

The Man Among the Myrtle Trees

Jeff Rogers / Lamplighter Bible Study

Zechariah 1:7-17

Philippians 1:6, *He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

- Life in Jerusalem: not joyous — difficult, mundane, survival-level yields, a backwater province, irrelevant to world history. God seemed absent, powerless, uncaring.
- Into this context, Zechariah receives eight visions in one night. Stephen Coleman writes about these visions, “...this highly symbolic world serves as a powerful reminder that there is more going on in Heaven and earth than we could ever possibly understand. Though unfamiliar, bizarre, fantastic, and symbolic, what the prophet sees is at the same time familiar, meaningful, and significant for the postexilic community. In these visions it is as if the veil separating the spiritual world from the physical has been pulled back so that the prophet (and we along with him) may behold the spiritual realities at work in this world—realities at work in the prophet’s day, in our day, and in the days to come.”
- As Zechariah is chasing the message, so will we, but not every detail. These are pictures (visions) with a point and not a coded newspaper. The guardrail we will respect is the interpreting angel to whom he asks, “What are these, my Lord?”
- The opening vision sets the stage for the subsequent visions by serving as God’s answer to his people’s lingering question and deepest fear: Does God know about the struggles, burdens, and anxieties we bear day in and day out? And, if He knows, does He care? And if He cares, will He do something about it?
- These questions are not limited to the people of Zechariah’s day. Christians of every age at times have been haunted, if not crippled, by these questions. Zechariah is framed by one line: God is not finished! Hold Philippians 1:6 in your mind; we will end on that verse.

I. What is the Meaning of the Horsemen? (Zech 1:8-10)

A. The scene of the vision set:

1. A man riding a “red” horse (not a barnyard red, but a common chestnut brown for horses)
2. Standing among myrtle trees (evergreen trees implying cover) in the glen.
3. A number of horsemen behind him (1:8,10b).

B. The relevance of the scene to the day.

1. The Persian Empire had a vast system of couriers to relay information to the King. It is said in Herodotus, *Histories*, “There is nothing mortal that is faster than the system the Persians have devised for sending messages. Apparently, they have horses and men posted at intervals along the route, the same number in total as the overall length in days of the journey, with a fresh horse and rider for every day of travel. Whatever the conditions—it may be snowing, raining, blazing hot, or dark—they never fail to complete their assigned journey in the fastest possible time.”
2. The community in Jerusalem would have been familiar with Persia’s horsemen. They knew the Persian king had eyes and ears everywhere.

C. The comfort of the vision

1. This was a comforting message for the postexilic community as they wrestled with significant questions: Does Yahweh see? Does Yahweh know? Does Yahweh hear? Is our God aware of our suffering? Does God know the hardships we endure? This vision answered those questions with a resounding, YES!
2. God does not “accidentally” come into this information about the state of the world; the Lord sent these horsemen to patrol the earth (**Zech 1:10**). Nothing escapes God’s “radar.”
3. Our God, who is Sovereign over the whole world, knows our suffering. The horsemen are a message of comfort, but they also come bearing a message.
4. God “sees” and that is more than the remnant believed!

II. What is the Message of the Horsemen? (Zech 1:11)

- A. A message of peace and rest? But for whom? At what cost? Under whose kingship?
 - B. This announced peace was under the kingship of Darius and was far from good news for the Jews in
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Jerusalem.

- C. Calvin called this an “accursed happiness.” The earth was at rest in wickedness, not righteousness.
 - 1. This is the oldest ache in the believer’s heart: the people who don’t care about God appear to be doing fine, and the faithful are the ones struggling.
 - 2. Turn to **Psalm 73:1-3**. Asaph knows the reality of **verse 1**, yet is honest in his self-assessment in **verses 2-3**. “*Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.*” (**Psa 73:12**)
 - 3. Turn to **Malachi 3:15**. *And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evil-doers not only prosper, but they put God to the test, and they escape.*
 - 4. Turn to **Psalm 73:17** to see the resolution. “*Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.*”
- D. The invitation to long for and pray for God’s kingdom, “*O Lord of hosts, how long...?*” (**1:12**). In the New Testament, we are encouraged to pray, “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” (**Matthew 6:10**)

III. What is the Angel’s Lament? (Zech 1:12)

- A. The lament of **verse 12** echoes throughout the psalms of lament (Turn to **Psalm 13:1-2**)
- B. The identity of the Angel of the Lord (appears throughout the OT, as messenger of God and speaking as God)
 - 1. Appeared to Hagar and spoke to her (**Genesis 16:10,13**)
 - 2. Appeared to Moses and spoke to him (**Exodus 3:4**)
 - 3. Appeared to Joshua and spoke to him (**Joshua 5:14**)
 - 4. Most theologians conclude this is a visible manifestation of the preincarnate Son of God. From **Mark 1:9-11** and Jesus’ baptism to the garden and His high priestly prayer in **John 17** and on the cross (**Luke 23:34**), Jesus as the Son of God stands praying for those who know Him.
 - a) It is the Son of God who intercedes on our behalf before the Father.

IV. What is the Lord’s Gracious Response (Zech 1:13-17)

- A. We are not told specific words, but given the character of the words: “gracious and comforting” (**1:13**).
 - 1. God speaks to those who are said to be “cursed...” (**Genesis 3:14**)
 - 2. God speaks grace and comfort.
- B. What Zechariah is instructed: Cry out! (**1:14-15**)
 - 1. Jealous for Jerusalem and, by implication, the postexilic community (**1:14**).
 - 2. Angry with the nations that are at ease (**1:15**)
- C. God’s disclosures of comfort:
 - 1. The nations were raised up as God’s sword and arrow of judgment. Israel was to see these actions as God’s righteous anger against His people for their sin and rebellion.
 - a) Assyria (**Isaiah 10:5**)
 - b) Nebuchadnezzar (**Jeremiah 27:6**)
 - 2. These nations exceeded God’s intended judgment on His people (Zech 1:15) and God would hold them accountable.
 - a) Similarly, God would not excuse the cruelty and brutality of the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:23)
 - b) What God has torn down in judgment, He will rebuild in mercy (Zech 1:16)
 - c) Jerusalem will be rebuilt and will overflow with prosperity. (Zech 1:17)

V. The God Who is Not Finished

- A. Does He see? Yes, He sent the patrol (**1:10**).
- B. Does He care? Yes, He is jealous and angry for His people (**1:14**)
- C. Will He act on our behalf? Yes, “*I have returned...with mercy*” (**1:16**). The measuring line is out!
 - 1. The rebuilt Jerusalem would not be the end; God, who returned in mercy, would send His Son.
 - 2. Our work is not to “try harder.” Our aim is to rest in His unfailing promises, knowing He sees, feels, intercedes, and finishes His work.
 - 3. Stalls in our life are not abandonment (**Philippians 1:6**)
 - 4. Worship the One who sees, cares, acts, and is not finished.