

## PostExilicProphets 21-07-08a

Good evening. This is Thursday the 8th of July 2021. We continue our study in the book of Zechariah.

We have already prayed so we're going to begin. We're in the middle of these visions and the central thing to remember about these eight visions and their chiastic structure is that the symmetry as we compare sides is different in the sense that the first four visions are in the present looking to the future. When you get to the center and those two visions that we saw last time of Joshua and Zerubbabel, the high priest, those two represent Jesus Christ in his two primary ministries to Israel which is as priest and as king.

From that point as we move through the remaining visions it is going to be a future present. We had the present looking to the future. These remaining visions are going to be moving into the future and looking at what God is doing in the future which of course is prophetic.

It's similar to the visions of John in Revelation where he is transported into a tribulation period that has not yet happened, but he sees things happening in present time but he's positioned in the future. So these first visions, the first three in particular, are the present and promises of what God is going to do. We then focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and once he has been presented the remaining three visions, six, seven and eight, are going to place us in the prophetic future and tell us what is happening at that time.

So this gives us some context, but we skipped a thing when we were looking at the first three visions that I think is really fascinating and I want to go back and look at it. That is in the third vision, the man with the measuring line. So turning back to Zechariah chapter 2 verse 8 is where I was looking.

See now I need my glasses again. 2, 1 through 8 is basically where we are. So in Zechariah chapter 2 he says, I raised my eyes and looked and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand.

So I said, where are you going? He said to me to measure Jerusalem to see what is its width and what is its length. There was the angel who talked with me going out. So he sees this angel going out, which means he is not standing next to Zechariah anymore.

This angel is basically going away from him and another angel comes out to meet him. So this angel, it is like he is going in to say, what should I do with Zechariah next? And this other angel comes back out and says to him, run, speak to this young man. Some people think the young man that needs to be spoken to is the man with the measuring line.

Other people think that it is Zechariah. I think it is Zechariah. So go speak to this young man saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls because of the multitude of men and livestock in it.

There is no point in creating a border and trying to measure it because that has not yet been determined. And we talked about this last time, how the population is going to be determined by the choice people make to live there and to do what is necessary to live there. For I, says the Lord, will be a wall of fire all around her and I will be the glory in her midst.

Obviously, the earthly Jerusalem up to the present time, God has not been the glory in its midst and he has not put a wall of fire around it as of yet. This is future. So again, this is a prediction in those first three visions before the introduction of those two that center on the Lord Jesus prophetically.

It says this is what is going to take place. But now look at the next verse. This is what I did not spend sufficient time on last time.

This is Zechariah 2.6. Up, up, flee from the land of the north, says the Lord, for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven, says the Lord. Up, Zion, escape you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. For thus says the Lord of hosts, he sent me after glory to the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye.

Remember, apple of eye is not apple of eye, but it's okay. Surely I will shake my hand against them and they shall become spoiled for their servants. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me.

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst, says the Lord. Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day and they shall become my people and I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you and the Lord will take possession of Judah as his inheritance in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem.

Be silent all flesh before the Lord, for he is aroused from his holy habitation. Okay, that's a big chunk. We didn't spend a whole lot of time on it.

There's only a couple of details that I want to really focus on because they are pertinent for us. So beginning again in verse 6, this is the oracle. Remember the structure where so often you have the vision, man with the measuring line.

What does that mean? It means that Jerusalem is going to be a unique city in the way it is dimensioned and how it is populated. Now the oracle in verse 6, up, up, flee from the land of the north, says the Lord. For I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven, up Zion, escape you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.

So here's the thing. What is the land of the north? You say, well, Sam, I've been looking at this in its context and he says, escape you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. So the land of the north is Babylon.

But if you go to the back of your Bible and look at the maps, Babylon is not in the north.

Babylon is mostly east. So what we want to do is look at what the north represents in scripture.

We've seen other passages where he talks about dwelling in the sides of the north and that the Lord seems to be in the north. What is this north thing all about? And that's question one. Question two, why do we care? So let's begin with question one.

What does the Bible mean when it talks about the north? Let's take a look at some verses that talk about the north. It occurs in a lot of places. Sometimes it's just simply a compass direction, but nothing is simply in the Bible as you know.

So other than just being a point on the compass, especially when you come to the prophetic books, this book, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, we find it in Zephaniah, we find it in Job. The north is significant. Sometimes it will be referring to a particular country or a particular land and it will say the land of the north.

So here's an example. Now if you're taking notes, I would say this is north, quote unquote, in the Bible. North in the Bible.

And other than it being a point of the compass, what can it represent? Well, it can be a particular country. This is the first point. It can refer to a country.

In our passage, which is Zechariah 2, 6, it is the land of Babylon. But the question is, why is Babylon called the land of the north when it's basically the east? Wise men from the east came to worship after they saw the star because Babylon and the plain of Shinar and Ur and a lot of those places are in the east. Persia is in the east.

But we'll come to that. But our first point is, north can refer to a country and it can be Assyria or it Babylon most particularly. So you find this in our passage, Zechariah 2, 6, escape you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.

So this is the kingdom of Babylon. This is eventually going to be taken over by the Persians and so on. You find this also in Jeremiah chapter 3 verse 18.

They shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I gave for an inheritance unto your fathers. This is a prediction of the return from the captivity. They were taken captive and taken to Babylon.

They're going to come back, Jeremiah says, from the land of the north. So that's another reference to Babylonia if you will. Jeremiah 46 verse 6, in the north by the river Euphrates have they stumbled and fallen.

Where is the Euphrates river? It's over there north and well east. Ezekiel 26 verse 7, I will bring upon Tyre Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, king of kings from the north. I will bring Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings from the north.

We're going to see in verse 13 of Zechariah chapter, it says 2 but I think that's wrong. I think I

wrote that down wrong. He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria and will make Nineveh a desolation.

But that's not true. I've got that mismarked. At any rate, you see the point.

Many times it's used for Assyria and or Babylon depending on the time period. Well, this is somewhat problematic because Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was north east of Jerusalem and Babylon is almost due east. And yet they are called the north.

And the reason for this is we're used to thinking of geography in terms of a map. They didn't really have and use maps in those days. They navigated the way I navigate, which is kind of by memory and landmarks.

There was no practical route to go straight from Israel or Judah to Babylon. You couldn't just start going east and get there. We've got a lot of geographical hindrances around here.

You can't go straight because there's a big lake in the way. Or you can't go straight because it's so hilly and mountainous you have to take the long way around. So if I want to go to Uchi, I can't just go east northeast.

I have to go north and then go east and then hook around south to get there. So in biblical terms, even though Uchi is mostly east of us, that's spelled E-U-C-H-A, by the way, if you care, it would be a land of the north because I have to go north to get there. So all of the access for anything, whether it was northwest or north or northeast or even east, you had to leave Israel and go basically north.

When Abraham came in, he came south after having traveled west a huge distance. Remember he stopped at Haran and after his father died, after Terah died, he was in Nahor and then he came on down to, Nahor is both his brother and a town named for his brother, but then he came basically due south to come into the land of promise. So this is why it's called the north even though directionally on a map it doesn't look that way.

To get there, you had to go north. If somebody was going to come and attack you, even if they were well east, the Persians or the Babylonians, they were going to have to come west and then come south. So they were coming from the north as far as Israel was concerned.

So in Ezekiel 38 verse 6, the north was also used for things that were just way far away and we don't really know where they are. So this is point two sort of. In addition to the immediate adversaries of the Babylonians or the Assyrians, anybody that was way far away and we don't know exactly where they're coming from, you can just assign them to the north.

And so this is Ezekiel 38 verse 6, Gomer and all his hordes, the house of Togarmah in the uttermost parts of the north. They're not always sure what Gomer might refer to. Some people think it's Armenia or whatever.

But it's just the unknown nations and hordes in the north. And the reason this becomes important is when you start thinking about other uses of the north, talking about the location of God. So this is now point three, okay? North in the Bible, number one.

In the prophets, the latter prophets, it's usually Babylon, sometimes Assyria, a place of captivity. Secondly, it can be any unknown group that is coming down to devastate the people of God. They're going to usually be attacking from the north.

If it's Egypt, they'll be coming up from the south. But they'll just call it Egypt, okay? Point three, north is often associated with heaven or God's dwelling. So there are many people who have tried to find a physical location for heaven in our physical universe, physical location, physical universe, which I think is kind of mistaken.

But when they go to scripture, they'll say, well, heaven, wherever it is in our universe, it's in the north. And these are the passages they use to justify that. And it's a good study.

It's just not the physical universe. But symbolically, it's the north. So you may remember in the Levitical system, like Leviticus 1.1, this would be a subpoint under our third point, right? North associated with God and heaven.

Number one, the blood of the sacrifice was applied on the altar. They would kill the sacrifice on the north side of the altar. This is Leviticus 1.11. And you remember Leviticus 1, this is the full burnt offering, the full total ola sacrifice.

He shall kill it on the side of the altar northward before the Lord. Northward before the Lord. Now, north of the altar is toward the tabernacle or toward the temple in later days, right? But you get the idea that God is looking down upon these things from the north.

He's looking south at it. So as early as Leviticus 1, we have this idea. Northward before the Lord.

And one of the unique things that ancient man had observed, they didn't know a lot about astronomy, but when they looked up at the night sky, the people of God were in the northern hemisphere, right? So when you look at that around which all of the stars revolve, for us it's the north star, right? And there is a, it's like all of the stars draw concentric circles around this spot. And to look at it, you look north. This makes sense.

If you've ever seen the time lapse of a camera pointed at the night sky with the stars out, you just see these concentric rings around the north star. The north star is very close to the center of that. Well, ancient man said, wow, all of the stars of the heavens revolve around this somewhat empty spot where there's only, for us, kind of a dim star, which is Polaris.

Polaris is not a bright star by any means. If you've ever had to do an observation of it, it's not always easy to see. It's the one that the handle of the Big Dipper, actually, the Big Dipper points to it, right? So they thought, well, that's an important spot in the sky, and it's in the north, so God must be there.

And this is supported in scripture. For example, in Psalm 75, verse 6, promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. Salvation comes from the north.

Deliverance comes from the north. Promotion, the benefit, the blessing of God comes from the north. In Job 26, verse 7, that verse says, and you remember this, he stretches out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.

He stretches out the north over empty space, over an empty place, and hangs the earth on nothing. And there was this symbolic idea that the earth was sort of suspended on an invisible thread from that center of the rotation point in the sky, and that God had stretched out the heavens from this northernmost point. And it's a wonderful thing about the Bible that you don't have the mythology that the earth is on the back of an elephant standing on a turtle that's floating in the sea, or that it's on, I think the Greeks, was it, that thought the earth was on the back of Atlas, and that's why a book of maps is called the Atlas, because it's all of the stuff that's on Atlas' back.

The Egyptians thought the earth was flat, and that it was ringed with mountains, and that's what kept the water from draining off, that the mountains, it was like a big giant lake, and the continents were in this lake, and this ring of mountains kept the earth from losing all of the seawater. So, the north and the north country are important in the Bible, and you can do a concordance study and see even more of these than what I'm going to talk about tonight. Why are we looking at that? Coming back to our passage now in Zechariah, flee from the land of the north, that's Babylon, and yet God is in the north, and dwells in the sides of the north.

I was going to give you that one passage. In Ezekiel chapter 8, verse 5, Ezekiel is told, son of man, lift up your eyes now the way toward the north. So, I lifted up my eyes the way toward the north, and behold, the northward gate of the altar was this image of jealousy in the entry.

We're going to see in Zechariah chapter 8, verse 7, God is going to say, behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, as though God is in the north, and he's gathering them with his two hands. He's scooping from the east, and scooping from the west, and bringing them together, because he's facing south from the north, is kind of the metaphorical idea there. In Ezekiel 46, verse 9, remember 40 through 48 is the millennial temple, when the people of the land, this is 46, 9 of Ezekiel again, when the people of the land shall come before the Lord in the solemn feasts, he that entereth by the way of the north gate to worship, shall go out by the way of the south gate, he that enters by the way of the south gate, shall go forth by way of the north gate, he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it, opposite it.

And this is like a two-lane traffic where you don't go the wrong way. Job 37, 22 says, fair weather comes out of the north, with God is awesome majesty. And it associates the generally fair weather that would come from the north, the wind would come and blow away a lot of that Mediterranean effect in the land, and associates it with God's glory, with God's awesome majesty.

Jeremiah 46, verse 20, Egypt is like a very fair heifer, but destruction comes. It comes out of the north. And this was a prediction of the destruction of Egypt by the Babylonians, which of course happened.

Jeremiah 4, verse 6 says, set up the standard toward Zion, and then get away, don't stay, for I will bring evil from the north and a great destruction. So here's my question. We've had plenty of these.

You can do a concordant study and see more if you're interested. But if God is in the north, and yet the Assyrians and Babylonians and destruction and so on comes from the north, why are they both in the same compass direction from the people of God? God is in the north and destruction comes from the north. This reinforces something that we have seen in the past few nights of study.

And that is, God is in control of the Assyrians. Assyria is the rod of mine anger and the staff of mine indignation. Remember that in the King James? Assyria is my rod, my staff.

Psalms 23, what does it say about God's rod and his staff? The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack. Then he turns to God and speaks to him directly in the second person. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

So God's rod and staff are both a source of comfort and a source of chastisement. Assyria is the rod of my anger and the staff of my indignation, he says. How can they be both? There is both blessing and discipline.

There is both prosperity and judgment that come from the north and so God being in the north and above the north, God's instruments of judgment, Assyria and Babylon being on earth from the north are a reminder that these things are under God's control. This far and no farther, he says to the troubled sea. God sets boundaries and imposes limits.

God can create a wall of fire around his people. He can hedge them in and there are times when he takes away that hedge. The most stunning example and I've mentioned it several times here recently is his two witnesses in Revelation who prophesy and can call down fire to consume anybody that tries to stop them and yet after a certain measure of time, they are overcome and killed and their dead bodies lie in the street.

Why did God not make them permanently invincible and just let them ascend to heaven in a cloud of glory? He could have done the same thing with the Lord Jesus who was all-powerful and yet God's plan called for him to be overcome and to be slain. These witnesses are going to drink that same cup. They are going to be overcome and slain and this is by God's permission.

It is a part of God's plan. Point of application. We shouldn't unduly panic when tribulation comes our way.

Jesus promised it to us in this world, you shall have tribulation. Paul talks about it that our

momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory. Jesus said to look ahead.

In this world you'll have tribulation but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world and we see that same picture in this God dwelling in the sides of the north and judgment and discipline on God's people coming from the north. Egypt took them captive but it is because Israel went to Egypt and dwelled there.

You don't see an Egyptian invasion from the south taking captive the descendants of Jacob. Invasions always came from the north. Even the battle of Armageddon they're going to gather in the valley of Armageddon which is northward in Israel.

So it's no accident that the north is associated with both the presence of God, the north side of the altar, and with judgment which reminds us that God is in control. When difficult circumstances, when tough challenges, when we seemingly are defeated or set back or held back, this is a conscious metaphorical communication from God for us to remember that he is above and over these things and they only come by his permission as a part of his plan. It is either to chasten us, to correct and rebuke us, get us to check the bases, to examine ourselves and see if we are in the faith.

And many times that examination is going to come up healthy. We're okay. I'm not ignoring my spiritual life.

I am a person of prayer. I do regularly listen to the teaching of the Word of God and I think about it and I invoke it in my prayer life. I'm communicating with God.

I'm asking and I'm seeking and I'm knocking. I am trying to flee evil and choose good. I'm trying to do better than I have done.

I'm confessing my sins. I'm doing everything I know to do and I'm asking God, try me and see if there will be any wicked way in me. Purge me with hyssop so I can be clean.

Wash me so I can be whiter than snow. I am acknowledging my sins and claiming God's cleansing grace. Sometimes trouble comes and it is not to correct us.

It is not to turn us or change us. It is to test for the purpose of approval. The Greek word dokimazo.

This is to take the gold into an assayer and he says this is 24 karat. This is solid stuff. This is good pure silver.

And refining is just to drive the impurities out where they can be seen so they can be scooped away and make it even better. Testing for the purpose of approval. The Lord Jesus was tested.

His sufferings which were many were not because he had failed or sinned. It was the failures of people and he endured them and his endurance is an example for us. His faithfulness under pressure is an example for us.

Pushing against resistance is what strengthens us and this can be the purpose of the test. And all of us that have run or lifted weights or been challenged on an obstacle course know that there is a certain point when you're running three miles for time or you're running a 10k or a lap in a 10k or whatever it may be. There is a point where your body starts saying I can't do this.

I've got to stop. I can't catch my breath. My heart is beating too fast.

There's acid in my muscles and everything is screaming and the body says stop, stop, stop. And the mind has to say no, I did this on purpose. There's a reason why I'm doing this and we are going to keep going.

And you just have to suppress that instinctive desire to stop the challenge, stop the pain, stop the hardship, ease up, take some deep breaths, get a cool drink of water and saunter on back and say well I didn't finish my race. And we overcome that instinct and that desire to exit stage left from the challenge and say there is a good reason why this has come to me. And we trust God.

This is the exercise of faith. That's what the north and the sides of the north represent. There were faithful people in Israel that got scooped up.

Look at Daniel and his three friends. Look at Ezekiel. There were many others that suffered the indignities and the losses and the hardships of the captivity.

And it wasn't their fault that the nation had gone idolatrous and callous and indifferent and superficial. And we are caught up today in a nation and in a society that is doing much the same thing. And we will probably suffer some serious national consequences, social consequences, but it doesn't mean that we cannot continue to be blessed and prosper and God will work these things together for good.

He will turn cursing to blessing. Joseph's captivity by means of his brother's betrayal ultimately worked out in a wonderful way and at the end of his life Joseph would have never changed that, right? You meant it for evil, God meant it for good. So when we see the north and the sides of the north and the dwelling place of God and the source of judgment and invasion and loss and attack in the north, this is what we can turn to and remember.

So in this oracle, even though the bad weather has come to Judah from the north and they were taken captive, he says in verse 10, sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst. What direction will God come from? Well, the presence of God is located in the north, that good weather is going to come from the north. Now we have other imagery that talks about the glory of God that departed to the east and is going to come back from the east, but this is a separate thing because going to the east and returning from the east, that's going to be the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's glory is going to be personified in the Lord Jesus and he will come back through the eastern gate and over the Mount of Olives. And that speaks specifically of the Lord Jesus in the

earthly manifestation of God's presence. But the presence of God the Father is almost universally pictured as in the north.

And Jesus as the high priest will come in through the veil and present the perfect sacrifice, the atonement to the Father. And this is another reminder that God is a trinity and there is more than one person and they're not going to approach from the same direction. Jesus essentially approaches from the east, God the Father comes back from the north where his heavenly dwelling is.

And the train of his robe is in the Holy of Holies as it were. And if you follow that robe upward and find the presence of God seated on his heavenly throne, it's going to be in the north, not in the east. But east and west, these are associated with earth.

The north is associated with heaven, the things that define earthly life like the sun rising and setting. But the eternality of God is pictured by that invisible circled location in the heavens. Well, we find this all very fascinating.

We're going to pause here and take our break and we'll come back and resume our look at these visions.