

PostExilicProphets 21-10-14b

We are ready now to resume our study in Zechariah chapter nine. In summary, again, the message here from the beginning of the chapter up to this point is because of the king, because he is the delivered one, and because it is his blood that guarantees the covenant, the people of God, even though they find themselves in a waterless pit, are prisoners of hope. And God promises that he's going to deliver them out of that pit and to restore double what they have lost.

And double is really metaphorical. It's going to be astronomically more. It's beyond what we could ask or think.

Jesus says a hundredfold when he's talking to his disciples in Matthew. But this is our foundation. The promises of God are the rock on which we build our house.

And all the storms in this life will not prevail against it when that's where we build our confidence. So in verse 11 of Zechariah nine, prisoners are set free from the waterless pit, return to the stronghold. What is the stronghold? It is the fortress of the promises of God.

Remember that section of Psalm 91 we memorized. It's the secret place of the most high abiding in the shadow of the almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my rock, shield, buckler, fortress.

I shall not be moved. So God says this is not just for our benefit. God uses his people, his faithful people, the delivered prisoners of hope.

They don't just get delivered. They don't just shamle back to Jerusalem and start trying to build houses. They are a bow and an arrow.

They are the projection of God's power and God's purpose into the world well beyond the immediate victory. Tyre, Sidon, Philistines, Hamath, Damascus, and so on, all the way out to the sons of Javan, which are a little bit further out, quite a ways further out. And the final part of verse 13 says, I have made you like the sword of a mighty man, made you like the sword of a mighty man.

This word for sword emphasizes its ability to cleave, to divide, to chop. And the idea here is that the people of God are going to do what the word of God does. The word of God divides asunder the soul and the spirit, the joints and the marrow.

It is a judge of the innermost thoughts and intents. And for this reason, the Lord is going to be seen over them in verse 14. I want to give you the word we think of, machaira in Greek, but in Hebrew, the word for sword is kerev, c-h-e-r-e-v, it's a soft b, kerev.

But remember those who surround the throne of God, what is their name? The cherubim, the keruvim, the root is this word. They are the ones who get done. Remember the four faces that

represent the fourfold glory of God, the human face, the eagle face, the ox face, and the face of a man, all facing in different directions, and the manifold, omnipotent, omniscient plan and purpose of God being carried out.

Well, now these people of God are essentially becoming the keruv in the hands of a gibur, a mighty man. Gibur, the giburim, the mighty ones of old, men of the name, David's mighty men, that's their name, the giburim. And so this is the keruv, the sword, that which gets the most important things done in the hand of a mighty man.

That's what these people are going to be like, fulfilling their individual function. The arrow doesn't want to be a bow. The bow doesn't want to be an arrow.

You got all kinds of people wanting to be things that they weren't fitted, suited, designed, born, trained to be and do. You don't just get to choose. God says, Judah, you're my bow.

God says, Ephraim, you're my arrow. God says, Levites, you're my priest. God says to certain church-age believers, you're a pastor.

To others, you're a teacher. To others, you're an evangelist. To others, you have the gift of helps.

You have the gift of administration. You have the gift of encouragement. You have the gift of washing the feet of the saints.

You've got the servant heart. Whatever it may be, you might have the gift of faith. When people's faith is starting to fade, you see how to encourage faith in people whose faith is starting to fail.

Peter, Satan has desired to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail. You can't pray that somebody's faith will not fail unless you're the Lord Jesus. Without some means, how can faith be supported? How were Moses' arms supported when Joshua was down in the valley fighting the Amalekites? You got people on each side.

You've got Aaron and Hur holding up Moses' arms, right? And as long as his arms are in the air, the fighters in the valley prevail. It's mutually supporting. That's how we are designed.

Aaron and Hur have a different function. They're there to hold up Moses' arms. Moses is there to be the symbolic figure and symbol of God's power on the mountain.

They're not down there fighting the battle. Joshua could say, well, why can't I be up there? I want to hold up one of Moses' arms. Why isn't Hur down here swinging his sword? I can understand Aaron.

He's not even the priest yet. You know that. He hasn't been commissioned.

Haven't had the law from Sinai yet, right? So everybody can say, oh, remember the guys that

wanted to come and offer strange fire before the Lord? And are we not all priests? No, you're not. Get used to it. Find your function and fulfill it.

That's a problem with a lot of what's going on in the world today is lack of humility, lack of discipline, lack of the willingness to submit under the mighty hand of God, whatever that hand hands us, so that we can be exalted in due time. People don't want to wait to be exalted later. They want to be exalted now.

I want to feel good now. They want to be gratified now. They want to do their plan and their purpose now.

Well, that's a part of the evil that we're having to slog through. It's part of the sand in our waterless pit. But God has made the sons of Zion like the sword of a mighty man.

They're like a bow and an arrow. It's all under God's control. It's part of God's plan, God's purpose to fulfill God's overall mission and to reflect God's overall glory.

Then verse 14, the Lord will be seen over them and his arrow will go forth like lightning. This is literally like a flash in the cloud. It's a cloud flash.

They translate here as lightning. It says, then the Lord will be seen over them and his arrow will go forth. Now, what happened to the sword in the hand of a mighty man? What happened to the bow? Here it says the arrow is going to go forth.

Why does he leave out the bow and the sword at this point? The Lord will be seen over them. And the final effect of all of these mechanisms, the bow is a mechanism. The flight of the arrow is a mechanism, the effectiveness and the strength and the direction of a sword in the hand of a mighty man.

This is all God's work. What does the world see? Just like in the artillery, the world doesn't see where the guns are in place. They don't see the logistics of getting the troops and the beans and the bullets and all the rest of it in place.

What do they see? They see rounds impacting and shells going off and fragmentation, death and destruction raining down from the sky. That's what they see when the world sees the effect of God's plan and purpose implemented in and through his people. It's the arrow.

The Lord God will blow the trumpet and go with whirlwinds from the south. This is interesting because God seems to dwell in the sides of the north. We saw that earlier in Zechariah.

So whirlwinds from the south and the blowing of trumpets, all of this harks back to Israel's earlier history. What happened when Gideon blew his trumpets? He and his 300 men, 300 select and chosen men. The enemy was thrown into confusion.

The enemy is expecting God to march forth from the north. Instead, it's a whirlwind from the south. It is counterintuitive.

It is unexpected. It is unanticipated. It is irresistible.

If you sow the wind, what do you reap? He that sows the wind reaps the whirlwind. You might be able to sow wind, but you cannot get away from the whirlwind that comes back on you as a result. It's irresistible.

It's uncontrollable. There's no coming back from it. So God will blow the trumpet, whirlwinds from the south, and the Lord of hosts will defend them.

They shall devour and subdue with slingstones. Devour and subdue with slingstones. Where does this come from? What's the most famous slingstone in history? It's the one that hit Goliath between the eyes, right? Exactly the picture we saw in the preceding verse.

Was Goliath expecting that? Did he anticipate it? Could he escape it? Come here to me, little boy, and I will feed your flesh to the fowl of the air and to the beast of the field. He didn't have a lot to say after that slingstone hit him directly on the brain case. They shall devour and subdue with slingstones.

They shall drink and roar as if with wine. Now it says as if with wine. They're not drinking and roaring because of wine.

They're not drinking wine. But the immediate verse that comes to my mind is the one that probably comes to your mind. Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

Be influenced, guided, visibly affected by. If you're drunk with wine, people can tell. If you're filled with the Spirit, people ought to be able to tell.

And the power of the Spirit to influence us in a positive way is the exact opposite of the power of alcohol to influence us in a negative way. They shall drink and roar as if with wine. They shall be filled like basins.

Filled with what? What's the new covenant? Which, by the way, is already in writing at the time that Zechariah delivers this prophecy. What is the new covenant? People have to know their word of God. They have to be like Daniel reading Zechariah.

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. This is all the flesh in Israel. Joel 2, 23 and 24.

They will be filled like basins. They will not be drunk with wine. They won't be shouting and exuberant because of being exhilarated in an improper manner.

They are going to shout the shout of victory. They're going to be filled with the Spirit. Filled like basins.

Like the corners of the altar. What do you know about the altar? What happened there? They like to say that, in fact, there are even some translations that say filled with blood. The altar is

full of a lot of things, but it's not full of blood.

It's not a basin of blood. They didn't take the bronze sea, for example, and fill it with blood and say, here's a big bowl of blood before the Lord. The altar is not full of blood.

What happens when you slay the animal? There's certainly blood in the area. There may be blood splashing hither and yon. But when you're talking about something being full, what is the altar full of? It is full of that which sanctifies.

It is full of that which pleases God. The altar is for God. It is the meeting place between God and man in the tabernacle and later in the temple, right? And what is it full of? It is full of atonement.

It is full of acceptance. It is full of forgiveness. It is full of cleansing, purification, sanctification, redemption, propitiation.

So they like to say that this is a altar that's full of blood and that the fullness of the altar. But remember, this is a victory that was won with sling stones, not with swords. How much did Goliath bleed from the stone between his eyes? Not a lot.

And he was dead when David cut Goliath's head off. So not a lot of blood involved. So this, in my mind, is not talking about blood.

What are the corners of the altar? What do they represent? Remember the horns of the altar? You would fall. Remember, Joab does this. Any number of people would go run in and grab the horns of the altar.

That's the corners. Why did they grab those? Why did they go in and seek that position, that opportunity? Because the altar represents refuge, safety, cleansing, forgiveness, being freed from the consequences of sin and failure. And this is going to be vindication when these people are used by God because they are prisoners of hope that return to the stronghold as instructed and do what God asks them to do.

They're a bow that does not break. They're an arrow that flies true. They're a sword in the hand of a mighty man that does not shatter.

And they are a sling stone that flies true. This pleases God. This is just like the horns of the altar.

It's acceptability. It is the glory of God. It's the pleasure of God in his own people.

So in verse 16, the Lord, their God will save them in that day as the flock of his people. Of course, you know, the root of that word save is the same one from which you get Yeshua, Joshua. He will save them in that day as the flock of his people, for they shall be like the jewels of a crown.

This is literally stones of a crown, gemstones. They are the gemstones of a crown. What do

those do? They pick up light and reflect it.

Gemstones don't look like anything in the pitch dark. They reflect and refract and become beautiful in the presence of light. So the Lord, their God will deliver them in that day as the flock of his people.

They will be jewels of a crown lifted like a banner over his land. For how great is his goodness and how great is his beauty. Grains shall make the young men thrive and new wine the young women.

You've got a text note there because the pronoun is the same in Hebrew for he and it and possessives. So is it talking about the greatness and the beauty of God or is it talking about the greatness and the beauty of the land? Well, I think it's correct here because of the context. Like the jewels of a crown lifted like a banner over his land.

Land is the immediate referent for these references. So how great is the goodness and how great is the beauty of that land? It is called the beautiful land, Beulah land. And this goes all the way back to the fulfillment of God's promises when he first delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt.

I will take you to a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a beautiful land, a fruitful land. And of course, as a result of being planted like flags on that land, grain will make the young men thrive, new wine the young women. And so we're back to the sons and daughters of Zion, that picture.

We've had both of them mentioned earlier in the context, the rejoicing of the women, the might and prowess of the sons when they are thrown against these greater enemies. And that brings us to chapter 10. This is where we wanted to get because ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain.

And your text note there is good. If you just ask most English speaking people about the former and the latter rain, they would say, well, the former rain is in the spring and the latter rain is in the fall. And that is backwards because of the way the Hebrew calendar works.

The former rain is in the fall and the latter rain is in the spring. So the latter rain is in the April, May timeframe. The former rain comes in the autumn.

So this is not related to the growing season. This is related to the calendar year. And there are crops that are planted in the fall.

Let me read you something here about this from a Jewish source. And we're going to find ourselves back in Deuteronomy to really understand this reference. So many of these references have been taking us back, taking us back, taking us back to Old Testament episodes, Old Testament figures, Old Testament previews that are going to come to their fulfillment when this covenant is fulfilled.

And so ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. Ask the Lord for rain when it's time for the rain. Notice he doesn't say ask the Lord for rain and it'll come whenever you want.

Ask for rain in the time of the latter rain. So the former rain idea, that's the first time that it is seen in the year. And there are crops that are planted and benefit from that rain.

And then there is a later rain. Let me read you a little bit on this. The rains that begin in the fall are known as the yoreh, y-o-r-e-h, or the early rains, since it is the start of the rainy season.

These early rains are reasoned to be glad after a hot, dry summer, and the ground can be broken up ready to work the fields. Toward the springtime, around the time of Passover, Israel will have the latter rains known as the malkosh, m-a-l-k-o-s-h, necessary for the ripening of barley and grain. The word for the former rains, yoreh, y-o-r-e-h, comes from the same root as the word that means to shoot or cast.

To shoot, what do you shoot in Hebrew? Arrows. Shoot, this is the one that's used when you get over there to First Samuel, the vicinity of 19 there where David and Jonathan are trying to meet, and there's this arrow that is shot, and he tells the young man, it's beyond you, come back, and so on. So the former rains come from the same root that means to shoot or cast or teach.

You cast or shoot out this information. So the former rains are metaphorically and grammatically and secondarily, the connotation is that this is a time for the implanting, for preparing the soil for crops, and it's related to teaching. The yoreh rains are sent down to soften up the ground, ready for the first round of planting, and this, you could imagine, would be the ministry of the Holy Spirit to soften our hearts so that we can receive the sincere milk of the word and grow thereby.

This is the good ground that the seed can fall into and sink deep and bring forth its 30-fold, 60-fold, and 100-fold fruit. How susceptible are we to being softened? Softened by the rain, broken up by the plow. So the yoreh rains are sent to soften up the ground, ready for the first round of planting.

God's teaching is compared to the sending of rain in Deuteronomy 32, verse 2. May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass and like showers upon the herb. It's Deuteronomy 32, 2. Teaching, drop like rain. The latter rains, mal'kosh, are much harder rains that would have just caused flooding and devastation if they had come earlier on the dusty, dry ground.

But these latter spring rains are essential for the agricultural cycle also. The Gezer calendar, you may have seen it's one of the earliest Hebrew inscriptions they've ever found, comes from the time of Solomon, tells us that in the January, February time frame, there was a second round of later planting in ancient Israel's agricultural year called the lekesh, L-E-K-E-S-H. The word for these harder, later rains is related to the lekesh.

The latter downpours can more easily penetrate the softer ground and bring forth the second

harvest in the spring. So you plant in the January, February time frame, and then these rains help the barley and grains ripen and come to the point of harvest. The Spirit of God is often connected with water in the Bible, God's provision of water.

Some would see the former rain and latter rain as outpourings of the Holy Spirit, as you have referenced in Joel 2.23, which I already talked about. Another verse that pertains to this is Isaiah 44, verse three, I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground. Remember the devotional book, Streams in the Desert, comes from this verse, 44, three of Isaiah.

I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground. I will pour out my spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants. Notice the reference we just had to the young men and the young women in verse 17 of Zechariah 9, that last verse.

This is the idea, this former and latter rain that starts chapter 10 is directly connected. There's no chapter divisions in the original text. And for some background on this, and the last thing we're going to look at tonight is turn with me over to Deuteronomy chapter 11, Deuteronomy chapter 11.

Deuteronomy, of course, the second delivery of the law by Moses. Therefore, and this, by the way, the reason we're going to Deuteronomy here is we're attempting to answer the question. Okay.

I get what the first half of the chapter was about. I see how the people of God need to deal with the enemies close at hand, allow God to give victory in those places before we get launched like arrows further afield to accomplish God's plan and purpose. We're not ready for solid food until we learn to digest milk, until we can deal with the details of our lives and those things that happen in our own household before we branch out to try to deal with the nation or the house of God and so on.

That all makes good sense. What about this second part of the chapter? What does that mean for us? We see what it means to Israel. It's the new covenant.

It promises them blessing and victory and peace as a result of that victory. What does it mean to us? Well, oddly enough, instead of finding the answer in the new Testament, we find it in the old, and we're here in Deuteronomy 11. Remember, as goes the nation in the old Testament, so goes the individual believer in the new.

So this is what God said to the nation. Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his judgments, and his commandments. Always know today that I do not speak with your children who have not known and who have not seen the chastening of the Lord your God, his greatness and his mighty hand and his outstretched arm, his signs and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and to all his land.

Notice there is a division here between the people who experienced God's judgment on Egypt, and in this case, in Zechariah, God's judgment on his own people. They're still the fathers who

remember this. And we've had this exhortation in Haggai in an earlier part of Zechariah.

Don't forget the lessons of that judgment. Don't forget the point and the purpose. What is the point and the purpose? You shall love the Lord your God, keep his charge, his statutes, his judgments, and his commandments.

Always don't become slack. Don't become indifferent. Don't lose your hope.

I'm not speaking with your children, these sons and daughters that are going to participate in a whole new economy, a whole new kingdom, a whole new paradigm with the outpouring of the spirit in the millennial kingdom. I'm not talking to them. I'm talking to you.

Verse four, what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and their chariots, how he made the waters of the Red Sea overflow them as they pursued you and how the Lord has destroyed them to this day. What he did for you in the wilderness until you came to this place and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the sons of the son of Reuben, the earth opened his mouth and swallowed them up, their households, their tents and all the substance that was in their possession in the midst of all Israel. Remember the sin of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, rebelling against God's authority, God's assignment of who was going to do what.

Therefore, verse eight, you shall keep every commandment which I command you today so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land to which you cross over to possess and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey for the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come where now pay attention. This is where our whole former latter rain comes in. This is our big final point this evening.

Don't miss it. Look at verse 10. The land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come.

What was the land of Egypt like? You sowed your seed and watered it by foot as a vegetable garden. How did crops get grown in Egypt? What's their water source? The Nile. The Nile floods.

It's done it for millennia and they depend on that for their crops, for their fertility, for that top soil to be replenished and renewed. Their source of their water is the Nile. What was the nature of many of the gods that were worshipped in Egypt? They were related to the Nile.

They controlled the Nile. They was the Nile. Gods of the Nile, right? This is God's point.

The land you're going to has no Nile. Look at what he says. Verse 11.

The land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys which drinks water from the rain of heaven. You don't rely for your nurture. What kind of pit were these people delivered from? It's a waterless pit.

Where does the water come from? They were waterless in the Old Testament age. The spirit

was not yet given. Christ was not yet glorified.

When they come back for the millennial kingdom and they actually go and possess this land of hills and valleys, the water doesn't come from a Euphrates River. It doesn't come from a Nile River. They saw the Euphrates in Babylon.

They saw the Nile in Egypt. This land is not like that. This land drinks water from the rain of heaven.

Verse 12. A land for which the Lord your God cares. The eyes of the Lord your God are always on it from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.

Beginning of the year, knock, knock, to the end of the year, former rains, latter rains, beginning of the agricultural year, end of the agricultural year. And it shall be that if you earnestly obey my commandments, which I command you today to love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock that you may eat and be filled.

What did the people of Israel eat, grass or livestock? Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them. The gods of the Nile, the gods of the Euphrates, the gods that say it's the physics that make the difference. It's physical laws.

It's cause and effect. It's science. What does God say? You look to for the source of your water from heaven.

You're going to a land. Remember when he said return to the stronghold, you've been delivered from the waterless pit? Well, but I don't see any visible means of support there. I can't count on the Nile to flood.

I can't count on the Euphrates to always be there. I can't count on irrigation. I can't count on, you know, it all depends on the rain.

Elijah prayed and we didn't have rain. How symbolic is that in first Kings? You start chapter 17 with Elijah. And the first thing you find out about Elijah is when he comes on the scene, there's no rain.

That's Ahab and Jezebel's big problem. No rain. And they don't get rain until Elijah prays because rain comes at God's behest.

What does it say in Hebrews? The field with the rain falling many times on it is either going to bear good crops or it's going to bear thorns and is fit only for burning and is near to a curse. It shall be, verse 13, if you earnestly obey my commandment, which I command you today. And what are those commandments? To love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart

and with all your soul.

I will give you the rain for your land in its season. There's a time when the land needs to lay fallow. There's a time when the seed is going to sit there and germinate, but rain will come when rain is needed.

I will send grass in your fields for your livestock that you may eat and be filled. Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived. You turn aside and serve other gods, lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you and he shut up the heavens so that there be no rain and the land yields no produce and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.

You see why I really prefer the translation in Zechariah, that it's the land that is good. It's the land that the Lord's eyes are on. Therefore, verse 18, you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

Teach them to your children. Remember the verb for rain and for teach is the same. Let this rain enter your soul.

Teach them to your children. Speak in them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise up, write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied, doubled, tripled in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them like the days of the heavens above the earth, infinitely multiplied. For if you carefully keep all these commandments, which I command you to do, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways and to hold fast to him, the Lord will drive out all these nations from before you and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves.

Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even to the Western sea shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand against you. The Lord, your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread.

Just as he has said to you, behold, I said before you today, a blessing and a curse hard to get away from the issue of choice. Choose you this day whom you will serve. Choose you this day what you will trust.

Choose you this day what the final authority in your life is going to be. It was the issue before they ever got into the land because that was potentially the millennial kingdom. There could have been a kingdom with God as its king.

Remember the disappointment God has when they ask Samuel, give us a king. Don't you want a kingdom where God is the king? That's the ultimate. That's what's coming in the millennium.

But time and again, the hearts of the people depart. They are not prisoners of hope. They are

not returning to the stronghold of the shadow of the almighty.

That's our choice as well. We are the people of God. We are presented with this choice.

These things are written for our instruction and it starts in our immediate periphery. It starts with the Philistines. It starts with Hamath and Damascus and those things that are close at hand.

We've got to get those enemies licked in the presence and power of the spirit. We've got to get those former rains that come gently and allow us to plant those first crops. Get those crops in.

Then we're ready for hard times, hard ground and the harder rain and the opportunity to mature those later crops. Those ones that are going to be waved before the Lord, those ones that are going to be a part of Pentecost. There's so much imagery in this that we barely have time to address it, but we'll take a further look at it next time.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the beauty and the power of your word and for the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us understand it, to bring it to our minds, to impress it on our hearts, to help us see its pertinence and application as we think and act in the time that remains to us, in the circumstances that are pressed upon us, as we fight those enemies within and without. We pray that we will bear fruit, that we can abide in the vine, and even as we are prone to bear more fruit, that all will redound to the praise and glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask it in His name. Amen.