

Kings and Prophets 17-12-07

Good evening, this is Thursday, the 7th of December, 2017, and it's appropriate that on this Pearl Harbor Day we find ourselves in a portion of the Word of God that deals with warfare, both its run-up and circumstance, the events that take place during that battle, and then the results afterward. And we find this in our study for tonight, in the latter part of the Book of Zechariah, which is a part of our Kings and Prophets study. We'll be resuming tonight in the final section, which is chapters 12 through 14.

Let's take a moment as we begin to go to the Lord in prayer, and we'll pick up our study primarily at chapter 13. Father, we thank You for this time of fellowship and cooperation with one another in seeking a better understanding of Your Word and in living our lives in a way that is pleasing in Your sight and accomplishes Your purposes for us. We pray that as we look at this portion of Your Word that God the Holy Spirit will be our teacher, will minister it to each heart, help us to see its applicability, how pertinent it is to our particular situation and our opportunities, so that we can apply it and make it the object of our faith, lay hold of righteousness by that faith and reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus as we do so, both now and in this age that we will be seeing in our passage tonight that is to come.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as I said, we're in the Prophet Zechariah, the penultimate book of the Old Testament, right before Malachi.

And we saw chapter 12 last time. And just by way of reminder here, in the book of Zechariah, we began with the introduction and we had those eight visions that manifest God's care for His people, His working in their lives, both in blessing and in discipline and judgment, the exhortation to ensure that their hearts are right as they engage in the work of rebuilding the temple, recognizing that God is aware. And we've reviewed those several times.

That was the first half of the book. The second half of the book is made up of two oracles. And this is chapters 9 through 14.

The first oracle was in chapter 9, 10, and 11. And it primarily anticipates the first advent, the first coming of the Lord Jesus, kind of like the spring feast cycle did. And we've studied that and reviewed it in some detail.

There are a number of quotes that are familiar to us from this section that you find in the New Testament. It's interesting, Zechariah is one of the most quoted portions of the Old Testament. It is referred to in the New Testament about 42 separate times.

Exactly half of those, 21 of them, are in the book of Revelation. And as a piece of apocalyptic or prophetic literature, it sort of was really the first to establish a lot of the literary mechanisms that God uses in apocalyptic literature, i.e., the symbolism of horses and the interaction with angels and angelic messengers. Really, Daniel is the only one that really compares to it in the Old Testament.

And then, of course, it bears quite heavily on the book of Revelation. So, first half of the book, introduction and the eight visions. Second half of the book, these two oracles.

First oracle, first advent. Second oracle, second advent. And it began in chapter 12, as we saw last time, the burden of the word of the Lord for Israel.

And these six chapters, 8 through 14, are probably the most concentrated messianic material anticipating the coming of Israel's Messiah to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. And there is a variety of interpretation when it comes to both the visions in the first part and the statements that we saw in chapter 9, chapter 10, chapter 11. You know, the staff's beauty and bonds and the worthless shepherds and so on.

But we've tried to make some sense of that in looking at the three aspects of government that are found to be at fault and are judged. And these are the three aspects that the Lord Jesus is going to perfectly fulfill, he and the house of David in the millennial kingdom that is to come. So, if we quickly look at chapter 12 again and remember that there is a lot of thematic material that carries through these last three chapters in particular, one of which is the day, the day of the Lord, in that day, in that day.

In these chapters, you find that phrase, a reference to the day, about 16 times. And this, of course, moves us from the first advent and the recognition of Messiah coming, riding on the foal of a donkey, to his, which is sort of the suffering servant half of his appearance, to the second advent, which is the conquering king aspect. And so, in that day, a lot of things are going to happen.

We saw last time that Jerusalem is going to be something that seems to be one thing, but it turns out to be something else. It seems to be a city that can be swallowed up, but instead it's going to be a cup that's going to cause drunkenness and blindness and confusion. It seems to be a stone that can simply be picked up and moved out of the way, but instead it is going to destroy the ones who try to move that stone.

He says, in that day, verse 4 of chapter 12, I will strike every horse with confusion and its rider with madness. I will open my eyes on the house of Judah and will strike every horse of the peoples who are attacking with blindness. It's easy to imagine in our day the equivalent of horses, transportation, computer-controlled cars and airplanes and tanks and everything else have really become ubiquitous.

The technological piece of what used to be mechanical transportation is well known to us now. And you can imagine how easy it would be just from a technology standpoint to strike the horses with blindness. All you've got to do is cut off the internet, cut off communications, cut off the computer network that drives and coordinates these things and they're going to be confused and blinded.

It's a good reminder not to become too dependent on technology. You know, as you're

listening to Mrs. Google give directions, look around, note a few landmarks so that you can get around without it if need be. We talked about the distinction between the province or the region of Judah, the kingdom of Judah, if you will, as an area versus Jerusalem in general, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the house of David.

This distinction is drawn in verse 7. The Lord will save the tents of Judah first so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah. And you see this distinction drawn and it sort of anticipates perhaps the benefits of being a citizen of the new Jerusalem as opposed to simply being there in the heavenly kingdom. There is a new heaven and a new earth, but the capital of the new earth is the new Jerusalem.

And that city that is built four square with the gates on each side, to have citizenship and occupancy, to be qualified for that, seems to be a special privilege. And there is a harbinger of that in the millennial kingdom where to be in national Israel in that day is going to be a tremendous privilege. Those sheep that pass under the rod and are allowed in to dwell in those horizontally striped allocations to the 12 tribes.

And then the city of Jerusalem itself has a special privilege. And of course, those who are involved in administration and rulership and priesthood and teaching the prophetic aspect, that will be their home and to be envied, to be desired, to dwell in that place. And in verse 8, the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem and it goes on to talk about those who are like David and like the house of David.

Strength, favor in God's eyes are all in view there. And he says in verse 10, I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication. And again, special opportunity in that place.

They will look on me whom they pierce, they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, grieve for him as one grieves for a firstborn. There will be mourning in Jerusalem like the mourning for Ben Ammon. Remember Josiah, Ben Ammon.

We believe that that's what the text originally said rather than Hadad, Ramon. There's also an allusion to Ramon coming up in the next chapter and you get the idea that perhaps that Ramon migrated over from the later use of it. The land will mourn every family by itself.

Now, we didn't get a chance to talk too much about what all of this means. If the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the house of David are favored and strengthened and looked upon and they receive the spirit of grace and supplication, that would seem to be a good thing. So why are they mourning? And this gets at one of the themes of human life, particularly life as a believer, as a child of God.

And that is why suffering? Why hardship? Why do we have to experience failures? And it is really going to come to the forefront in these next two chapters, chapter 13 and chapter 14. But we

ask ourselves when we were looking at chapter 12 last time, well, why doesn't God immediately intervene? Why does He allow the nations to assemble? Why does He allow the city to be besieged? Why does He let them become so dire in terms of their straits before effecting deliverance? And that is going to be even more fully developed as we go forward. And this mourning is a part of it.

Why are they mourning? They are looking on Him whom they pierced. And to mourn over that failure to recognize, failure to identify, and in fact to mistreat, to abuse, and ultimately to crucify the Messiah that was sent to deliver them is a very serious thing. And there is time spent here reflecting on that history.

We mentioned this past Sunday about the atheistic objection to God and the crucifixion and the message of the cross. Why doesn't God just forgive? Why doesn't He just say, okay, it's all in the past? Why a bloody sacrifice? Why the pain and the suffering? Why does God make such a big deal out of this? And we realize that it is to emphasize to us how serious sin is. It is not something to be taken lightly.

It's not a simple misdemeanor. You crossed the street in the middle instead of at the crosswalk, and so you were jaywalking, and it's a minor offense. It's a felony.

It's worse than a felony. It's a death penalty serious thing to rebel against God, to separate ourselves from God, to go our own way, to decide that we're smarter than Him. We've got a better plan, a better idea, going all the way back to the original fall of Lucifer that we see recorded in the guise of the King of Tyre.

You find it in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. But that hubris that says, I will, I will raise my throne above the stars of God. I will be like the Most High.

I don't need Him. I can function independently from Him. And that's essentially what sin is.

When we choose to sin, when we choose to be disobedient, we choose... And what is the essential nature of sin? It is not taking God and His will and His Word into consideration when we make a decision, when we speak a word, when we engage in an action, when we allow thoughts to run in our hearts. We are essentially dominating our own universe like a god, small g, instead of humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He can exalt us in due time. So when these people look upon the Lord Jesus, there is going to be a time of mourning and it is a time of reflecting on lessons learned.

This is a mistake we don't want to make again. You often have in the military an after-action report where things that went well are reviewed, things that broke and went poorly and came apart at the seams are reviewed. And striving for a lessons learned, a light bulb moment, well, next time let's do better.

Let's not go down this road. Let's not make this mistake. Let's not partake of this failure in the future.

And so this mourning is a healthy review of what went wrong to ensure that it doesn't happen again. And this is how God will be able to leave those who possess eternal life with free will in the eternal future. You know, how do we know that there won't be another satanic fall? How do we know that a third of the elect and the saved and so on are not going to make that same mistake again? Well, this is the experience, this is the reflection, a necessary experience of pain and sorrow and failure that informs free will and prevents it from making that mistake again.

I promise you that if someone is, and I've given you this illustration before, but it's very powerful in my mind. If someone is chatting out the window of their car, saying goodbye to someone they've spent the afternoon with, it's getting on towards supper time and they put their car in reverse and they're still smiling and joking as they're waving goodbye and they start rolling out the driveway and they roll over a toddler, which I saw happen at first hand. I was too far away to run out and open my door and holler or intervene, but I saw it happen.

I promise you that person driving that car checks and double checks and triple checks behind them every time they put their car in reverse and they will do that till the day they die. I was in a gas station one time. We filled up the car and we had dogs and children and luggage.

Fatigue was setting in. It was dark. It was late.

Filled up the car. Walked back around. Got in the car.

I can't remember now why things were out of the ordinary, but it didn't take my usual path and I ended up not taking the gasoline dispenser out of the fill pipe. I was still connected to the pump by the hose and the handle. And I drove away and pulled the hose off of the thing.

How embarrassing. You know, the people come out from the cashier's deal and here's this hose dragging the ground from my car and I've broken the pump and it has a breakaway joint because I'm not the first or the last person to do this, but it's incredibly humiliating. But it's interesting to me now because every single time that I have filled up any of our vehicles since then, I make an extra look.

I do an extra check. I never forget. I have this panic that I'm going to do that same silly thing again.

That's what this morning is. That's what the review of our sins at the judgment seat of Christ is going to do. It will forever chide us, chasten us, warn us, make us paranoid about making those mistakes again.

It is almost necessary that we experience them to be inoculated against them in the future. Well, let's pick up now in chapter 13. We're going to try to finish chapter 13 and chapter 14 tonight.

So we've got to get on with it here. Look at chapter 13, verse 1. In that day, remember I said 16 times we have references to that day. This is talking about the final 1,000 years of human

history.

It is the fulfillment of the covenant promises to Israel. In that day, the day of the Messiah's return and setting up His kingdom, a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. And it's pretty well known that William Cooper, it looks like Cowper when you see it spelled out, but William Cooper, when he wrote the hymn, there is a fountain filled with blood.

This is the verse that inspired that. This fountain that is open for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. It shall be in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land and they shall no longer be remembered.

I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land." So, idolatry, false prophets, and unclean spirits are purged from the land. What is the result of this? It will come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother who begot him will say to him, you shall not live because you have spoken lies in the name of the Lord, and his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies. These are false prophets.

These are those who serve in the name of idols. And his own family will be so repulsed and so alarmed and so shocked and dismayed if someone tries this, that they will get rid of him. It won't ever go to court.

It won't go to the elders. It won't go to the government. The Davidic king with the rod of iron isn't going to have to swing it at this guy.

His own family is going to put him out of his misery because it will be such a tremendous crime. It shall be in that day, verse 4, that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. They will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive.

Nobody is going to imitate a prophet of God and prophesy lies. You can think about the days in the kings of Israel and Judah that we've seen in our study where there is a whole group of false prophets and the one true prophet, Micaiah, comes up and tries to speak. And, you know, he's ridiculed and belittled.

Which way did the Spirit of God go when he departed from me? And so on. That is going to be gone. This prophet will not wear a robe of coarse hair.

This is being a wolf in sheep's clothing. This is a false teacher masquerading as someone who knows God's truth. Prophesying prosperity when God's judgment was actually coming.

That was chronic in Israel and Judah. Right before their judgment. But this guy instead will say, I'm no prophet, I'm a farmer.

A man taught me to keep cattle from my youth. He was taught how to keep cattle, but he

decided that was too demeaning and he could make more money as a false prophet. Well, he's going to go back to what he was taught when he was a kid growing up and he's going to fall back on that.

And one will say to him, what are these wounds between your arms or between your hands, depending on which way to translate it. It doesn't make a whole lot of difference. And he says, those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.

Now, there have been some interpreters that have tried to associate this with the Lord Jesus and the crucifixion. You can see from the context that that's not apropos and the New Testament does not do that. There are a lot of these Zechariah prophecies that are tied back to the Lord Jesus, not this one because that's not what it's talking about.

You remember in Kings when Elijah met the prophets of Baal and they were slashing themselves and trying to wake Baal up so that he would listen to their pleas and come down with fire and so forth. That's what's in view here. These are professional wounds that are inflicted by these guys on themselves.

And he's going to say, well, this happened to me in some other context. I was working with some friends. It's not my doing.

That was 1 Kings 18.28 when the prophets of Baal cried aloud and cut themselves as was their custom. As was their custom. With knives and lances until the blood gushed out of them.

Well, this guy's got the scars from that. And when he's called into question, it's the reverse of the young maiden asking Peter about his Galilean accent. And weren't you with him? Weren't you with this Jesus? And he says, oh, no, no, that's not me.

And he curses and swears and tries to put the lie to that identification. Well, here, if somebody identifies this guy as a false prophet, he says, no, I'm a farmer. And I was working with some friends and we were stringing barbed wire and that's how I got these wounds on me.

Something like that. And so the land is going to be purged. The land is going to be cleansed.

It's going to be cleansed of idolatry. It's going to be cleansed of false prophecy. It's going to be cleansed of evil spirits.

And this is all in the Millennial Kingdom time. Then you get to verse 7. And with these false influences out of the way, the true shepherd is going to be in view. "'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my companion,' says the Lord of hosts.

Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. Then I will turn my hand against the little ones and it shall come to pass in all the land,' says the Lord, that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it. I will bring the one-third through the fire.

I will refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name

and I will answer them. I will say, this is my people.

And each one will say, the Lord is my God." This goes back a little bit to what we saw at the end of chapter 12, where the house of David was mourning, the men by themselves, the women by themselves, and the house of Nathan by itself, the family of the Levites by itself, and the family of Shimei by itself. They are going back and reviewing and figuring out what went wrong. Well, this is what went wrong.

And this is a review of the first Advent. The Lord Jesus came and said, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd puts his life on the line for the sheep, gives his life for the sheep.

And the Lord Jesus quoted this particular Zechariah passage twice on the night he was betrayed. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. And it, in the immediate sense, was fulfilled when the disciples all scattered.

John is in the temple, Peter is outside, or he's in the temple precincts anyway. He's there around the high priest when Jesus' trials are going on. And the rest of them have scattered and are in hiding.

In a larger sense, it speaks of what's going to happen to the entire nation as a result of having not identified him whom they pierced. All of the sheep of Israel are going to be scattered, and they will remain scattered. They are scattered to this day.

And two-thirds will be cut off and die, but one-third will be left. I will bring one-third through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. And these are the faithful in Israel down through the generations who, in times of trial, in times of idolatry, in times of great evil, in times of bad government, in times of God's judgment, they are faithful.

They trust God. They're like the woman in the days of Elijah, in the days of Ahab the king, who trusted God and recognized the prophet and took care of him, and God took care of her through the prophet. She had the cruise of oil and the barrel of flour that did not fail.

And you think of the widow whose son is restored to life and so on. There have always been those in every generation. These are the third.

Two-thirds will be cut off and die. One-third will come through. You remember this idea of thirds is often in contexts of judgment.

When the dragon is cast out of heaven, his tail sweeps one-third of the stars. It appears that one-third of the angels of God followed Satan in his rebellion. And in the case of humanity, and in general in Israel in particular, it appears that two-thirds are going to be cut off and die, but one-third is left.

And that one-third is brought through the fire and refined as silver is refined. Again, that idea we saw in chapter 12 of hardship and suffering and calamity and being attacked on every side,

this separates the wheat from the chaff. It separates the dross from the precious metal.

And those who endure to the end will be delivered. Those whose faith is tested and demonstrated in the fire. Without the fire, who knows? Who is a fair-weather friend? A lot of seeds sprout in shallow soil.

It isn't until the hot sun beats down on the ground that you find out those that really only have a shallow root and they don't have that genuine faith that God is looking for. I was thinking about this idea of faith. A lot of people, as we saw on Sunday in Corinthians, object to the way God is doing things.

There's too much suffering. There's too much unexplained. There's too much blood and animal sacrifice.

And this God is just a figment of somebody's imagination because look at the horrific circumstances that He allows on the earth. If He's an omnipotent God, He has the power to stop it. And since He's not stopping it, He's either not omnipotent or He is all-powerful, but He's a malicious God.

And in either case, He shouldn't be worshipped because He's either not as powerful as He says He is or He's not as kind and gracious as He says He is. Stop and think for just a moment. What is the nature of the gospel? What is the nature of the decision we make all down through human history, especially in this age with biblical revelation about faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior? There is an absence of evidence.

There's not an angel with a whirling flaming sword at the gates of the old Garden of Eden that we can look at and say, well, the Bible must be true. There's the angel it talks about. There isn't a lot of physical evidence that you can point to and say, well, there must be a God.

Everything can be explained in other terms. Everything can be believed in the context of a godless universe. Lots of people do it, especially in our day.

Well, why doesn't God try harder to persuade us? Why doesn't He give more evidence? Why doesn't He come to the foot of everybody's bed in a fantastic appearance and so on? Let me offer you a thought. This is a fresh thought for me, one I haven't mentioned before, but I've been mulling this subject now for some time. And it occurs to me, especially in the light of what it says here in Zechariah, both with the angels and with human beings, what is God looking for? Is He just looking for sentient thinking creatures who can parse evidence? Any atheistic scientist can do an experiment, gather data, and draw conclusions based on the data.

It doesn't require any Godward look whatsoever to weigh factors. Any historian can weigh evidence for the existence of Julius Caesar and say, well, here are these coins, here are these contemporaneous accounts, the accounts that talk about his battles. We've actually found Roman campsites.

We have enough evidence that even though we can't conclusively prove the existence of Julius Caesar, any reasonable person has to believe that he substantially existed as history portrays him. Anybody can do that. How much higher is God than His creation? How much more vast and infinite is God than we are, human beings? We're finite, we're fallible, we're temporary, we're made out of dirt, we're very limited in our grasp and our reach.

Our senses have access to only a minuscule portion, even of the known universe. Most of it, better than 90% of it, is dark matter and dark energy that we know nothing about. And the little bit that we can understand, we're constantly changing our minds.

Newton was right, Newton was wrong. Einstein was right, Einstein was wrong. Quantum this, quark that.

We're feeling our way along. Some things seem to work most of the time. We can get things to fly, we can make cell phones work.

But we're stumbling along in an evidence-based material universe. Even the angels, with their access to the heavenly dimensions and the higher realms, how much can they really understand about God? Now, I'm driving to a point here, so stay with me. Even the angels are limited because they are creatures.

They're not as limited as we are. We are made a little lower than the angels, which means they are a little higher than us, but not much. God's infinite character, His infinite power, His infinity in so many different areas.

You remember the old essence box? God is sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability, and veracity, those ten things. It doesn't capture all of it. God has other attributes, but that's a summary of some of the major points.

Well, how much can we understand about any one of those things? Only by analogy, only by illustration, only as it is watered down and put in terms that we can understand, right? So how do we know, no matter how much God reveals, no matter how smart we are, how do we know that God is what He says He is, that He will do what He says He will do? Sooner or later, even the angels have to believe what God says because God said it, not because they've got an independent laboratory that can put what God says on a scale or in a mass spectrometer and analyze it. Sooner or later, all of God's creatures who are going to live with Him eternally have to operate believing things that can't be proven. Those are the kind of people that God wants in His eternity, that can exist with Him, that can appreciate Him, that He can use to teach, to create new things, to go on and do even greater and grander experiments, if you will, experiments in the old sense of the word, demonstrations, manifestations that can go forward, trusting and learning more and more.

But the fundamental attribute, this is the point, the fundamental attribute for both angels and

people who are going to dwell with God is they have to be able to take Him at His word without being able to independently establish its truth. You don't have to be gullible. You don't have to be hypnotizable or able to be convinced of anything.

You don't have to be somebody who buys everything on the shopping channel because they say it's so great. When it comes to God, there is an inherent quality of these remnant, the one-third that passes through the fire, that believes despite evidence to the contrary, that believes despite downturns, that believes when the chips are down, when things are bad, when there is judgment, when there is evil, when there is rampant failure, there is a quality in both angels and humans in both the Old Testament age and in the New Testament age that bends itself by decision toward God. This is summed up in Job.

Job's wife comes and says, Job, look at everything that's happened. Curse God and die. What does Job say? We've received good things from God.

We didn't question why He was doing good things for us. Now He has allowed bad things. Why should I question that? He's the same God.

Though He slay me, I will trust Him still. I know that someday, even if worms destroy my flesh, I will stand on my feet and look through my eyes and I will see God. I believe what He says is true.

Can I prove it? Can I demonstrate it? Is there a preponderance of evidence in its favor? No. I am the kind of person who chooses to believe. I don't fall into belief.

I don't happen to be a believer. I choose it. That's what history filters for.

That's what life filters for. God's plan is filtering for the one-third. God is looking for it.

It's like filter paper. When you took chemistry in high school, you had paper that would filter certain things out and allow other things through. Your coffee filter keeps the grounds, hopefully, up in the top of the pot and lets just the coffee filter through.

Life is a filter. It is a means for those of us who choose to believe God no matter what to be that silver and that gold that is separated from the dross. It's not supposed to be provable.

It's not supposed to always make sense. It isn't supposed to be something that any reasonable person would necessarily conclude because it isn't based on reason. We're going to see more of this on Sunday when we're back in Corinthians 1. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing because they've got a set of tools that work in the material world.

God is Spirit. Those who worship Him don't worship Him in the material means. You don't strap something onto your hand.

You don't nail something to your doorpost. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him, Jesus said, must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Those are abstractions.

They are not subject to proofs. They are the object of faith. And the kind of God that God reveals Himself to be, both in nature and in His Word, appeals and causes some of us to choose, to believe, to choose to follow, to seek.

Seek Him while He may yet be found. Call upon Him while He is near. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

Not when you amass enough evidence. Not when people provide enough convincing arguments. That's who these people are.

Notice, God allows the nations to surround Jerusalem. God allows the shepherd, His own son, to be stricken. And when the shepherd is stricken, the sheep are going to be scattered.

And you say, oh, that's a bad thing. The sheep are scattered. Remember when we studied 1 Peter, the letters of Peter to the Diaspora? God scattering those sheep was the means of evangelizing the entire Roman Empire.

All people immediately saw in the near term, in the beam of their headlights, was disaster and loss and hardship. And displacement. And it just seemed like a complete bad thing.

And yet they are God's spokespeople. They are the point of the spear throughout the Roman Empire. And they are the seeds.

They're like dandelion seeds that get blown in the wind. And you say, oh, the dandelion was destroyed. But now it has proliferated.

It has multiplied. God's got agents in every part of the empire who can speak the truth and love to other people who are going to catch that understanding and come to God through Christ. I'll give you a quick example.

I was going to do a piano at a church. And I had kind of a tight schedule because I had to go way up north to Veneta and do this church piano. And then I had to boil all the way down the turnpike and go to South Tulsa to do the second piano.

So I was really, I was assured that my father had tuned the church piano and that it would only take an hour and a half. And I thought, okay, great. I can make all of this work.

So I got there. I got there right on time. And there was nobody there to let me into the church.

So I called the guy who had contacted me. And he called another guy who called another guy who eventually got there to let me in. And the pastor showed up later.

He was very apologetic. He said, you know, I just don't know what happened. It's not like me to miss an appointment like this.

But I just faced it. I don't have an excuse. I was talking with somebody and counseling with

them late last night.

But that shouldn't have kept me from, I just, I don't know what happened. I wasn't here to meet you. And he was just profusely apologetic.

Well, I got started a half hour late. So I was a half hour late leaving the church. And I had also gone off and left my coffee.

And I was kicking myself for forgetting my coffee. And the pastor was kicking himself for forgetting our appointment. And so on my way out of Anita, I stopped in Big Cabin.

I thought, I'm going to get me a cup of coffee to accompany me down this long road to South Tulsa. So I went into the truck stop there in Big Cabin. And as I was buying my coffee, I was standing behind a lady and she was very flustered.

She was an elderly lady. She was confused. She had been in Verdigris at a hair appointment.

And she always takes 66 going back and forth. She just goes through Katusa to Broken Arrow. She'd done this many, many times.

But she thought, you know, they're always telling me to take the turnpike. So she got on the turnpike at Verdigris and turned the wrong way and ended up in Big Cabin, which is about well over a half hour the wrong way. And she was flustered.

The lady at the register was trying to explain to her how to get back on the turnpike and how to turn the correct way. But she was so confused and so flustered, I was pretty sure that if she had tried to get herself back on the turnpike, and it's got kind of a cloverleaf on ramp and you kind of have to turn the wrong way to go the right way, and I figured she would have ended up in Missouri. I said, look, I'm going right the same direction you are.

Just follow me. And so, boy, she followed me right out and got in her car and was right on my bumper. And I went through the toll gate and made all of the turns and got the exit to go through Catoosa and get her on the road to Broken Arrow.

And it occurred to me, this is kind of a long story, but it occurred to me that I could have been frustrated at losing the half hour and getting stuck in Tulsa traffic, which I did. The pastor could have been beating himself up. But I believe that probably all of that happened because that nice elderly Christian lady needed help and God used two pastors, both of them forgetting something and delaying their schedule by over half an hour just so that one guy would be in the right place at the right time to guide that lady back home.

And she didn't know my name. She could be at home telling people, you know, I think he was an angel. I think, you know, how could he have showed up at just the right time? It was a complete accident from a human point of view and it was a delay and a hardship from one point of view and a failure on the pastor's part, a failure on my part.

I forgot my coffee, he forgot the appointment. But God works all things together for good. And it's a very minor illustration of what Zechariah is talking about here.

Yes, there is warfare. Yes, there is destruction. Yes, there is bloodshed and there are people that are going to be cut off and die.

But God is going to bring his people through those circumstances. He does not deliver them out of it in this case. The church is going to be delivered out of the tribulation, but Israel is going to be delivered through it and the one-third that is refined by that fire.

There is a time for being delivered out like Noah in the ark and there is a time for being delivered through so that we leave behind the dead branches and the useless bark and the diseased parts and we come through refined and purified and chastened. We may mourn because some of that's going to be our fault. But on the other side of it, we are renewed and we are wise and we are more dedicated and more convinced than ever that our faith in God is vindicated because he loves us anyway.

He saves us anyway. He uses even our failures and the failures of others to prepare us for future service. That's what he's doing here.

One-third will be left in it. I will bring the one-third through the fire. I will refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested.

They will call on my name and I will answer them. I will say this is my people. Each one will say the Lord is my God.

Each one will say that because they have proved out in difficulty and hardship that that's the kind of people they are. They choose God when people say it makes no sense for you to choose God. Curse God and die.

Though he slay me, I will trust him. I choose to believe. I choose to trust.

He is the God of my salvation and whatever he's doing, I don't have to understand it. This is a necessary attitude to move into the eternal future. We are never going to fully understand God.

The angels in glory don't fully understand God and unless they are willing to trust him for what they don't understand, they will be subject to the same kind of mistake that Lucifer made, that one third of the angels made when they followed him and that so much of humanity makes. The two-thirds of Israel here is making. Chapter 14.

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming and your spoil will be divided in your midst. I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. Look at this.

The city shall be taken, the houses rifled and the women ravished. Half of the city will go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. The remnant is not going to be subject to that.

This is going to be going on at the household to the right and the household to the left. But those who are trusting God are not going to be cut off from the city. The Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as he fights in the day of battle.

And in that day, his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. The Mount of Olives will split in two from east to west, making a very large valley. Half of the mountain moves toward the north, half toward the south.

Then you shall flee through my mountain valley. How often does it look like in our circumstances? There is no possible way of escape. Where I would like to escape, there is a mountain there.

Nothing moves a mountain. It would take a bulldozer weeks and weeks and weeks to even make a decent path over, around, somewhere near that mountain. God is going to split the mountain.

It's never happened in history. The Mount of Olives has been there since ancient days. But in that day, when the Lord Jesus descends and places his feet on that mountain, it is going to split and provide a way of escape.

For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. You shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come and all the saints with him.

That's potentially us. Shall come to pass in that day. There will be no light.

The lights will diminish. It shall be one day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. It's going to be a twilight period.

People are going to say, well, is it going to get light again or is it going to go pitch black? What do you believe? Well, what does God say? God says there's a coming kingdom that will be nothing but light. God is light. In him is no darkness.

The Lamb is going to be the light. There will be no night and no darkness there. But you've got to wait for it.

This is a twilight time and it's going to divide people in their faith, in their belief, in their attitude, in their commitment. Evening time it will happen. It will be light.

Evening time is when the sun goes down and it gets dark, right? But God says the unexpected is going to happen. An immovable mountain is going to split and provide a way of escape. And when the sun is going down, it's going to suddenly be light.

But you've got to trust him on this. It's counterintuitive. There's no evidence.

There's no proof. The Mount of Olives has never split before. It's never gotten bright as day and stayed that way at twilight before.

God says it. Do you believe it? In that day it shall be that living water shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea. In both summer and winter it shall occur.

And the Lord shall be king over all the earth. In that day it shall be the Lord is one and his name one. Well, we're not going to have time to finish the chapter as I had hoped, but that's okay because the last half of this chapter is really the climax and the culmination of this entire prophecy.

And we don't want to give it short shrift by going quickly. But just remember this, what is the point of interpretation and application? God is invested in his people. In who are his people? Who are those who call on his name? Those who trust in the face of even counterintuitive evidence.

The shepherd is stricken. How do you think the disciples felt? We know a little bit about how they felt when the Lord Jesus was crucified, how discouraging that was to be scattered, to think that all hope is lost. What does Jesus say? Do not doubt, but believe.

Remember when he appears to them in the upper room? He says, don't be doubting, have faith. You are the guys that followed me for three and a half years. Keep that faith.

Yes, it seems bleak. Yes, it seems hopeless. Who comes back from death? But they saw the Lord Jesus bring people back from death.

People mocking at the cross. Well, he saved others, but he can't save himself. And this begins to eat at their faith.

Well, he raised others, but maybe he can't raise himself. Well, remember him talking about his father? Remember him saying, he told them time and again, sign of Jonah, three days in the heart of the earth, and then he would be back. We can learn from the example of the past to trust when things are dark, when they look hopeless, when it seems that there's just no light at twilight, and there's no way of escape in the direction of the immovable mountain.

God says, you know what? This is exactly where I want you to be. I want you to show your faith so that I can embrace you, so that I can deliver you, so that I can set you on your feet, wrap you in a white robe, make you one of those that rules and reigns with the Lord Jesus Christ because you are exactly the quality that Satan and the fallen angels are not, that unbelievers are not, that apathetic and shallow-rooted believers are not. You stick and you stay.

You're like Job. You're like Daniel. You're like Joseph.

You're like David, someone after God's own heart. It is when the chips are down that we have the greatest opportunity to demonstrate to the Lord we are the people He's looking for. We trust Him no matter what.

Yes, it's counterintuitive, but what's more real to you? Circumstances that are ephemeral and changeable or the unchanging Word of God, the promise of God, the character of God demonstrated most fully in the person of Jesus Christ. Well, this is what we aim our faith at. This is what sustains us when the chips are down.

Read Hebrews 11. All these died in faith, not having received what was promised. Abraham waited for a city whose founder and builder is God.

These people didn't live a life of ease on rose petals. They were torn asunder. They were sawed in two.

They lived in caves and holes in the ground, but it didn't dissuade them. It didn't discourage them. They ultimately knew that God would make good on all of His promises.

And the vindication is foretold in passages like this one in Zechariah. Let's close in prayer, and then we're going to hear a wonderful Christmas special from Annalynne Godbole. Father, thank You for the passage before us.

Thank You for Your promises, Your faithfulness, and Your grace in loving us and being interested in us and cultivating us and drawing us to Yourself through the Lord Jesus. We pray that these things will be an encouragement and a motivation to us, that our faith will be found to survive the refining fire. We can grow in grace, follow the example of our Savior and those who have been faithful to Him in the time that remains to us in this life.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to thank Dan and Annalynne Godbole for providing this wonderful music for us each week on Thursdays and on Sundays.

And hopefully we'll rejoin together on this coming Sunday for our study in 1 Corinthians.