

PostExilicProphets 21-06-17a

This is the 17th day of June, June 17, 2021. Continue our study in post-exilic prophets. We're in the book of Zechariah.

We are looking at the set of eight visions that constitute the first several chapters of Zechariah's prophecy. It is so different than the remaining section that there are many who have proposed that the book was composed by more than one author, that Zechariah could not have composed the whole thing and that it was done at two different times and two different historical circumstances. We'll address that when we finish our vision section.

But the visions are the fun part to begin with. Yeah, the stuff that comes later is also fun, but you can't beat visions for interest. And these are very interesting.

So we're, we're taking a look at them. We've reviewed their structure and seen their chiasmic nature in terms of organization. And we'll continue and build on the study that we made a few years ago.

I would guess that would be four years ago or so when we were concluding our Kings and Prophets study. Taking a little bit different angle now. So you'll benefit if you want to go back and review what we studied about Zechariah at that time.

You can find those in the Kings and Prophets starting in about September of 2017. We're working to get those labeled, but you go back to, I believe it's September 7th of 2017. That's where we began our Zechariah perusal.

And there's a lot of detail that I'm not going to redo there. But I went back and listened to it to be sure it was fresh in my mind. And I know what to say and what not to say and what to repeat and what to build on.

So if you have spare time and want something to listen to between our Sunday and Thursday studies, I would highly commend to your attention a review of September 2017 Kings and Prophets with our Zechariah investigations. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study, our fellowship, the opportunity to receive the ministry of God's Holy Spirit together as we look at this portion of God's Word. Father, what an ongoing privilege it is to have good reason to interrupt the flow of daily events and ongoing tasks, responsibilities, distractions, the occupation of our earthly life to resort to the oasis of your Word to be refreshed and renewed and restored by the living water that we find in it.

We pray that as we look together at this portion, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to each of our hearts, impress it on our memories and cause it to be a source of motivation and encouragement to us as we try to invest the time that you give to us in eternal things and in fruitful activity for preparation and service now and in the ages to come. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we have now seen these eight visions. I'll review them briefly. You should have maybe a note with a bit of a chiastic structure with vision one and eight corresponding, indent a little bit.

You've got two and seven corresponding and then indent a little more. You've got vision three and six corresponding and then in the center visions four and five. And knowing that in the center of a symmetry like this, we typically find something emphatic or something important that our attention is being drawn to.

We see two individuals. We see there Joshua and Zerubbabel and that they represent together the coming Messiah in his high priestly role and in his governance role. And it is so fulsome that he can't be foreshadowed or represented by a single individual.

So as we've seen before elsewhere in the Bible, God sometimes uses two things to represent one. One of my first and most amusing, it shouldn't be amusing, I'm sorry, it is amusing to me anyway, is Abraham when he divides the sacrifices and is shooing the birds away, he's divided the animals and God is going to walk between the pieces and confirm the covenant. It's long about Genesis 19 if I remember right, somewhere in there.

But that's two things. You've got the pieces divided and these speak and provide a similar symmetry to what we have here in these mirror four and four visions. So what is going on? And again, there's a detailed study of this that we did a few years ago.

But just in summary and by way of review, the first vision of the horsemen among the myrtle trees. This begins in Zechariah chapter one, verse seven and extends through verse 17. That includes both the vision in verses seven through 11 and the oracle or prophetic element that follows it.

So in verse eight, Zechariah sees these horses, there's a man riding a red horse standing among the myrtle trees in a valley, in a hollow, in a shaded glen, if you will, of all the different kinds of trees that this could be, could have been olives, could have been figs, could have been sycamores, could have been mighty oaks, any number of things this could have been, could have been cypress trees. But what kind of trees are they? They are myrtle trees. Now, what is the most significant appearance of this tree in the entire Bible? We'll start you off with some trivia here, flake off the rest a little bit, get your spiritual wheels turning.

The most significant myrtle in the Bible. I'll give you a hint. It's queen myrtle.

Queen myrtle. Who was queen? I know you think, wait a minute. I thought myrtle was like a old lady that saw the street go by or something.

Who was queen myrtle? I'll give you another hint. From Zechariah's perspective, who is going to be queen myrtle? Because she has not appeared yet in his day. This is Esther.

Now, Esther, the name is Ishtar, but that's not her name. What is Esther's real name? Hadassah. What is Hadassah in Hebrew? Myrtle.

Queen myrtle. You'll remember now, right? I sure do. Hadassah.

This is myrtle. So does, is there any connection here? Well, naturally there is. This is prospective.

What is Zechariah's job? What's his title? What does he do? What's his gift? He's a prophet. So he prophesies. By the way, this is, let me take 30 seconds as an English major here and just say, please squelch, call out, rebuke, and stamp out the word prophesize.

P-R-O-P-H-E-S-I-Z-E. I see this all over the place. He's prophesizing.

This is like somebody having trouble with their prostate gland or something. I mean, it just, it does not, it does not, it's not legit. It's not real.

It's not a word. Prophesize. I don't know if they got this at the dry cleaner.

Remember they used to have this special process for your dry clean clothes and they would, you know, do, yeah, it's not jazzercise. It's not, but there used to be a special, I can't even remember now. It's one of the first words I read when I was learning to read.

My mom would take things to the cleaners, but no, prophesize is not a word. And to prophesy, there's no letter C in that. People don't prophesy.

You see, well, he was, he was prophesying. They spell it with a C. Prophecy is P-R-O-P-H-E-S-Y, prophesy, S-Y. There's no I's in it.

Just please, they used to say stamp out disco in our lifetime. You know, compared to the music now, I love disco. Disco is my new friend.

I've got a BG channel on my Pandora because it is so much better. And let me, I'll just take another 15 seconds here. You know why I suddenly have come to like disco? It's happy.

It's happy music by definition. It's upbeat. People celebrate it.

What are you doing laying on your back? The guys say you should be dancing, you know, get up and celebrate, be happy, get some exercise, sweat a little bit, sweat to the oldies. The music that has come out in more recent decades is the most dismal, angst-filled, dark, post-apocalyptic, nuclear holocaust, knuckle dragging through the dark post-disaster winter. It's just so depressing.

Who are these people and why do they write what they write? Anyway, I have come to appreciate disco because it's happy music. I've got something to, you know, jump around about. And I didn't like it when it came out, but compared to what followed, it's good.

Sorry, not all of it. But you know, KC and the Sunshine Band. Sunshine Band.

You try to find anybody that's got a Sunshine Band now. I can't even repeat some of the names of the groups they have now, but it's awful. Anyway, prophesy.

Zechariah is a prophet. He's looking forward. And this is important for understanding these visions.

When you come to the four horns, you can't believe the way this has been mixed up in my view, trying to figure out who the horns are, what they represent, because people seem to get Alzheimer's when it comes to Zechariah's job. He's a prophet. So these guys are amongst the myrtle tree.

Why would that be important? Why myrtle trees? People of Israel, pay attention. When you see myrtle, you should expect that God is going to do something related to this vision. They end up with a queen about 40 years hence.

Remember, this is 520. Zechariah begins his prophetic ministry in 520. When is it that Xerxes is going to issue the decree that we have talked about that is exactly the right number of years before Jesus comes onto the scene as the Messiah? The 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel is going to begin with the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, not any decree related to the temple, not any decree related to the walls.

This is a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem as a city, as a functioning capital for people who have independence to protect their own wealth and their own property. What decree is that? I do not believe it is the decree of Cyrus. I don't believe it is any of the other decrees of Artaxerxes or any of these others that are commonly named to restore Jerusalem as a place where people can hang onto their own stuff and not be under the thumb of foreigners.

That does not come until Xerxes issues the decree to give the Israelites the ability to defend themselves against Haman's decree. Haman's decree is going to wipe these people out. There would be no Jerusalem because there would be no Jews.

What restores and rebuilds Jerusalem in the sense of the symbolic city of the Jews? In my view, and I am virtually alone in this, I don't know anybody that thinks this, so weigh the odds, probably wrong. I am just saying that to my eye, to my mind, and then you do the math and you don't have to take 360 day prophetic years and multiply and then divide 365 and one quarter and leap year. It doesn't work.

Feasts define a year in Israel and you don't get that many feast cycles if you start playing games with the numbers. Oh, look, it comes out to 33 AD, my view, and you've heard me explain it in the past. Say that to say this, Zechariah is a prophet.

Don't forget, he's a prophet. What do prophets do? They look at the future and they bring the future into the present. When you look at the book of Daniel and you see the vision that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar and asked Daniel to interpret, how much of that existed when Nebuchadnezzar dreamed it? Remember the big statue, head of gold, shoulders and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, feet of iron mixed with clay? And we say, well, obviously.

And then later on, you got the vision of the beasts, right? And you got bears with ribs hanging out, one shoulder higher than the other. How many of those empires existed in Daniel's day? How many? In the day that he's doing those visions and writing them down and interpreting them and such for Nebuchadnezzar and for himself, how many empires? One, uno, ichi, wahad. However many languages you want to say the word one in, hes, mia, hen.

Those are three different Greek ways of saying one. One, Babylon. But the vision, comprehended, you got the shoulder and arms of silver, Medo-Persian, you got kind of a doubling there.

You got two things. You got the bear with one shoulder higher than the other because the Persians are going to outdo the Medes, right? Future. It's critically important when we're looking at this portion of Zechariah.

He's a prophet. He's looking ahead, not behind. We'll see how important that is here in just a minute.

So, man riding on a red horse, standing among the myrtle trees in the hollow, among the trees. This is a secluded spot and it is defined by these myrtle trees, these Hadassah trees. Okay.

So, behind him are horses red, sorrel, and white. So, red, brown, and white. We'll just say sorrel is brown for purposes of simplicity.

Red, white, and something else. I said, my Lord, what are these? So, the angel who talked with me said to me, I will show you what they are. People have been wondering, what are these horses? And of course, the horses have riders, but the riders are nondescript.

The riders are not distinct or separate. What distinguishes them is the color of their horses. So, when you see horses, this is a horse and rider combination.

The man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, these are those whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth. The Lord has sent them. So, these are reconnaissance angels.

That's what they are. They are reconnaissance angels. Now, let me stretch your mind here I'm building on a foundation that we spent some time laying here over the last 10 minutes.

These angels that are walking to and fro in the earth, to and fro, are angels bound by the space of the earth? Are they limited to our mileage, our width? Are they limited to our roads and our physical geography and topography? Angels do not have a limitation of physical space, do they? They can come and go. You can't lock a door and keep the angels out. You can't lock a door and keep fallen angels out.

You can't lock a door and bolt the windows and keep Satan from going where he wants to go, right? Because angels in general, God's angels in particular, are not restricted by anything

physical, are they? Would we all agree on that? Physical barriers, physical limitations don't stop angels. I want to submit to you that it's easier now, I think, than it has been in the past to understand this because we're an advanced civilization. We understand that time is a dimension.

These angels that are going to and fro and are evaluating the nations, they're not limited to the nations that are on the scene in the second year of Darius. They're just not. When they are going to and fro, and this is a bit of a mind stretcher, but I'm telling you what I see and what I think the Word of God is telling us here, this is also to and fro in time.

They are not just looking at the present. They're not just saying, hey, look, Darius in his second year has achieved peace by conquest. These reconnaissance angels riding these horses are traversing time.

They are looking ahead. Zechariah is a prophet, and this is a summary of God's knowledge and God's survey, not only of what is happening, but what is going to happen. Does God look ahead in our lives? Does He know what's coming even though we don't? You would agree with me.

God knows the end from the beginning because Scripture says that. You have to agree with me. God knows the future, and God makes provision for the future in the present.

In fact, God already made provision for this present in the past. God is eternal. He is the Alpha at the beginning, and He is the Omega at the end.

He transcends time. He looks down on time. He sees the whole thing at once because He's God.

I would suggest to you and submit to you that in God's service, the angels are also above and beyond the limitations of time. They are not just a needle in a groove starting at the beginning of the record and circling as the needle traverses those grooves on an old record album. The arm moves toward the center.

That's us. We are seriatim. We are A, B, C, D moving sequentially through time.

We are restricted to a timeline. We can remember the past, but we can't remember the future. We haven't seen it yet.

The dimensions where God and the angels dwell aren't like that. I know you think, do I really need to know this? Only if you want to understand what's going on in Zachariah, and it will become clear. So I just want to suggest right now that what Zachariah is being shown is that these angels who are on horses, meaning they can travel quickly, and they are surveying all nations, not just all present nations.

They are surveying. Now, does everybody know what has gone on in the past? Does everybody know about Egypt enslaving the Israelites and so on? Does everybody know about Assyria coming and taking out the ten northern? Does God need a reconnaissance team to tell him

about the past? No. Even humans know the past.

It's a historical record. But in the present, is God evaluating both the present and the future? Yes, he is. And there's a point of application here because does God know not only our present needs, but our future needs? Does he know our present challenges and our future challenges? Yes, he does.

So these angels are going to and fro throughout the earth. They are looking not only at the present, but also at the future. The passage is going to make this clear as we go to the second vision.

So just take this on board as a suggestion. This is what I think. You can just kind of provisionally say, okay, let's try this idea out and see if it holds water.

So I'm suggesting to you, these angels surveying the earth are looking at everything that is currently happening to God's people and what the nations are doing to the Jews and the future. The angel of the Lord standing among the myrtle trees, notice we've got two angels. Zechariah has the angel who spoke with me.

This is the interpreter angel, the guide angel, the helper angel for Zechariah. He's got an interpreter because he's just human and these are angelic things and he's going to need some help. So this angel who speaks with him is that.

We could name him AWSM, angel who speaks with me. That's what Zechariah calls him. Be nice if he had a name.

Could be Gabriel. He's an angel that speaks with people frequently. But this angel that speaks with Zechariah is separate and distinct from the man on the red horse in the myrtle trees who turns out to be the angel of the Lord.

The angel of the Lord. It's capitalized in your Bible. It's capitalized because a lot of people think it's Jesus.

It's not Jesus. I'm sorry, but it's not. And I can prove it.

Anyway, we'll get there. So when Zechariah says, what's going on here with this man riding a red horse and behind him are horses, red, sorrel and white. Angels are sometimes called men.

You can go all the way back to Abraham's experience with the two men who accompany God and visit him and he fixes him a meal. And they are called men sometimes because that's what they look like. They're not flapping wings.

They're not glowing in the dark. They're not supernaturally. They just look like men.

They've got eyes, ears, probably beards, because that is what the custom was in those days. They just look like men, but they are more than men. They are angels.

So the angel who talked with me said, I'll show you what they are. The man who stood among the When it says stand, the men and the horses are thought of as one unit here. So the horse is standing.

The man is astride the horse. The angel of the Lord is on a red horse and the rider horse combination is standing among the myrtle trees. Make sense? So the man who stood among the myrtle trees, i.e. sitting on his horse, standing among the myrtle trees, these are the ones whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth.

Notice he doesn't say they are the ones I have sent. They are the ones the Lord has sent. The angel of the Lord is supervising these others on horses.

The Lord, the God of the covenant, Yahweh, Lord of the covenant, the God of Israel has sent these angelic minions, these angelic servants, these angelic reconnaissance troops on horses to survey, to walk to and fro throughout the earth. Now, why would you need to go throughout the earth when Israel is just in one spot? They are currently, well, in two spots, maybe some of them are still in Persia and some of them are returning to the land. But would you need to know what's going on in Europe? Would you need to know what's going on in Africa? Would you need to know what's going on in India or China or other as yet undiscovered continents, undiscovered to these people? There are people living there.

But why would they need to go throughout the whole earth geographically? They wouldn't. But they do go throughout the whole earth chronologically because these individuals are interested in the people of God and those nations who impinge upon their well-being and their particular situation. These angels are not going and evaluating China.

They're not evaluating the southern tip of Africa. They're not going over and looking at the early Native Americans on the North American continent or the Native Americans in South America. They're not in Japan.

They're not in Korea. They're not in Australia or New Zealand. These angels are working at the behest of the Lord, Yahweh, on behalf of Israel.

So why would you need horsemen traveling all over the place when all you've got to do is take a quick look at Persia and take a quick look at the returnees to the land? It's easy. One guy on a horse could do that. Why so many and why to and fro throughout? I would submit to you that this is the time dimension that has to be constantly surveyed.

Action is being taken in the present that changes the future, that prepares for the future, that determines the future. Because there's nothing Satan and his forces would like better than to do things in the present that cut off options for God's people and for God himself in the future. This is a time war as much as a war in the confines of the earth.

Why do angels have to fight? Why can't God just say a word and they all disappear? This conflict, the angelic conflict, the spiritual conflict, we wrestle against principalities and powers

and rulers of the darkness of this entire age. Not this country or this town or this county. Rulers in the age.

There are efforts that affect the future that are being waged in the present. It's just a fact. You can't get around it.

And we really can't understand these visions if we don't take that into account. So among the myrtle trees, because where is the end of the Persian empire? When is that going to take place? When are God's people truly released from the bondage that begins with Babylon and continues through Medo-Persia? It's the Xerxes decree. That's when they are given autonomy.

It's an irreversible decree that the Jews can defend themselves and their property. Remember that? The whole thing about Haman's decree is I can't countermand it. I can't revoke it.

And we've seen that the seven weeks and 62 weeks, 49 years after that decree is going to essentially be the end of the Persian empire. It's the only thing that happens 49 years after. Why Daniel divides his weeks into seven and 62? Anyway, we've covered that.

So the myrtle trees, this is looking ahead. They know how important Esther is going to be. They know how important the times of Xerxes are going to be.

This is what is going to enable Ezra and Nehemiah and those days which follow Esther. Ezra and Nehemiah are after Esther. This is still 50 odd years in the future from Zachariah.

If you want to just get it organized in your head, it's Haggai and Zachariah, Zerubbabel and Joshua coming back and starting the temple, but they're not going to have the freedom to populate the city and build the walls until after Esther, after Xerxes in the 480 circa time frame. That's 480. And it's after that in the 470s and the 460s.

460 timeframe is when Ezra and Nehemiah come. So this is preparation. The preparation for Ezra and Nehemiah, the preparation for Esther is happening in the days of Haggai and Zachariah as it is presented in this vision.

So it's really important. That sets us up for the second vision in verse 12. You have the oracle and then the second vision begins in verse 18.

I raised my eyes and looked and there were four horns. I said to the angel who talked with me, same guy, this is our Gabriel guide type angel, what are these? He answered me, these are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. This is really interesting.

Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. And you think, well, Israel, that must be looking back to the 721 Assyrian invasion where the Northern 10 tribes were taken out and so on. Hold that thought.

The Lord showed me four workmen, four craftsmen, four artisans. Artisan is a good translation here. What are these coming to do? He said, these are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could lift up his head, but the craftsmen are coming to terrify them to cast out the horns of

the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.

Now, the common definition of these four horns is what had happened up to this point. So they'll say, well, one horn is Egypt, one horn is Assyria, one horn is Babylon and one horn is the Medo-Persians. Right? What's the problem with that? According to your humble correspondent here, it's looking backwards.

Did Egypt scatter Judah? Did the Assyrians, now the Assyrians came down and attacked Judah. Remember there's a near thing when the Rabshakeh comes down and is trying to terrify him and so on. But did they scatter Judah? Did Assyria scatter Judah? It says that these horns lift up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.

That didn't happen with Egypt. Egypt is the land of bondage. And by the way, why would you need to whittle down the horn of Egypt? It's already gone.

Why would you need to whittle down the horn of Assyria? It's already gone. What, are you going to time travel back to the past and do more to them than was already done? Has Egypt been judged? Were there nine plagues and then the death of the first one? Was that land not judged and decimated and left for the Amalekites to come in and take over and become the shepherd Kings? That's already happened. Egypt's been taken.

There's no Egypt threat at this point. Assyria, the Babylonians wiped out Assyria, right? Assyria is gone. Their history, this is like trying to go back and refight World War II against the Third Reich.

I mean, they're done, they're over with. So why would God be presenting a vision of craftsmen and two of these horns have already been, it's history, it's past. No, these horns are present and future.

Zechariah is a prophet. God is dealing with the present and the future. So how do we figure out who these horns are? Well, that's what we're going to look at when we come back from the break.

But as a point of application, these visions are given to Israel, Judah, and all of the remaining Israelites through Zechariah. Why? Why is God even talking to Zechariah? They're already coming back to the land. You can say, well, they need to rebuild the temple.

Been there and done that. Haggai and Zechariah have already delivered those prophecies. The whole book of Haggai is an encouragement to get the temple finished and the spiritual connotations of that that we've talked about.

First seven verses of Zechariah, he talks about that. But now this is a new thing. This is all looking forward.

This is to instill and to provoke hope. The word of God is given to the people of God to stimulate

and build up hope, which is the motivation for faith, the motivation for obedience. Why would you be faithful to God? Why would you bother cultivating any kind of spiritual life or relationship with God if you don't have a hope for the future? If you don't really believe there's a resurrection, if you don't really believe that there's the opportunity to be an overcomer and walk with the Lord Jesus in white and to serve with him and partake of the hidden manna and have that white stone and that new name and the opportunity to sit with him on his throne and to enter into these wonderful future opportunities for service and function and basking in the glory of God and dwelling in the new Jerusalem.

If you didn't have that as a hope, then why aren't we all just godless, pagan, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die people? The only motivation for faith and obedience is hope that God sees, that God knows, that God provides, that God is interested in us, that he loves us and he is on our side. He's making provision for us. He is looking to bless us and to prepare us for the present and for the future to give us peace, to give us love, to give us hope, right? That's what this was for the people in Zachariah's day who are coming back to the land and there's all kinds of discouraging things.

The temple project is fumbling and falling and limping along in a very cowardly and unhappy fashion and the people of God who are looking to God are saying, really? This brings tears to my eyes thinking back to what Solomon's temple was. Is this all there is? God says, no, this is not all there is. Let me show you what I am doing on your behalf.

These horns are future. These horses and reconnaissance evaluations are for the present and the future and they are designed not to try to drag up the past and get people to remember the glory days have gone by, but for the present and for the future. And God does the same for us.

God right this second, right this minute is looking down on us, evaluating the present and looking to the future, not for harm, not for punishment, not for discipline, not for judgment, but for blessing, for reward, for opportunity. If we will heed His word and pay attention, there is an incredible, exciting, stimulating life to be lived now in whatever remains to us in this life, looking ahead to the eternal future. That is what Zechariah is offering those people and us.

And as we look through Zechariah's eyes, we are going to see that this same thing as our age draws to a close, the word of God does the same thing for us that it does for these people as their age is drawing to a close and looking to the kingdom fulfillments. We will see more of it as we pause here to take our break and then return.