

PostExilicProphets 21-10-27a

Greetings, welcome to the Wednesday night class at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're continuing our study in the book of Zechariah, picking up at chapter 10. This is the 27th day of October 2021.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, we are so grateful for the ways and means that you have provided for us to enjoy fellowship with one another, to share together our enthusiasm for your Word and its power in our lives, to equip us for every good work, to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, to prepare us for life both now and in the ages to come. We pray that as we look at this portion together, that your blessing will be on each one of us, that your Holy Spirit will be in evidence and will manifest His divine power to make your Word meaningful and effective in our hearts.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. Zechariah chapter 10, I am so excited to be moving into this new chapter. We began looking at it last time.

We saw the former and latter rain, and the Lord with His flashing clouds, giving showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone. For the idols speak delusion, the diviners envision lies and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd.

My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goat herds. For the Lord of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle. That's about as much as we're going to be able to cover tonight.

It's very pertinent to our time. Obviously, God is talking to the post-exilic returning people of Judah and is reviewing the span of history that got their fathers in trouble and sent into captivity to begin with. But this is so pertinent to our present time that it is almost shocking.

Look at verse 2. We've talked about the former and latter rains. You remember that the former rains come in what is our fall. This is the time of planting and the rain coming to the soil that has been parched and dry for the summertime. They plant in the fall, and the rain prepares the soil and gives nurture to the seed so that it can grow throughout the rainy season that starts in the fall around the time of the fall feasts and extends to and through the spring. The latter rains in the spring, after the plants have germinated and grown and produced the stalk and the leaf and the bud and the ear, whether it's barley or wheat or whatever other crop they have, the spring rains, the latter rains, enables the fruit to come to its full growth and prosperous abundance.

So, planting in the fall, harvest in the spring. This is why you have the Feast of Firstfruits in the spring, because those crops have been growing for the past several months, and you bring in the first of that crop, present the tithe before the Lord, eat in the presence of the Lord, and then the harvest is going to continue thereafter all the way through the next several weeks to Pentecost and so on. So we've talked about that, showers of rain, and notice that the clouds are flashing.

These are thunderstorms. Man and beast alike can be frightened by thunderstorms, but to see the storm as the provision of God, it is under the control of God. It manifests the power of God both to stop and to start the rain.

You have the predicted outcome of those who in the millennial kingdom refuse to come and do obeisance to the kings. On them there will be no rain. We've seen that just recently.

In the days of Ahab, Elijah prayed and there was no rain until Elijah prayed again. So this rain is an important sign of God's favor, and it is withdrawn when God's favor is not in evidence. So in this case, ask the Lord for rain.

You look to God for basic provision. Your Father in heaven, Jesus said, knows what you need. Look at the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they spin. God makes provision.

And most importantly, keep your finger here and turn over to Hebrews chapter 6. Leaving the elementary discussion of the principles of Christ, let us go on to maturity, perfection, not laying again the foundation of change of mind away from dead works and of faith toward God. That's foundational, change of mind away from works that lead to death, that are a part of death, that are fruitless and lifeless. Baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, eternal judgment. This we will do if God permits.

It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit. Now, if you have been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have become a partaker of the Holy Spirit, are you a believer or an unbeliever? You are a believer. Unbelievers are never partakers of the Holy Spirit. They receive a ministry of the Holy Spirit in terms of conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment, but they are not partakers.

Taste of the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come. Notice, enlightenment, heavenly gifting. What's that talking about? What happens at the point of salvation? The Holy Spirit does a minimum of five things. And one of them, in addition to sealing, filling, indwelling, is gifting. Right? Gifting.

Partakers of a heavenly gift. This is believers only. Taste of the good Word of God. You can't taste the good Word of God unless you have the Holy Spirit resident because the carnal mind cannot understand the things of the Spirit. They are spiritually discerned. Very clearly a description of believers.

And the powers of the age to come. Such an interesting phrase. Believers at salvation and at the beginning of growth taste the powers of the age to come. What kind of power is that? We've been talking about this in recent weeks. It is the same power by which the Lord Jesus is going to rule. It is the same power by which we are able to function now and evermore.

Jesus said, "I go, I will send you another comforter. He will be with you always." You're a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and you taste His power.

If they fall away, or if they have fallen away. There's two different text traditions. It doesn't make a real big difference. The idea is falling away.

This is not apostasia, by the way. This is a different phrase, because standing away is what happens at the rapture. Apostasia. That day will not come except there comes first the standing away. And then the man of sin is revealed because what restrains is taken out of the way. That is the Holy Spirit in us and among us.

If they fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to the first step. Change of mind. Back in verse 1, not laying again the foundation of repentance. It's impossible to even get them back to square one. The first thing they learn, change of mind. Why? They crucify again for themselves the Son of God. They go back to the point where, as far as they are concerned, the work of Christ on the cross is not even accomplished. It isn't effectual. It doesn't pertain. And they put Him to an open shame.

Unbelievers cannot put the Lord Jesus to an open shame. Only believers can do that because we bear His name. We represent Him on this earth. We are His body. You cannot shame the Lord Jesus if you are an unbeliever. Put Him to an open shame.

Notice verse 7: for the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it. The rain is for believers. The rain is for the people of God, the former and the latter rain. The earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it and bears herbs that are useful for those by whom it is cultivated receives blessing from God.

The response to the rain is growth and fruit. Growth and fruit. But if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. This is loss at the judgment. Wood, hay, and stubble time. Very clearly, rain being used as provision from God with the expectation that there will be growth and fruit.

The question we have to ask ourselves is, the rain that God has sent upon us as a field, having the implanted Word, thinking about that parable, what kind of soil are we? Is the seed choked out by thorns? Does it fall on stony ground where it springs up with joy, like the people at the Sunday before the crucifixion, greeting Jesus and hailing Him, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and so on? A few days go by, about the same number of days as after they left Egypt and got out into the wilderness and began to complain. Just about that same length of time, the same people are saying, "We have no king but Caesar. Crucify Him. Let His blood be on us and on our children," because we don't really think much of Him.

The rain, grass in the field for everyone. Isn't it interesting, back in Zechariah 10, verse 1, He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone. What does Isaiah 40, verse 8 say? This was one of our memory verses, if you recall. What do we know about grass? What does it do? The grass withers. What does the flower do? It fades. What is it that stands forever? The Word of our God. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God shall stand forever.

So this is not the eternal heavenly kingdom of the Father, is it? Because rain is going to fall and there is going to be grass that springs up as a result. So what age are we talking about? We are talking about the age of millennial bliss, the age of the fulfillment of covenant promise to Israel. Still wonderful, still fulsome, still wonderfully blessed, but impermanent.

Grass. Of all of the descriptions of the new heaven and the new earth that you find in Revelation 21 and 22, that you find in the prophetic passages in the Old Testament, you don't see references to grass. Streets of gold, there are walls of jasper and gemstones, but everything in that kingdom that is mentioned by way of materials is permanent, not fading. Grass fades.

The millennial kingdom has a duration, and then it will come to an end. What happens at the end? What kind of end is foretold in Scripture at the Gog Magog rebellion? How are the enemies of God going to be dealt with? Fire. What does Peter say about the end of this heavens and this earth? Fire. Everything is going to be burned up. The elements are going to melt with a fervent heat. Fire.

The grass of the millennial kingdom will eventually wither and will go up in flames. Wood, hay, stubble. Hay is just long grass, right? So, grass in the field for everyone.

This is a wonderful affirmation. It is a promise. It is a hopeful note that reflects on the earlier part of Zechariah chapter 9, that last half of that. Judah is going to be the bow and Ephraim is going to be the arrow. God is going to blow trumpets. The enemies are going to be dealt with. The people of God are going to be triumphant, and then they are going to enjoy this time of prosperity, of rain and green grass.

You get the idea that it is the beginning part of Psalm 23. The beginning part of Psalm 23. Shepherding of God, still waters, green pastures, restoration of the soul.

But look at the next verse. Grass in the field for everyone, for what is the experience on this earth before the fulfillment of God's kingdom promise to Israel? There are idols. This is teraphim. More about that in a moment. Teraphim.

Diviners envision lies and tell false dreams. They comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd. What is this talking about?

You remember there is a common understanding that idolatry was never again an issue in post-exilic Israel. One thing they learned was never again to go back to the Baals, to the Ashtoreth, to the high places and the groves and the worship of false gods. That seems to have been expunged during the captivity.

So why is God talking about idols here? Specifically, teraphim. Well, there is a fascinating insight into this if we turn back a few pages to Ezekiel. Turn back to Ezekiel chapter 21.

Ezekiel chapter 21. If you notice your superscription in the New King James, it says, "Babylon, the sword of God." Babylon, the sword of God. Where the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem. Preach against the holy places and prophesy against the land of Israel. And say to the land of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord: Behold, I am against you, and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off both righteous and wicked from you.'"

Now this sword that is going to do this cutting is Babylon. It is Nebuchadnezzar. It is the three invasions in 605, 598, and 586.

Skip down to verse 18 of that chapter. The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, "Son of man, appoint for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to go. Both of them shall go from the same land. Make a sign, put it at the head of the road to the city. Appoint a road for the sword to go to Rabbah of the Ammonites and to Judah into fortified Jerusalem."

For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, and he's got a decision to make. Is he going to divert and go to Ammon, or is he going to turn and take the other fork and go to Jerusalem? He is at the fork of two roads, and he's going to use divination. He shakes the arrows. He consults the teraphim. He looks at the liver.

You've heard of this before, people thinking that you can tell the future by getting the innards of some animal or other. Well, these were popular forms of divination in Babylon. And the one in the center there, to use divination, he shakes the arrows. They had some sort of a pickup sticks kind of a thing where they would drop arrows and would interpret the pattern that they formed after they stopped moving on the ground. He consults the teraphim. This was a Babylonian, pagan, godless means of seeking a prediction of the future. Teraphim.

The people of Judah in captivity with Ezekiel for 70 years, Ezekiel and Daniel and the others that are there, watched the Babylonians divine the future, predict the future, seek to know the future by using teraphim for the decades upon decades that they spent there. So when they come back and the prophecy of Zechariah says people are consulting the teraphim, what immediately comes to their mind? That's how the pagans do it. That's how the Babylonians did it.

Later, the Persians, the Medes and the Persians, they started under the Babylonians. Soon they are superseded by the Medes and the Persians. But the Persians do the very same thing. But it began with Nebuchadnezzar, who is rolling the dice, as it were, dropping these arrows and consulting the teraphim. That's what's being spoken of here in Zechariah chapter 10.

The teraphim speak delusion. The authorities that guide the nations, hear me now, the authorities, the godless authorities consult the teraphim to decide their policy. They're divining the future in a godless manner. The diviners envision lies. They envision lies and tell false dreams.

Now, this word for delusion is the word Awen. A-W-E-N. Sounds like Amen, but it's Awen. A-W-E-N. This is the word for sorrow, for trouble. Trouble due to iniquity. Trouble, wickedness, sorrow. This is the primary meaning.

What the teraphim speak, and they only speak when they are consulted. They don't just, you know, you don't have this. They had been household idols. You remember when Rachel left Laban's house and he came looking because she had stolen the teraphim? That's the earliest reference to these.

Households had teraphim because they were good luck charms. They were a source of omen information. Is it a good omen or a bad omen? And you get the idea that maybe Rachel stole these because she didn't want any prediction of where they might go or any help in chasing them down and trying to bring them back. And so she pretends that she's unable to stand up and she's sitting on them in her tent.

That's teraphim and the teraphim on down through the ages. But oftentimes they are used, sometimes it's translated idols, other times it is translated as divination or false gods. But these teraphim are speaking not beneficial predictions. The outcome of their guidance, their suggested policy, their recommendation to the authorities is going to be trouble, sorrow, and further iniquity. That's what Awen means. That comes from the teraphim, godless sources of preternatural, supernatural guidance. They are thought to be so. And in many cases, they are actually, there's demon influence involved.

The diviners, these who claim to be wise, to have supernatural wisdom, they envision, they perceive, they prophesy, they preach lies. And this is sheker, and it's not far from the words for darkness. It's falsehood, lies, and false dreams. These are false dreams that they tell in vain.

See where it says they comfort in vain? In vain they comfort, it says in Hebrew. The word for in vain is our old friend, hevel, H-E-B-E-L or H-E-V-E-L. This, of course, you remember is translated vapor, smoke. And when we went back to Ecclesiastes, "Vanity, vanities, all is vanity," saith the preacher. Hevel.

And sometimes the hevel itself is translated as idol, idols, or vanities. You'll find this in the New American Standard for Deuteronomy 32:21, where God says they are provoking me to anger with their hevels, which by implication is their idols, but it literally is their emptinesses. And it is so translated in 1 Kings 16, the God of Israel has been provoked to anger with their hevels. And it's a near quotation of Deuteronomy.

And you remember in 1 Kings 16, that's right before Elijah appears on the scene in chapter 17. In 2 Kings 17, verse 15, you have the description of the people in Israel who reject God's statutes and His covenant that He made with their fathers and His testimony. This is 2 Kings 17:15.

They're rejecting the covenant that God made with their fathers and His testimonies, which He testified against them. And they followed hevel. They followed vanity. They followed emptiness and became hevelu. They

became empty themselves. Following emptiness, they became empty. Following vanity, they became vain and went after the nations who were all around them.

The danger is that in the days of Haggai and Zechariah, if the people do not get past externalities, building a physical temple without actually honoring the Lord God in their hearts, they're going to be following the nations. All of these other nations have temples to gods. They expend a lot of money and effort and time in building these edifices and these idolatrous systems of worship. And the returning Judahites are in danger of doing the very same thing, of having a hollow form of godliness that denies its power.

We can do the same thing. We can have the trappings. We can have verses on the wall and Bibles on the table and notebooks of notes. And we can have the forms of Christianity. And yet our day-to-day thought life doesn't reflect love for God, love for His Word, cultivation of the Holy Spirit, letting the rain that falls upon us soak in and produce good fruit from the Word instead of thorns and briars.

I want to read you something in this regard as by way of an example of a man who was born in the late 1700s in Ireland and was saved as a young man. And a few years after his salvation, at the age of 17, he went down and went to divinity school in England. His name was Adam Clarke, Clarke with an E, C-L-A-R-K-E. And he eventually wrote what has come to be fondly known as Clarke's Commentary. He completed the work in 1826.

My copy is 1833. As you can see from its well-worn and dilapidated condition, the leather on these boards looks like it's 175 years old, and it pretty much is. But I wanted to read you something because this is the last volume of the Old Testament. This is Jeremiah through Malachi.

And Adam Clarke did not work his way from Genesis through to the Revelation when he did this work. But I want to read you an example of the kind of heart we are talking about. We don't necessarily agree with every aspect of Clarke's theology. He was Methodist. He was a supporter of Wesley and the Wesleyan point of view, which believes in entire sanctification, for example, that you can actually enter into a daily life of sinlessness while you're still here. He makes some pretty good scriptural arguments for it. I just don't believe it.

Anyway, I want to read you the conclusion at the end of his, or excerpts from the conclusion at the end of this volume. And bear with me, because I want to give you a sense of what it is to have a heart that is dedicated to God.

"In my general preface, prefixed to Genesis, page 17 in Roman numerals, I gave a succinct account of the plan I pursued in preparing this work for the press. But as this plan became necessarily extended and led to much further reading, examination, and discussion, I judge it now that the work is concluded to give my readers a general summary of the whole, that they may be in possession of my mode of proceeding and be enabled more fully to comprehend the reasons why the work has been so long in passing through the press.

"My education and habits from early youth led me to read and study the Bible, not as a textbook to confirm the articles of a preconceived creed, but as a revelation from God to man of His will and purposes in reference to the origin and designation of His human offspring, which it was the duty and interest of all the inhabitants of the earth deeply to study and earnestly to endeavor to understand, as it concerned their peace and happiness and the perfection of their being in reference to both worlds, conscious that translators in general must have had a particular creed in reference to which they would normally and naturally consider every text, and this reference, however honestly intended, might lead them to glosses not always fairly deducible from the original words."

In other words, I don't trust that my translation before me doesn't necessarily have an undue influence of the beliefs of the translator.

"I sat down with a heart as free from bias and sectarian feeling as possible, carefully read over, cautiously weighed, and literally translated every word, Hebrew and Chaldean, that's Hebrew and Aramaic, in the Old Testament. And as I saw that it was possible, even while assisted by the best translations and best lexicographers, to mistake the import of a Hebrew term, and considering that the cognate Asiatic languages would be helps of great importance in such an inquiry, I collated every verse, where I was apprehensive of any difficulty, with the Chaldean, Syriac, Arabic, and Persian, and the Ethiopic in the polyglot translation as far as the sacred writings are extant in these languages. And I did this with a constant reference to the various readings collected by," and then he names five or six individuals, "and to the best editions of the Septuagint and Vulgate, which are the earliest translations of Hebrew texts, which have reached our times."

Adam Clarke was not seminary trained in the sense of getting an advanced education, but he taught himself 10 languages so that he could consult these versions and references for himself and not take anybody's word for it.

“Nor have I been satisfied with these collections of various readings. I have examined and collated several ancient Hebrew manuscripts which preceding scholars had never seen, along with many ancient manuscripts of the Vulgate, equally unknown to biblical critics. This work required much time and great pains, necessarily occasioned much delay, and no wonder, when I have often on my plan been obliged to employ as much time in visiting many sources, and sailing down their streams, in order to ascertain a genuine reading, or fix the sense of a disputed verse, as would have been sufficient for some of my contemporaries to pass whole sheets of their work through the press. Had I not followed this method, which to me appeared absolutely necessary, I should have completed my work such as it would have been in less than half the time.”

And he goes on to say that he began doing the books of Moses along with Joshua and Judges. That was the first volume that he finished. And when he finished that, he thought, well, the rest of the Old Testament is going to be too daunting. I would like to get to the New Testament.

So then he went on to do the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. “As these two parcels of divine revelation carefully illustrated would give a full view of the origin and final settlement of the Church of the Old Covenant, and the commencement and completion of that of the New. Thus I proceeded. After having literally translated every word of the New Testament, that last best gift of God to man, comparing the whole with all the ancient versions, and the most important of the modern, collating all with various readings collected by Stephens, Curcellæus, Fell, Gerard of Maestricht, Bengel, Mill, Wettstein, and Griesbach, actually examining many manuscripts either cursorily or not at all examined by them, illustrating the whole by quotations from ancient authors, rabbinical, Grecian, Roman, and Asiatic, I exceeded my previous design and brought down the work to the end of the apocalypse and passed the whole through the press.”

So he was going to just do the Gospels and Acts, ended up going the entire New Testament. Then he goes on for several paragraphs to say that he was encouraged, even though he was in ill health, to go back and do the Old Testament, which he finally did.

“So, thus through the merciful help of God, my labor in this field terminates, a labor which were it yet to commence, with the knowledge I now have of its difficulty, and my inadequate means, millions even of the gold of Ophir, and all the honors that can come from man, could not induce me to undertake it. If I knew what it was going to involve when I started, nothing would have been sufficient to make me do it. Now that it is finished, I regret not the labor. I have had the testimony of many learned, pious, and judicious friends relative to the execution and usefulness of the work. It has been admitted into the very highest ranks in society and is lodged in the cottages of the poor. It has been the means of doing good to the simple of heart and the wise man and the scribe, the learned, and the philosopher, according to their own generous acknowledgments, and they have not consulted its pages in vain. For these and all His other mercies to the writer and reader, may God, the fountain of all good, be eternally praised.”

Let me just read one other thing.

“In this arduous labor, I have had no assistance, not even a single week's help from an amanuensis, no person to look for commonplaces or refer to an ancient author, to find out the place and transcribe a passage of Greek, Latin, or any other language, which my memory had generally recalled, or to verify a quotation. I have labored alone for nearly twenty-five years previously to the work being sent to press, and fifteen years have employed in bringing it through the press to the public. Thus, about forty years of my life have been consumed, and from this the reader will at once perceive that the work, well or ill executed, has not been done in a careless or precipitate manner, nor have any means within my reach been neglected to make it in every respect, as far as possible, what the title page promises, a help to a better understanding of the sacred writings.”

That is a dedicated man. He saw an opportunity that was within his abilities. He saw a need for a commentary that the common man could access and benefit from. And despite also preaching as an itinerant Wesleyan Methodist preacher and being president of several societies and publishing other works, he put forty years of daily work into this commentary because of his esteem for the Word of God and his desire that it be understood rightly.

It is an example to me of the dedication that each of us can have and should have in our particular area of gifting, in our particular area of assigned service and opportunity and potential. The same Holy Spirit, the same

Word of God is available to us all. The question is, how much do we value the former rain? How much do we look forward to the latter rain? What happens to the rain when it falls upon us? What kind of produce emerges from our soil? Is it the kind of growth that can withstand pressure, that when the sun comes up, it doesn't wither away, as we saw on Sunday with the parable of the soils, that it takes deep root and it produces lasting fruit, fruit that redounds to the praise and glory of God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, both now and in the ages to come.

From 1826 to 2026 is almost 200 years, and in that time, there has not been a day go by that there haven't been hundreds of people accessing, reading, and benefiting from the work that Adam Clarke did in his commentary. I always consult it on every passage. I don't often use much of the insight there, but I always consult it because he had the right attitude. He valued the Scripture. He compared Scripture with Scripture. He did his very best to understand each and every word.

The man translated personally every single word of the Old and New Testament to the best of his understanding with what was available to him at the time. Hopefully, we can be similarly dedicated and similarly used by God to be a blessing in our assigned corner of God's great field, God's great building.

Let's pause here and take a break. When we come back, we're going to pick up in Zechariah 10 and see what God has to say about accessing what diviners say and what the teraphim predict and what it means for us in this day and this time.