

PostExilicProphets 21-10-14a

Good evening, welcome to Thursday night Bible class at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 14th day of October, 2021. Continue our study in Zechariah 9, and at long last, we're going to be moving forward in text.

We will be resuming here in the vicinity of verse 11. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we will begin. Father, we are so grateful that you have created us as a fellowship, brought us together as a group of believers of like mind with spiritual gifts that benefit and bless each one in the group and come from each one in the group.

We thank you for this portion of your word and the opportunity to look at it together tonight. And we ask that your Holy Spirit will minister to our hearts, that it will be meaningful and effective and stimulate that spiritual fruit that reflects your glory and vindicates the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. We ask it in Jesus name, amen.

So in Zechariah 9, when we come to verse 11, after the announcement of the coming of the King, which we've looked at in great detail and a very interesting study to me, we pick up in verse 11, where the prophecy says, as for you also, because of the blood of your covenant. Now, this is you also, this is the people of God. These are the people of Israel because of the blood of your covenant.

And that's significant. It's not just a promise. It's not just a casual contract.

This is a covenant sealed in blood. And you can go back. We could spend a lot of time looking at Moses sprinkling everything in sight with blood, sprinkled the Levite, sprinkled the tablet, sprinkled the tabernacle, sprinkled.

He was just going wild, sprinkling everything with blood to emphasize the fact that this is a blood covenant, nothing more solemn. This is unto death. And in fact, beyond death, but it's a serious arrangement binding on both sides.

Because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. You might be able to survive for a time in a pit if you've got something to drink, but you cannot survive. The quickest way to die of exposure is to dehydrate.

In terms of not having a weather extreme, but you can go without food for quite a long time. You can survive a reasonable degree of temperature shifts, but you can't go without water for very long at all. So a waterless pit is something from which prisoners would need to be set free.

The idea here is that they've been left to die. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. And those that have been set free from a waterless pit have a choice.

Am I going to immigrate? Am I going to flee the nation? Am I going to go elsewhere? Or am I

going to return to the stronghold, to the capital, to the fortress that represents the capital city, represents the people, in this case, the people of God. When you're liberated, you've got options. Once you're set free from the waterless pit, you have a choice of what you're going to do.

The encouragement in this case is to return to the stronghold. Now, this might raise questions in the minds of people who used to dwell in the stronghold, and that stronghold was knocked down most recently, and never before in history at Jerusalem from the time that David established it as his capital, not through the days of Solomon or the early kings of Judah or the middling kings of Judah, even in the days of Hezekiah, when the Rabshakeh comes and threatens to roll over them, never had Jerusalem been breached and sacked and destroyed until Nebuchadnezzar. And so these people freshly returned from that experience might say, well, we're delivered from the waterless pit, as it were, a place where we can't bear fruit, we can't be the people of God, but I don't want to go back, Jerusalem is not safe.

It's a target, it's liable to be attacked and ruined again. What's the point of trying to rebuild it? Let's go make a fresh start somewhere else. But part of the Davidic covenant is that David's capital city of Jerusalem is going to be rebuilt, the fallen tent of David will be propped back up and to sit on the throne of David is to reign from Jerusalem.

So to be a prisoner of hope is to claim that promise and to believe in hope, in expectation that having wrought this judgment on his people, God is now going to restore them. The earlier prophets are fraught with these prophetic assurances, whether it's Jeremiah or Isaiah or any of the pre-exilic and exilic prophets. There are many, many promises that say, similar to what God said after the flood, I will never again destroy the earth by a flood.

And there are assurances that so long as the people uphold their end of the covenant, there is going to be this restoration. Now, that's kind of tricky because we know that Jerusalem got destroyed again in 70 AD. So what's God saying here? When are these promises in effect? Are they in effect in the day that Zechariah delivers them? When are these promises and assurances effectual? If you look at mortgages or any other kind of legal contract that you sign, it usually has an effective date.

It can be effective on the date that it is signed. It can go into effect on some future date. This contract, this set of promises has a date of going into effect and it is not when it is delivered.

This is not a promise for the days of Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi. It is not in effect for the centuries between them and the Lord Jesus. It is not in effect in Jesus' day or in the day of the apostles.

And that is why Jerusalem will once again be destroyed in 70 AD. This is why it is so important to pay attention to context. What is the context of these assurances? As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, this foreshadows the new covenant.

What does Jesus say in the upper room? This is the new covenant in my blood. Church age has not begun yet. When Jesus makes that new covenant, he is still in the age of Israel and he is talking to Old Testament saints.

His disciples are Old Testament saints. And he says, I will not drink this cup again until I drink it new with you. When? In the kingdom.

And so verses nine and 10 are critical here because when you behold daughter of Jerusalem, your king coming to you riding on the donkey and he cuts off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem and cuts off the battle bow, speaks peace to the nations and his dominion is from sea to sea and from the river to the end of the earth, that's when the remainder of this goes into effect. So we don't have a problem of interpretation here. It's pretty straightforward.

So at the time of the inception of the millennial kingdom, because of the blood of your covenant, this is blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. It is better than the blood of goats and bulls. Moses sprinkled everything in the old covenant with animal blood.

This new covenant is sealed and guaranteed with the blood of Christ. And it is far more lasting and effectual for that reason. You think about how long the nation of Israel lasted from the time that Moses led the people out of Israel until there was a monarchy and a true nation, that was 400 years.

And so you don't have a nation with its own independent king until circa 1000 BC, just slightly before that. And it's gone in 586. So it lasts a little over 400 years as an effectual monarchy in Judah.

It went out significantly before that in the Northern kingdom but this is going to last 10 centuries. So what the blood of animals could not do, the blood of Christ is going to do. What the Mosaic covenant could not do, the new covenant is going to do.

And the reason it is going to last and the reason it's going to be effectual is because it includes the pouring out of God's spirit on all God's people in that kingdom. So return to the stronghold you prisoners of hope. Today I declare, I will restore double to you.

Remember how Isaiah 40 begins? The people of God have paid double for all their sins. Comfort me, comfort me and my people. Your warfare has ended and your strife has ceased.

She has paid double for her sins. There is a double payment and now there's a double restoration. For I have bent Judah my bow, fitted the bow with Ephraim and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece and made you like the sword of a mighty man.

This is really interesting to me. It took some time to figure out exactly what was being said here. You notice bow is in italics in its first instance in verse 13.

Excuse me. I have bent Judah and fitted my bow with Ephraim. So it's a good emendation.

It makes a little more sense here in English. It flows pretty smoothly in Hebrew. But Judah is the bow and Ephraim is the arrow, right? Now think of this in terms of metaphorical value.

This in modern parlance would be, I have put, I've taken my rifle, Judah and put in my bullets, Ephraim. So think about the role of the rifle versus the role of the bullets. Anybody that watched Sledgehammer knows his famous saying, "Guns don't kill people, bullets kill people." In the same way, bows didn't kill people on the battlefield, arrows killed them.

So what is the functional value of bow versus arrow? Well, think in terms of government, authority, direction, policy, plans. You use the bow to aim, to determine distance, angle, all of that. Direction, this is like howitzers in the artillery.

You then place them and then when you wanna fire rounds, there are three essential pieces of information you have to give to each gun crew. One of them is, what is the deflection? What is the direction? Hopefully you have that tied to something that is correct and you're not shooting, you're not misdirecting. So deflection, what is the direction that the tubes are pointing? Secondly is quadrant elevation.

How high have you raised the muzzle versus the carriage of the weapon? Thirdly, what is the charge? How much powder is gonna be behind this? How much force is going to impel the projectile downrange? And with those three values carefully calculated, you can put rounds where you want them. You can put steel on the target. Same thing with a bow.

With a bow, you determine the direction, you determine the angle of elevation and how far back do you draw that string? How far do you want that arrow to travel up to its maximum range? So the role of Judah is to be the bow. Judah containing the capital city of Jerusalem, Zion, daughter of Jerusalem. This kind of makes sense, doesn't it? That the government and the leadership of forces that are gonna project power on behalf of the nation are going to be controlled from Jerusalem, from Judah.

Judah is the bow. Ephraim represents the projection of force, the armies, the military that is gonna be sent. And notice what kind of weapon, archery bows and arrows were the ancient form of artillery before you could sling rocks and such.

This was harm at a distance. You can shoot an arrow farther than you can throw a spear, certainly farther than you can swing a sword or brandish a knife or use hand to hand or club somebody in the head with a rock. So your furthest projection of power on a battlefield in the ancient day was with arrows.

Even if you send chariots out there, the horses got to pull the chariot, it's easily visible. Arrows rain down death in an almost invisible manner from on high and it strikes a lot of fear and uncertainty into the forces coming to attack you. So here's the thing.

This promise to the prisoners of hope is a great comfort because what it tells them is the war is not gonna be on their own soil. Americans are often reminded, we used to be reminded of the fact that we have fought many wars, but since the Civil War, we haven't had any on our own soil. We fought in Europe, we fought in the South Pacific, we fought in Haiti, we fought in China, we fought all over the world.

We fought in the Middle East, but we have not had invasion and open warfare of the military type on our own soil. And you like this because your civilian population is largely safe. That's the promise here, that because Judah and Ephraim are a bow and an arrow, the warfare is taking place at a distance.

And that's a wonderful promise. So I have raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece. This isn't quite what the text says.

Sons of Zion, yes. We just had the daughters of Zion up above. Notice the daughters of Zion rejoice while the sons of Zion go to war, just saying in terms of combat arms.

The biblical model in ancient days doesn't necessarily pertain now, but it's something to note. Women are around the mountain in the capital city. They are rejoicing, they are offering support and encouragement.

The sons of Zion are out on the battlefield. And who are they fighting against? The sons of Javan, J-A-V-A-N, J-A-V-A-N, commonly understood to be Greece, but it's misleading in this case. And it's also a bit of an anachronism.

It's like a reverse anachronism because Alexander the Great and the whole Greek conquest of the world has not yet taken place. And you tend to think the sons of Greece are going to be Alexander the Great's army. Well, it's not.

And what helps us here is the sons of Javan. So what you have instead is you go to Genesis chapter 10, keep your finger here and just turn back to Genesis 10. You've got the genealogy here of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The sons of Japheth, verse two, were who? Gomer, Magog, Madi, Javan, Tubal, Meshach, and Tiras. You get down to verse four, who are the sons of Javan? This is our specific phrase in Zechariah, the sons of Javan, right? So who are these sons? Well, they're not the army of Alexander. They are Elisha, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodonim.

That Dodonim, the last one is almost certainly Rodonim. You remember me explaining many times that Resh and Dalet are virtually identical. The only difference in them is a tittle, just a little corner.

So one of them looks like an upside down L with a little corner sticking out. The other one looks like an upside down L with a curve. And I mean rotated so that the leg is pointing left and the stem is down, like a backward small R sort of.

If you have the little corner, it's a Dalet. If you don't have a corner and it's round, it's a Resh. Well, these are commonly confused.

There are hundreds of examples in any number of Hebrew texts. So this is Rodonim, not Dodonim. Dodonim would be doubly strange because I think in Hebrew that means the beloved ones, and that wouldn't make any sense.

David is Dalet, wow, Dalet. Which you can say if you want to as Dud or Dawad. But Dod and Dud and Dawad and all of those, that whole word group comes from beloved.

David's name basically means beloved. So these are the sons. Well, here's what's interesting.

The sons of Javan, Elisha, and to cut to the chase here, you can look each of these up and find the geographic location for them. But where they are is up in Asia Minor, Kittim, this is Crete, Rodonim, this is Rhodes. If you look at a map of the Mediterranean Sea and you look at where Israel is positioned on the eastern side of that sea, as you curve around counterclockwise, heading north and then northwest around the Mediterranean Sea, you come to the areas that are occupied by these sons.

It includes Northern Italy, it includes parts of Macedonia, it includes Crete and Rhodes. And Tarshish is actually a bit closer. The Tarshish that Jonah was trying to get to was actually clear over to Spain, but that was a colony founded by the Tarshish people that were closer to home.

Northern Italy, Macedonia, those parts of Asia Minor are in view. Now, why do we care about this? Why do I care about the sons of Javan? Here's why. Because how did this prophecy back to Zechariah 9, how did it start out? Go all the way back to the beginning of chapter nine.

The burden of the word of the Lord against who? Remember this, Hadrach and Damascus that are near to each other and against Hamath or Hamath and against Tyre and Sidon. Now, let's think about where the sons of Javan are and let's think about where Tyre and Sidon and these places are. Which ones are closer? The ones we started out with, right? Tyre and Sidon are just up the coast.

You can't get around to the northern edge. You can't get around to Italy or Macedonia or any of these other places. You certainly can't get to Cyprus or Crete or Rhodes or any of those places until you get past Tyre and Sidon.

And Hamath and Damascus and all the rest of these have already been dealt with. Now, God is going to use a strengthened and restored Israel to deal with people that are further afield. They're not going to march all the way around.

They're not going to have to take land. They're going to shoot arrows over to these further areas. They're going to project power.

This might be naval power. It might be air power. It might be missile power in our modern day.

It could be anything, but they don't have to go there in mass. Everybody doesn't have to leave and abandon Israel. This is projection of power beyond the guys that got licked first.

Remember the Philistine cities that were going to, those are the ones that were to the immediate West. Philistines have been dealt with. People of the North have been dealt with.

Now, why do we care about that? Turn back to our verse. Here's the thing. Here's what we're getting at.

This is a covenant, a blood covenant with the people of God that they are going to be planted. They are going to be returned to the stronghold after a time of imprisonment. You ever felt like you were just imprisoned by sinful nature, imprisoned by the evil that is rampant in the world, imprisoned by a lack of options, imprisoned by the poor and inconsiderate decisions of people that are over you in employment or above you in rank or whatever it might be, government this and restriction that, and the whole, it seems like you're just struggling to get out of a wet blanket that never lets you go.

Of course, in this case, I guess it would be a very, very dry blanket, a very, very waterless pit, but we feel hemmed in by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Three strikes and you're out. And we've got all of that stuff working against us.

When it's not the world and the devil, it's our own flesh betraying us. With my mind, I serve God, but with my flesh, I serve sin. Paul says, who will deliver me from the body of this death? Remember that in Romans, you get to six, seven, and eight there.

Who will deliver me from the body of this death? This is the deliverance that is promised to Israel. I will take you out of the waterless pit where you can't grow, you can't thrive, you can't branch forth and bear fruit. I'm gonna take you out of there, and I'm gonna restore you to your land.

You are prisoners of hope. This is not just any old body. These are people who have got the hope of deliverance, the expectation of deliverance, and are going to exploit that deliverance when it comes.

Patience, you need to have patience so that after you have suffered a while, you inherit the promises. We are supposed to suffer, just like those two witnesses we saw on Sunday are supposed to be powerful for a while and then be overcome and die. The Lord Jesus was tremendously effective for a while, and then he had to be overcome and die.

And for some of us, it's not gonna be a glorious wafting to heaven on the wings of angels for us. We're going to be on the long march. We're gonna be going across 1,000 yards of inhospitable territory, uphill to get to that straight gate that leads to life.

If it was easy, everybody would do it. If it was easy, it would not accomplish God's purpose. God is looking for those of us who will sustain our hope no matter what.

Though he slay me, yet will I trust him. That's why Job is one of the great examples of the Old Testament. There wouldn't even be a book of Job if he didn't have that attitude.

Did he struggle? Did he misunderstand? Did he question? Was he misunderstood by others? Yes, he was. It was a part of his ordeal that not only did he suffer tremendous loss, but he was misunderstood by those closest to him. But he persevered, and in the end, because he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, he was exalted in due time.

And friends that sought to judge him ended up depending on him for the sacrifice that would restore them before God. Well, here's what's going on in this passage as far as we are concerned. We are the people of God.

We are related to him through a blood covenant. We are currently spiraling around many times in a waterless pit. We are prisoners of hope.

And what is our hope? I will restore double. You remember Jesus talking to the disciples. Whatever you've given up, you're going to have a hundredfold later.

But you've got to function with that hope now. You've got to dedicate yourself to service. Dedicate yourself to the first word there that we saw on Sunday.

He that would be great should be a servant. And it's diakonos. This is one who waits tables.

He is there to defer to and fulfill the wishes of the clientele. The second word, he who would be first, let him be the bond slave. And that's doulos.

That's the low grinding slave with an emphasis on slavery, not on service. Who is going to be first of all? The Lord Jesus, because he gives his life. We saw that on Sunday.

So here, you prisoners of hope, I will restore double to you. And we say, okay, I will stick. I will stay.

I will hold this ground, whatever it may cost me because I know the promise of God. God says, I'm going to use my people. Some of them here, it's Judah, are going to be in roles of leadership and guidance.

And policy and clarification of what the mission and the purpose and the goal is. That's Judah. Others are going to be Ephraim.

And they are going to fly into the thick of it and be the means by which God gets the task on the ground accomplished. You can think of Judah as the officers and Ephraim as the enlisted. Somebody's got to do the planning and the direction and take responsibility for it and take the heat when it fails.

Others are the practical rubber meets the road. Here's the task. I'm going to get it done.

People, you need both. Somebody's got to be able to look at the shape of the forest and plan accordingly. Other people have to get down there and start wading through the trees, clearing the brush, finding the enemy and dealing with them.

So that's Judah and Ephraim. In our church age, we have believers with various gifts. Some of them are leadership oriented.

He gave some apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers. Others wash the feet of the saints. Others minister in seen ways and unseen ways.

Some are prayer warriors. Some are encouragers. Some are those who quietly get tasks done that need doing.

They put a shoulder under the load, often unacknowledged. They are Ephraim. You can't have one without the other.

Those who have the opportunity to forage into the word of God and bring back sustenance, that's one kind of job. Those who partake of that sustenance and go out and make use of it in the energy of the spirit instead of the energy of the flesh, that's a different task. Everybody doesn't have time to spend hours studying the word of God.

You need somebody to get it, assemble it, prepare it, present it, and you take that. This is what I like. This is completely off the subject.

This is the best explanation I ever heard for not being a vegan. If you're gonna be a vegan, you've got to go down to the level of gathering plants. Energy comes to us from the sun.

Plants photosynthesize that solar energy and store it in their structures, right? Doesn't matter if it's lettuce or whatever it might be, right? So in order to gather enough energy from plants, you gotta eat a bunch of plants because no one plant has got very much energy in it. And oftentimes it's stored in ways that we're not really cut out to digest in terms of the vitamins and minerals and so on. They may be bound in compounds that uptake is difficult.

Here's the genius of the plan of God. God put animals on the earth after he put the plants on the earth. And he said, you know what? Instead of you people wandering around, you know, the gatherers instead of the hunter-gatherers, instead of you wandering around gathering all these plants and trying to make all of these different salads and soups and teas and stews and things to try to get enough nutrition, you spend all day long messing with plants, trying to get enough nutrition.

So here's, and I'm talking about in the old days, we've got technology to do it now. But in the old days, what did people do? They said, you know what? There's animals that spend all day long grazing. They eat plants, they metabolize them, they convert them into higher forms of stored energy.

And when you eat the animal, you basically get the benefit of the hours and hours that it spent wandering around grazing or wandering around finding berries and fruits and nuts and all the rest of it. And eating those, you eat the animal, you're basically leveraging all of that time the animal spent. This is just genius on God's part that we can eat the animal and not have to spend all the time.

Well, this is my analogy for we don't all have time to be grazing in the green pastures of the word of God. Somebody has got to be a shepherd and have the sheep, as it were, and the sheep eat all of that food. And then the sheep have got more power stored in them than the grass did.

And that's a loose, rough analogy. You see what I'm getting at. Some of us can take time to graze in the word of God, package it all together into a nice, meaty presentation.

You eat the meat, you don't have to do the grazing, right? Efficient, takes less time. So these here that are prisoners of hope, I declare, I will restore double to you. I've bent Judah my bow, fitted the bow with Ephraim and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece.

We've already got the immediate enemies licked. Those of you that remember long days ago, there was this thing called mastery of the details of life. As we grow spiritually, one of the first things we learn is to avail ourselves of God's grace and not let the daily details of life cause us to stumble, throw us off track, stress us out, distract us, keep us from making any real spiritual progress.

So the enemy's near at hand. The immediate circumstances, the people in our immediate periphery, the challenges in our immediate periphery, we learn first to deal with those. It's like kids who first learn how to manipulate toys in the living room floor before you stick them behind the wheel of a car and say, okay, drive through traffic.

You deal with things near at hand, master that, get your hand-eye coordination. Now you can deal with the larger world. Same thing here.

Now that the Philistines, the Tyrians and the Sidonians and the Hamathites and the Damascus and all the rest of these that were near at hand have been dealt with, God says, now my people are going to be a bow and arrow to go further afield, deal with things that are at a grander, more strategic level. We're going to go tackle the sons of Javan now. Because who got dealt with first? Look at the first half of the chapter.

That immediate stuff's been dealt with. What is our point of application? Before we start trying to think strategically in spiritual terms and what can I do to influence the nation and how many letters should I write to my congressman and can I be a light shining in this crooked and perverse generation? The first way to get that lamp lit is to take care of what's immediately in front of me. There's a lot of things I don't know how to address.

There's a lot of issues. I don't know how I would decide based on what the immediate factors

are. But I first have to think of elders and the requirements for elders in the New Testament in Timothy and Titus.

A man has to rule well his own household before he is qualified to rule the household of God, right? We need to first be sure that we are handling the immediate close at hand stuff before we start worrying and fretting and distracting ourselves on things that are further afield. So when I come before God in prayer, when I get up in the morning or stop in the middle of the day or review the day at the close, evening and morning and at noon when I'm about to pray and cry aloud, I should first think, how did I deal with my temper? How did I deal with my tongue? How did I deal with my attitude? How did I deal with my interactions with others? How did I deal with the stressors that the world threw at me today or the flesh threw at me today or the devil threw at me today in my immediate vicinity? Am I conquering the Philistines? Remember David killed Goliath before he ever led his armies to all of the other conquests for which he is famous. There was a Philistine close at hand.

He dealt with that one first. Later on, he's gonna wipe out hordes of Philistines. He had to deal with one big one first.

It was right in front of him. It's the same for us. The same for the people of God, Old Testament or new.

To succeed as believers, to be truly fruitful, and believe me, this is context for what is coming up. When we get this under our belt and really understand what the context is saying here, this next section of Zechariah is gonna flame and live. It is gonna be a hammer that busts a lot of rocks for us, and that's what we'll see when we come back from the break.