Zechariah: The Lord Remembers
Ron Keller
Week 2

**Horsemen Among the Myrtle Trees**
*Zechariah 1:7-17*

Zechariah was a motivational prophet of hope for the Jewish people who had returned from Babylon to rebuild the destroyed temple; the Jews were enthusiastic at first; within 7 months of arriving in the ruins of Jerusalem they had built the brazen altar of the temple and began offering sacrifices to God; at the beginning of their 2nd year (534 BC) they began to rebuild the temple; they finished the foundation of the temple when work came to a halt for 16 years as Samaritans in the land disrupted the work.

There was not much enthusiasm for the temple project as the people were more interested in embellishing their houses so God raised up Haggai who told the people to get their priorities right (Haggai 1:1-11); his message caused a revival among the people.

Then God raised up Zechariah (520 BC), a contemporary of Haggai to keep the people motivated; he called for them to repent, to return to the Lord and the Lord would return to them (Zechariah 1:3); he told them to learn from their forefathers who refused to listen to the prophets and ended up in captivity (1:4-6a); the people did repent for they did not want to end up as did their fathers (1:6).

Zechariah then receives 8 visions which were given to him by an angel “with good and comforting words…” (1:13); these visions were to encourage the people that God was with them in this project for He is “jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal” (1:14); he assures them the temple would be completed.

The first vision: The comfort of God from myrtle trees and horses.

**The Perplexity of the Prophet (1:7-11)**
The day of the visions… (1:7)... It was on the 24th day of the 11th month which was Shebat of the second year of king Darius (520 BC) that all eight visions came to Zechariah at once-- one after the other.

It was the 24th day that would get Zechariah’s attention; day 24 is associated with God’s blessings in connection with the rebuilding of the temple (see Haggai 1:15; 2:18-23); it was on the 24th day that Zechariah receives these 8 visions of comfort from the Lord; the date of the month got his attention.

The difference between a vision and a dream, a vision is given when one is awake, a dream when one is asleep.

The discovery from the vision (1:8-11)...There is a man on a red horse and behind him are horseman on three different colored horses: one is red (war Revelation 6:4), one is sorrel or speckled colored (God’s judgment mingled with His mercy), one is white (victory, Revelation 6:2;19:11,14).

The horses with their riders were stationed among the myrtle trees, a bush with star shaped flowers; when its shiny green leaves are bruised they let forth a wonderful smelling fragrance; it depicts the nation of Israel.

These myrtle trees are in “the hallow”, the lowest place outside of Jerusalem where the Kidron Valley and the Valley of Hinnom meet; even today this low spot is called “the Hallow.”

This speaks of Israel’s lowliness and suffering as well as the baseness of her present position in the world; if these myrtle trees could speak they would wonder if the city of Jerusalem would ever be rebuilt; then standing in the midst of the myrtle trees is an angelic army, led by the commander, the Lord Jesus Christ; they are ready for battle; it’s going to be bloody as depicted by the red horse; it’s going to reveal God’s judgment on Israel’s enemies and show mercy to Israel as depicted by the sorrel horse; it going to bring victory for Israel as depicted by the white horse; Israel has many enemies in the world today but she is a nation that is here to the end (Amos 9:14-15).

Zechariah sees that these horseman have been on a surveillance mission (1:11b); the Lord is upset because there is relative peace and calm over the earth. Why is He upset? Why is He ready to unleash these horses on the earth and bring war?
The Passion of God for Jerusalem and His People (1:12-15)

What are the reasons for God’s anger at the nations when the world is at ease?

Jerusalem is in ruins and the world does not care... “I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal” (1:14a); today if the Jews were taken captive or Israel was to be blown into the Mediterranean most of the world would rejoice; Israel is different from other nations is that God choose them as His covenant people and did so as a sovereign act of His love (Deuteronomy 7:6-9).

There are at least 7 reasons why God chose the Jews:

1. God needed a nation who would proclaim the true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:21).
2. God needed a nation through whom He could reveal the Messiah (Genesis 12:3).
3. God needed a nation through whom a priesthood could be established so man would know how to contact God (Exodus 19: 5-6).
4. God needed a nation to transmit and to preserve Scripture ( Deuteronomy 4-6).
5. God needed a nation to show His grace and forgiveness in dealing with sin (Micah 7:18-20).
6. God needed a nation that could show the world that He is faithful to fulfill His Word (Lamentations 3:22-26).
7. God needed a nation to show His anger in dealing with unrepentant sin (Leviticus 26:14-39; Deuteronomy 28:37,64)

Israel has proven to be an unfaithful wife, but God still loves her and is jealous for her (Hosea 1-3); now we look at God’s second reason for anger.

Israel has been in bondage for 70 years and the world does not care .... “I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; for I was a little angry, and they helped---but with evil intent” (1:15); when the angelic riders returned from going to and fro over
the earth they said, “all the earth is resting quietly” (1:11); there were the Babylonians and before that the Assyrians who held Israel in bondage but the world didn’t care; this peace was one of inhumanity, of indifference to the people whom God chose as His mouthpiece and witness to the world; no one came to israel’s defence or utter a word of disapproval for enslaving God’s covenant people.

The world has not changed toward Israel; while the world is not at ease as Zechariah spoke, yet it distains the tiny nation of Israel; Anti-Semitism is rampant; the Arab Middle East wants to wipe it off the earth; according to Dennis Prager, a leftist magazine lists all the nations of the world and omits Israel; he says the “universities are the anti-Israel mainstream institutions in America;” one-third of 10,000 people interviewed by the Anti-Defamation League in 2014 denied the Holocaust ever happened; our government does not recognize Jerusalem as part of Israel; the World Council Against Racism declared “Zionism is a form of racism;” in 2011 American Express stopped doing business in Israel; in 2014 Harper Collins World Atlas left out naming Israel as a nation for the benefit of Middle Eastern school children; Anti-Semitism is such a problem in Europe that Prime minister Netanyahu called for Jews in Europe to come to Israel where they will be protected.

The causes of Anti-Semitism according to Jewish talk-show host Michael Medved:

1. The emphasis on the “chosen people” concept in the Bible.

2. The prominence and prosperity of Jews in most nations where they have established significant communities.

3. The startling success of the nation of Israel since it became a nation in 1948.

According to Jewish talk-show host Dennis Prager the values set forth in the Ten Commandments contribute to Anti-Semitism.

There are other reasons: Church fathers like Justin Martyr (100-165), Tertullian (155-230), Chrysostom (347-407) claimed that God’s covenant with Israel was no longer valid and that the Gentile Church replaced Israel; furthermore, the Jews were “Christ killers;” in 1095 AD Pope Urban led a million soldiers against Jerusalem killing thousands of Jews and Muslims.
In the Middle Ages the Church taught that God has no future purpose for the Jew; this led to the Crusades, the Inquisition, passion plays, being falsely accused of the black plague epidemic, and blood libels where Jews were accused of killing Gentile babies and drinking their blood at Passover.

Martin Luther wrote a pamphlet entitled Concerning the Jews and Their Lies where he literally dehumanized the Jewish people; Hitler wrote Mein Kamph where he referred to Luther as “a great warrior, a true statesmen, a great reformer” and then launched the Holocaust saying he was doing the will of Almighty God.

Today Replacement Theology is the prevalent teaching of Roman Catholicism and liberal mainline Protestant Churches; yet Paul said God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew (Romans 11:1-2).

The Church must take some responsibility for the present day Anti-Semitism; God is exceedingly jealous for His people and “exceedingly angry with the nations at ease.”

The Promise to Rebuild Jerusalem (1:16-17)

The return of the Lord to the temple (1:16a)... Though this temple was not as beautiful and magnificent as Solomon’s temple yet its glory will be greater for the Messiah will teach in this temple (Haggai 2:9).

The restoration of the temple (1:16b)... The temple was completed four years after Zechariah’s prophecy in 516 BC.

The reconstruction of Jerusalem (1:16c-17a)... The city will overflow its walls and was completed around 396 BC; today modern Jerusalem is overflowing the walls of that ancient city; the walls and much of the city was completed under Nehemiah who came some 80 years after Zechariah to govern Jerusalem and rebuild the walls (444-432); the walls were finished 52 days after he arrived (Nehemiah 6:15).

The reassurance of the people (1:17b)... Within 124 years everything Zechariah wrote concerning the temple and the city came true; our God is a faithful God; when He makes a covenant with His people He honors His word.
The Church has a covenant with God called the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15-28); just as God is jealous over Jerusalem (1:14) He is also jealous for the Church (2 Corinthians 11:2).

The vision of the horsemen among the myrtle trees is a picture of God’s love and protection for His covenant people; even when discouraging times come He does not want us to quit for He will not quit on us; if God is jealous for Jerusalem how much more should that be true for His Church to whom He has given a new and better covenant. Amen!