difference.

We will be privileged to see this fulfillment that many of us are not going to see because if you don't care about it in this life, you're not going to care about it in the next. And you're going to be way over the horizon just looking at the glow. When you're out in the country and you look, and when you're out here and you look southwest, there's a glow in the sky. Well, that's Tulsa. It's like 40 miles away, and all I see is the glow of the lights. Can't see any of the signs of the buildings, can't go to any of the stores, can't partake of any of the amenities. I just see the glow.

Well, we don't want to be that way in the kingdoms that are to come, where we're so far away from the light in this life that we're going to be equally far away in the next, and it is a real possibility. That's why Paul wrote Hebrews. So, one of many reasons.

God promises that He will return to Israel with blessing when they return to Him with obedience. And so this reflects itself in the structure of the book. There are two major sections, as I mentioned in the introduction.

The first one starts in chapter 1, verse 1, and goes through chapter 6, verse 8. Look at it in your Bible. You remember that's the section that's got those eight visions. There's a little introduction and then you've got the visions. Some people say seven visions. Some people say eight visions. Just doesn't make a whole lot of difference.

There is a symmetry to it and there's something at the middle. Then the second section of the book begins at chapter 7, verse 1, and goes to the end, 7:1 through 14:21. So that's where the book divides.

The central section that we looked at in great detail is at the end, last half of chapter 6, 9 through 15 of chapter 6. This was Joshua, Yeshua, standing there and having his clothing exchanged. And you remember Zechariah says, “Well, but he doesn't have the hat on. Somebody get him a hat.” Well, more about that soon.

But that's the first part, and there is material ahead of that vision of Joshua and following it in, in this first section. But the central section of the book, the center section of the book at the center of the chiasm of the book, is 6:9 through 15. It's inescapably an anticipation of the Lord Jesus Christ and his atoning work, his taking away sin, bearing sin, and yet coming out of the process righteous and able to be the intermediary between God and man. That's the center of the book, the most important thing.

If you think of Zechariah six months from now, a year from now, Joshua the high priest, raggedy filthy garments, clean garments. Well, in that first section of chapter 1 through the first part of chapter 6, we had these seven or eight visions. What was at the center of that section? Because it also is somewhat chiasmic.

There's an introduction and then you have those visions. What is in the middle of that? You've got three visions and then you have three or four visions. Do you remember what was at the middle? Chapter 3, verse 1 through 10.

Oddly enough, who is at the center of that first section? If you say 6:9 through 15 is the spine of the book, like we're accustomed to thinking of it, well, what's in the center of the, of the, of the first board, the top board, the top cover? It's 3:1 through 10. What happens there? Joshua the high priest, and he's got the garments. He's got the, the exchange of garments.

When you get to 6, which is the center of the book, and you have Joshua standing there again, I misspoke a little bit, the picture of Joshua standing there receiving the crowns, and he gets multiple crowns. Crown him with many crowns. Behold the man whose name is Branch. The elaborate crown will be a memorial in the temple of the Lord for him.

And it's a memorial to those who, who caught the vision, who understood what God was doing and put their resources into it and exercised stewardship into it just as we should. And you remember the significance of those names, Heldai and Tobijah and Jedaiah and Hen, the son of Zephaniah, and, and the alternate form of their names up above. We went into great detail on that.

But in 3:1 through 10, you have the exchange of garments, and here in the center of the book you have the—remember Zechariah says he needs a, he needs a priest hat, and they say, “Well, okay, you can do that for now because he actually is going to do a priestly function in the process of bearing sin.” But here that hat's gone and it's crowns, and Zechariah himself is going to make these crowns.

Then the next section begins, the back part of the board begins in chapter 7 and goes to the end of the book, and we are coming to the central section of this back board. It is also chiasmic and also has something very important at the center, and we've seen the first part here in chapter 7 and chapter 8, and we're coming up to chapter 9 and the resolution of the feasts. We saw in chapter 7 the question of fasting, should they continue to fast and so on. We covered that last time.

Then we came to chapter 8, and this is part of that hope. This is what's going to happen in the future. “I will bring them back” in 8:8. “They will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God in truth and in righteousness.”

Remember last time we talked about Mount Zion and the city of Jerusalem and God inhabiting Zion. It's his holy mountain and, and, and that's where his presence is, that's where the temple is, and then there is Jerusalem where the people dwell. But God is in Zion, people are in Jerusalem, and He is in their midst once again. A great section there.

You look at verse 16 of that same chapter. “These are things you shall do: speak each man truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace. But none of you think in your heart against your neighbor.” Heart change, the preparation for this kingdom is the heart first, actions flowing out of that.

And one final thing I want to point out about that: you remember that we talked about those chariots in the eighth vision that were going to the north and going to the south, the one with the white horses, the one with the black horses were going one way north, and the dappled horses were going to the south. And we said, “Well, what happened to the east and the west, and what happened to the red chariot?”

Well, notice in chapter 8, verse 7: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: I will deliver or save my people from the land of the east and from the land of the west.” The chariots go and deal with the north and with the south. The people aren't going back to Egypt and they're not going back into captivity in the north. They're going to be scattered among the nations to the east and to the west, and this is not so much historically geographical as it is metaphorical and symbolic.

God is going to judge some of the factors, but he's going to put his people in some of the others, some of those nations, in some of those areas, as it were. And so he sends the chariots to judge the north, two sets of chariots to the north, and the dappled ones to the south. And you get the idea that those southbound ones partake of both of the white and the black.

But then he says, "I didn't send any to the east and the west. That's where the people are scattered. I'm going to bring them back and settle them in their own land."

Well, so then we come to chapter 9, and this is an indictment and a pronouncement of judgment and coming disaster on the nations surrounding Israel. And this was immediately fulfilled in the days of Alexander the Great.

And so, having covered in the first half of the book those themes—remember we went through the themes of each of those seven or eight visions—God is going to judge those that have been giving his people a hard time. He's going to restore them. He's going to renew them. He has his eyes on them. He cares about them. We saw the horns and the craftsmen and the measuring line and so on. God is renewing his covenant promises to the remnant. He's going to fulfill them for the remnant, and then it culminates with the high priest Joshua there.

Then after that you had the lampstand and you, you had the introduction of these, of this double idea. There's Joshua and there's Zerubbabel, the two trees on each side of the lampstand, and then the flying scroll and the measuring basket and so on, or the, the basket with the lead lid. Then that central section, Joshua the high priest in 6:10 through 15 there, 9 through 15.

Now in the, in the second section here we have this part we looked at about the fasting. Now the coming kingdom begins in chapter 9. 9:1 through 11:17, here is going to be what God is going to do to these nations.

We're not going to look at this in detail. I will just tell you that if you track Hadrach there in verse 1 and Damascus, these were places in the north, and if you compare what this says to the career of Alexander the Great when he came and invaded some years after this prophecy was delivered, he fulfills in the same way that he does in Daniel a lot of these details. Ashkelon fearing, Gaza being sorrowful down in verse 5, Ekron, the king perishing from Gaza and Ashkelon not being inhabited, a mixed race will settle in Ashdod, cut off the pride of the Philistines.

Alexander, in first blush, did a lot of these things. And "I will camp," verse 8, "I will camp around my house because of the army, because of him who passes by and who returns," and Alexander actually marched through and then came back through, and, and he literally fulfilled that.

But look at verse 9, and in your New King James, you may have a header here, "The Coming King." "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!" Remember what we talked about in the, in the first section, that chapter 3 central part before you get to the spine, that central section in 3:1 through 10. That is bearing the sins with those garments, right, and accomplishing that work. That's the suffering servant side, so to speak. That's the priestly function.

And in Zechariah even it says, "Well, if he's going to be the priest, he's got to have a priestly hat," and they put it on him. Now we're getting to the conquering king side, the coming king side. "Rejoice, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Your king is coming to you. He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations. His dominion will be from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth."

So if you think about this, what was in the first part of this chapter? An anticipation in the first blush of Alexander the Great and, in a larger sense, of the coming Antichrist in some ways. And how did Alexander appear? You think about the visions of Daniel that anticipate him. It's quick. It's great force. It's lightning speed. He's irresistible and unstoppable.

What did Alexander use for transportation? He's, the horse itself is even a part of legend. He rode this great horse and proudly led this great army, you know, to and fro, and he's just unstoppable in every way. And lest they think that, well, maybe Alexander is the coming king in some way, what is Zechariah reminding them of? God reminds through Zechariah: "Your king is coming on a donkey."

Now, when's the last time you can think of a king who rode a donkey? David. If you remember, if you go back and look toward the end of his life when Adonijah is trying to take the throne and you've got the whole Abishag deal going on, and, and so Bathsheba has to go to David and say, "Look, you know, Nathan is involved there, and they're saying, look, Adonijah is about to usurp the throne." And David says, "Take my donkey and put Solomon on the royal donkey and lead him into the city and proclaim him king."

But David says, "That's my, that's my donkey. That's my ride." David was the first one, and it should have made a connection to the people in Jerusalem when they saw the Lord Jesus fulfilling this Zechariah prophecy, that just as at the beginning of the national identity the king rode a donkey, at the end the king is going to ride a donkey, and, and you'll know it's him because he's not Alexander on a great white charger.

And it's no accident that these two things are juxtaposed here. Alexander is going to come down. He's going to march in. He's going to march out. He's going to come by. We have an account of this in Josephus. There are those who say, "Well, you know, Josephus may not have gotten the, the details right," but it talks about that, that Alexander was going to come and destroy Jerusalem, but the high priest got a vision and he said, "Open the gates, put on your best robes, and go greet him."

And Alexander was so impressed when the priest did that that he welcomed them and he marched in, in peace. And then they explained to him the prophecies in Daniel and in Zechariah about his conquest, and he was so impressed he said, "You guys are good to go," and he just left.

The, the Word of God made such a difference to Alexander, and it fulfilled prophecy that said that, that God would protect his people. People in a historical point of view can say, "Well, wasn't that a happy coincidence?" God had prophesied that he would do it. You, you see human mechanism and somebody could explain this all away. It's just a wise stratagem on the part of the priest. Well, that was a, that was a lucky thought he had to do that, and it was all just cause and effect.

But those who know the Word of God and those who know God himself know that these are the ways in which God works. There are people who only see the glove and there are other people who understand the hand that is in the glove. And to look around this world and think that, "Well, isn't this a wonderful happy accident?" You're looking at the glove. You're not paying attention to the hand that has caused these immediate causes.

There's even a species of fallacy where it's one of the false cause fallacies where you attribute something to an immediate cause instead of an ultimate cause. Well, I, I ran into the bridge abutment and that's why the front end of my car is mashed. Well, your headlights failed and it was night and you couldn't see the bridge abutment, and so there's a proximate cause, but there's, there's an ultimate cause. There's a further-back cause. And did the bridge abutment wrinkle your car? Yes. But why did all of that happen? There was something, a larger circumstance.

It's another reminder. Look at all of the different ways God is turning this particular truth in the light like a gem to say, "Don't get bogged down in your circumstances. You're gonna see proximate causes and you're gonna think, well, this is my problem, and if I could just fix this, everything would be great."

There are larger things at work. Jesus could have spent those nights when he was in prayer with his Father saying, "You know, if I could just find a way to bring the Pharisees around, if I could just get them to like me, maybe if I went down there and, and schmoozed with the Pharisees a little more and, and you know, gave them some props and, and, and complimented them and, you know, go along to get along and can't we all be friends, and if I was more ecumenical and if I was less controversial and I didn't start talking about all these whitewashed tombstones and, you know, washing the outside of the cup and inside you're full of dead men's bones—and I think I mixed those as well. I think the tombs were full of dead men's bones and the inside of the cup was dirty."

But, you know, the Lord Jesus didn't mix up the proximate cause, opposition, nor did the Apostle Paul and the others. They understood that this is satanic. Ultimately, it is the larger conflict, and there are times when we seem to be suffering a setback.

And you remember what it says at one point where, you know, if they had known what was really going on, they would have never crucified the Lord of Glory. The biggest strategic mistake ever made by the forces of darkness was making sure that Jesus got crucified.

Because that was the, in chess terms, you sacrifice your queen, and when the guy moves the piece to take your queen, you run your rook down to the eighth row and it's checkmate. You, it's, it's a queen sack, a queen sacrifice. You take the queen, you lose the game. And if all you do is, is begin to moan and sob and say, "The queen was taken. The queen is off the board. Look at the point count, where all is lost," step back. The message of Zechariah is here's the Lord Jesus at the center. Step back and take a look at him and what God is going to do through him.

So you have that here in this section. God will save his people. "As for you, because of the blood of your covenant," this is verse 11 of chapter 9, "I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope." Notice, the other prisoners that give up aren't going to make it. Prisoners characterized by hope, hoping prisoners. That's verse 11 and 12 of chapter 9.

Because of the blood of your covenant. Now, what blood sealed the Old Testament covenant? Pop quiz. How was the Old Testament covenant between Israel and God sealed? With blood, right? Read Hebrews chapter 9.

In the Old Testament, you know, Hebrews 9 is a great chapter. It's almost tongue-in-cheek. You know, in the Old Testament, there's just sloshing buckets of blood everywhere. Everything is splashed with blood. High priest splashing with blood, altar splashed with blood, veil splashed with blood, mark of the covenant splashed with blood, all the instruments, all of the priests splashing with blood. Blood, blood, blood, blood everywhere.

What blood? How was that covenant sealed? Where did the blood come from? Sacrifice, right? And the blood of goats and bulls is never going to be adequate to take away sin, right? So when he says, "As for you also because of the blood of your covenant," now in the near term, just like looking to Alexander in the near term, the blood of your covenant is the blood that Moses and Aaron sloshed around. What's the blood of our covenant?

What does Peter say? You were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold. You know, you say you weren't redeemed with corruptible things, I was figuring he would say like the blood of goats and bulls. You know, you leave blood out on the countertop for a couple hours and it's corrupted. You know, you're looking at salmonella or whatever.

But he says corruptible things like silver and gold, the two metals you can think of that don't corrode. He says those are corruptible compared to what you were redeemed with: the precious blood of Christ. We are partakers of a better covenant founded on new and better promises, sealed with the blood of Christ.

So should we have hope? Should we have confident expectations? Should we be able to lift our eyes to those hills and see the ultimate redemption? "I will set your prisoners free from the waterless—" Do you ever feel like you're in a waterless pit? I don't know. What's worse, being in a water-full pit or a waterless pit? If you're thirsty, you don't want to be in a waterless pit.

"Return to the stronghold." What was the, what was the stronghold originally for Judah? Mount Zion. Remember David took the stronghold and he established his capital there from the Jebusites. "Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope, you hopeful prisoners. Even today I declare I will restore double to you."

Now that's, that's an IOU from God. So how valuable is it? I've been listening to an audiobook, and without going into gory detail, there's a guy who's a military policeman and he needs to do some real quick travel. And he doesn't have time to go through all of the paperwork, so he's, he's actually the acting C.O. because of a series of events, and so he writes travel vouchers and then signs them himself as in on the C.O. line.

Then he takes these and, and he's traveling all over Europe, and these travel vouchers everywhere he goes are treated like American cash money at places that know what a military voucher redemption value is. They've seen them before. They know that the U.S. government will absolutely honor these vouchers. They don't know that he signed them himself, and, and one of the signatures on it is actually a forgery. But he's gonna, you know, clean it all up later. It's like Perry Mason: "I plan to tie all this up at the end, your honor."

And so in the meantime, he's sort of committing a crime, but everybody treats these vouchers like cash, and they're just pieces of paper he signed himself. Well, how much more valuable is an IOU from God, a promise from God? He says, "I am going to double everything. I promise you has just doubled." That's what he says here in verse 12.

“Even today I declare I will restore double to you. I have bent Judah, my bow. I have fitted the bow with Ephraim and raised up your sons, O Zion.” He takes the two parts. You know, Ephraim, i.e., the northern kingdom, has been gone for centuries now, and he says, “Look, Judah is my bow and Ephraim is my arrow, and with that I’m gonna let fly and retake Zion. One arrow and the fortress is going to be restored and you all are going to be in it.”

And so he says, “You are going to be the instrumentality by which this victory is achieved.” And of course it is in and through Israel in general and Judah in particular that the Messiah comes. And he says, “Look, you may just be wood and you may just be feathers.” Do you remember what the back end of an arrow is called, the feathers that you glue on to make it fly straight? I had a chance to work this into a conversation earlier in the week, and I’m real proud of it. So it’s fletching. Fletching is the, the guidance system on the back of an arrow.

Ephraim is the arrow. Judah is the bow. God says, “You are going to be instruments in my hand for victory.” Archery, that was the artillery of the ancient world, which appeals to me.

“Raise up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, Javan.” And he says, you know, Greece is going to come and go, Alexander is going to come and go, but your king rides a donkey and you’re going to be my bow and arrow, and you guys, as, as impressive as all of this Greek conquest of the ancient world is, your sons are going to defeat them.

The Lord will be seen over them. His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord God will blow the trumpet, whirlwinds from the south. Lord of hosts will defend them that devour, subdue with sling stones, drink and roar as if with wine. They will be filled with blood like basins, like the corners of the altar. Blood, blood everywhere.

The Lord their God—and remember the blood running as high as the horse’s bridles—once again, we’re lifting off the runway here and looking forward to the close of the tribulation and even to and through to Gog Magog in prospect. The Lord their God will save them in that day as the flock of his people. They will be the jewels of a crown lifted like a banner over his land. How great is its goodness? How great is its beauty?

And if you look at your text note there, is, there’s some question about whether it is his or its. Is this God’s goodness and beauty or the land’s? And I, I go with the translation here because he is talking about the land studded with the jewels of his people, and God has made it beautiful and God has made it glorious. Grain will make the young men thrive, new wine the young women.

And when you see chapter 10, more promises of restoration. “Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain.” There is a time when this rain will come. If you ask for the rain earlier, it’s not going to come. It’s not God’s time. You got to be patient. You have to be a prisoner of hope.

Yes, maybe you’re in the waterless pit, but guess what? God has got this wonderful sense of what’s appropriate in terms of timing. Let me ask you something. If you are a prisoner of hope and you’re in a waterless pit and then you pray for rain and God sends it, what’s going to happen to you? You’re in a waterless pit. The pit is going to fill and you’re, you better hope you’re a good swimmer.

God delivers them out of the waterless pit, and in the time of the latter rain he sends the rain. Now the pit is a blessing and not a challenge at best or death at worst, right? There’s a time to be in the waterless pit. There’s a time to be a prisoner of hope. God delivers you, then he’s going to fill that pit with the rain. He sees the big picture and we don’t. That’s why we have to trust.

There’s a way that seems right to a man and the ends thereof are the ways of death. There’s a way that seems right to God and the ends thereof are always the way of life, always life and peace, truth and righteousness.

“Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds. He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone.” And as soon as you see grass in the field for everyone, you realize that it’s looking forward to a future time.

Idols speak delusion. Diviners envision lies, tell false dreams. They comfort in vain. These are your grief counselors, in my opinion. You know, secular grief counseling is useless. How are you going to comfort somebody after a shooting disaster or some other crisis where there’s been great loss of life if you don’t have hope? If you don’t have the expectation of reunion and restoration and eternal life and being with the Lord Jesus

and being able to serve God and doing that united with others who are of like mind and like faith, what hope are you offering?

“Well, you know, the wound will eventually scar over and it won't hurt so much.” What a tragically pathetic kind of comfort that is.

They comfort in vain, and the people went their way like sheep. They are in trouble because there is no shepherd. You cannot shepherd people. You cannot lead them to green pastures beside still waters unless you are Shepherd, capital S, and unless you serve that Shepherd and you listen to that Shepherd, you're never going to get there.

God says, “My anger is kindled against these shepherds. I will punish the goatherds. The Lord of hosts will visit his flock, the house of Judah, will make them as his royal horse in battle.” Isn't that interesting? The king is going to be riding a donkey, but the army is going to be on a, on a battle horse, so to speak.

“From him comes the cornerstone, the tent peg, the battle bow, every ruler together, like mighty men tread down their enemies in the mire of streets in the battle. They will fight because the Lord is with them.” Notice, they don't fight because their cause is just. They don't fight because they've got a great deal of confidence. They didn't have a big pep rally ahead of time. Why do they fight? The Lord is with them.

And what does that do for their heart? The message of Zechariah is put your eyes on Yeshua and get your heart right. You're going to have hope. You're going to have confidence. You're going to have durability in the face of challenge. Your faith will be durable.

You're not going to be that, that springs up in the shallow soil and as soon as the sun gets to 45 degrees it begins to wilt. You've got deep, firm roots. You weather the crisis. You weather the, the difficulties. They will fight because the Lord is with them. Riders on horses will be put to shame. Everything that seems powerful, that seems insurmountable, everything that seems like Alexander the Great conquering the planet will be put to shame. It'll be humiliated by comparison because the Lord is with them.

We can either live in the world of physicality, of circumstance, of simple and immediate cause and effect, proximate cause, or we can fix our eyes on Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith, and look forward to the time when not only is the Lord with us in our souls and our spirits now, but he will be in our midst in the ages to come.

“I will,” God says, “I will strengthen the house of Judah. I will save the house of Joseph.” Who's the house of Joseph? Who are Joseph's two sons that both became tribes? Ephraim and Manasseh, right?

So he's been talking about Ephraim. “Judah's my bow, Ephraim is my arrow.” Which would you rather be, the bow or the arrow? I mean, it kind of depends on your point of view, but, you know, the arrow can go get lost or smack into something and break into shivers. And if I, if God came up to me just out of the blue, you know, and said, “Sam, you want to be a bow? You want to be an arrow?” I would say, “Lord, let me be a bow.”

Because many arrows can be launched from the same bow, and guess what? You're in his hand. He's got his grip on you. He's deciding the direction. He's picking the targets. You know, it's not bad to be an arrow. You fly straight and true, hold on to your fletching and, you know, keep your head and, you know, you can, you can do a thing. But you shoot one arrow, it's done its job. You know, somebody might find the thing, the head of it, up in the woods centuries later. But in my opinion, if you get the question bow or arrow, be the bow.

Remember David wrote the song of the bow. He didn't write the song of the arrow. Wrote the song of the bow about Jonathan.

But the, I—he says, “I'll strengthen Judah,” and he says, “I will save the house of Joseph.” He's shifted language here. Why doesn't he say Ephraim again? Ephraim has become all almost synonymous for the northern kingdom in its failure. Joseph, as the father and a picture of Christ—you know, if you're, if you were descended from that line, which would you rather say? “I'm, I'm a son of Ephraim,” or “I'm a son of Joseph”? I'd rather say, you know, just like the Lord Jesus is, is as Yeshua Ben Joseph and he's Yeshua Ben Dawid. He's, he's the son of David. He's the son of Joseph. Both of those terms apply, and both of those men foreshadow him in many, many ways.

So, “I will bring them back, have mercy on them. They will be as though I had not cast them aside.” This is a really divine action. How many people can actually make it as though it never happened? You know, there's usually a memory. There's, there's a scar. There's a seam.

My roommate from Annapolis, Ken Russell, has made many, many pots, and I love them, but they're, they're pottery, and in some cases they suffer accident and then I glue them back together. And I could admire their form and the craftsmanship with which they were made, but there's always that little seam. You know, you cannot reform the pot in its original unity. It's always going to have that crack. God can make it as though he had not cast them aside.

“I am the Lord their God. I will hear them. Those of Ephraim will be like a mighty man.” He says those who are Ephraim now are going to be back to house of Joseph. “The heart will rejoice as if with wine. Their children will see it and be glad.” Notice: heart, heart, heart.

Wine is used because it doeth good like a medicine, like laughter, you know, it makes the heart merry. It, it changes your outlook in a temporary and chemical kind of way. “I will whistle for them and gather them. I will redeem them. They shall increase as they once increased. I will sow them among the peoples. They will remember me in far countries. They will live together with their children and they shall return.”

From the east and from the west, back to the land of promise, back around Mount Zion. “Bring them back from the land of Egypt,” that's the south. “Gather them from Assyria,” that's the north. “I'll bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon until there's no more room found for them. Pass through the sea with affliction, strike the waves of the sea, the depths of the river will dry up, the pride of Assyria brought down, the scepter of Egypt departs.”

Look at verse 12. “I will strengthen them in the Lord and they shall walk up and down in his name,” says the Lord. Who's going to do that? Those who get their hearts right, who fix on that hope.

You can't just take somebody and transport them and they're going to suddenly walk up and down in God's name. You have to have been calling on his name in the far country. That's where we are now. We are citizens of heaven. We are looking forward to that future fulfillment, that future redemption, that future resurrection. But we're in a far country. But we call upon the name of the Lord now. We will walk up and down in his name then. How real is it to us?

Well, we are coming up to the central part of this latter cover of the book. You remember the first cover with the eight visions, and in the middle you had Joshua with the filthy robes, and then the spine of the book is Joshua getting the crowns, the Branch, a very bold and uncompromised look at the Messiah.

Now we've started this second part of the cover, and we've seen that the backside is, is more hopeful than the front side. He's not talking about, “Look at these nations and, and how they have established peace.” God says, “Their peace is false. My peace is true.” And by the end of those eight visions God is establishing peace. There's not this false peace established by military conquest by the nations.

They are all—the recon team comes back and says, “Well, the nations that subdued Israel are all at peace”—and God says, “We're not having that. I'll make a kind of peace. It's going to last.”

Now we're in the back half and we're coming to the central section here, and what we're going to see by the time we come to the center of this section is another picture of the Lord Jesus, and it's in the person of Zechariah himself. And when we look at this next time, hopefully we're going to complete our look at the book of Zechariah. We're going to condense it a little bit and finish up here and see this thing as in its entirety. It's all about the Lord Jesus.

I was thinking as I, over and over again, it kept coming to my mind, you remember that song, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”? “Look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.”

And you notice that as the Old Testament revelation begins to come to a close here and God is speaking the last prophetic words to his people, he says, “Don't worry so much about your nation and your immediate future. I'll tell you what's going to happen just so you're prepared, but you need to start looking for the Messiah.”

We always think John the Baptist was the preparation for the Messiah. There's no better preparation. There's no better reason that they should have seen Jesus when he came than Zechariah, and Malachi is a companion piece, but Zechariah paints a portrait. You know, when the police go around with a photograph and say, "Have you seen this person?" Well, Zechariah paints the picture. All they had to do is look at Zechariah and look at the Lord Jesus with the heart.

And those who did see him for who he was, and those, that's your first generation of believers. And that's the ones who became the first generation of the church. Those are the ones who transfer from being disciples to apostles. That's Simeon and Anna, those who had been long anticipating. They knew what to look for, and even when he came in infant form, Simeon and Anna recognized him. They knew what he was going to do. They, his portrait had been painted in Old Testament scriptures no more clearly than here in Zechariah.

So hopefully we'll, we'll finish up looking at the backside of the, of the book cover next time. But let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the wonderful encouragement and hope that you provide to us through the Lord Jesus, the reminders to us of the rewards of faithfulness and endurance. Though we suffer a while, we will reap the peaceable fruit of righteousness if we endure to the end. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us keep our focus and our vision squarely focused on the Lord Jesus, fixed on him, and that as a result we can take advantage of the opportunities that you give us for service in this life and in the age to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.