

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 7, Chapter 3 and 4

We'll continue today in the ultra-complex Book of Zechariah by finishing up chapter 3, and then moving briefly into chapter 4, with still 10 more chapters to go after that in the coming weeks and months. If you can survive this Zechariah study, then you will certainly have proved to me your merit as a serious Bible student! It really doesn't get much tougher, but neither does it get more informative about the End Times, than with Zechariah's prophecies.

As we'll see better when we do open chapter 4 later today, these 2 chapters together deal with those 2 men whom God has put in place to govern the people (mostly Judeans) who live in the Persian province of Yehud, the former Judah. Chapter 3, then, deals with the office of the High Priest, who is at this time manned by Joshua. I'll tell you in advance: don't expect to thoroughly understand all the symbolism as we go along. The reality is that the bigger picture only begins to come into sharper focus as each vision/oracle builds upon the one before it, and then we reach the climax in chapter 14.

The person of Joshua in this prophecy essentially both portrays himself as a person, as well as a representative of the office of High Priest including the various offices of the entire priesthood institution in all its facets, and symbolically he even encompasses the whole of Israel. Because we understand that prophecy works in a way of having multiple fulfillments of the same prophecy occurring in different eras... first a near-term one that is limited to the current matters facing the people in that Prophet's era... and then later, a second fulfillment that occurs under different circumstances... and very often, a third fulfillment well into the future that is universal in its scope and affect... then that is how we are to understand what we are reading in Zechariah chapter 3. Therefore, in its most immediate and focused scope, this is indeed about the current High Priest, Joshua. Later another fulfillment will expand the scope to include whomever happens to be the High Priest at that time plus the entire institution of the priesthood, and then finally at some far-future time the prophetic scope expands to its ultimate, which involves the people of Israel in general. Even so, what makes these vision/oracles God is giving to Zechariah so difficult is that it is plain to Zechariah that while part of the prophetic word

can be applied immediately and it addresses current circumstances that he knows and understands, other parts of the same prophecy would be impossible to happen until sometime later when some other set of circumstances arise that certainly aren't presently evident to him. And, Zechariah is given no hint as to exactly what those new circumstances will look like, nor just how far into the future it will happen. It doesn't help us very much who are studying his book, either, since plainly some of what Zechariah was given by Yehoveh to tell others about is still future to us in the 21st century and so mentally imaging how this all plays out is all but impossible.

Understanding Zechariah's complex symbolism (it feels like we're trying to put together a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle but with a few random pieces missing) revolves around understanding the actual historical circumstances of his time, and what the many idioms and expressions he uses meant to the Jews of his day. It also is that the symbols themselves have to be taken in the context of what they meant to the Jewish people of his day because often the imagined symbols had a very particular meaning that applied only to a very narrow slice of time, but not in earlier or later times when those same symbols were imagined in different ways and carried different meanings. And, I'll caution yet again that nothing that we'll read has much of a correspondence to any concrete object of the 21st, or even the 20th centuries A.D., and especially nothing familiar to modern Western culture. Thus, we'll run across some symbols and phrases that we have little real idea of what was actually meant at that time, and sometimes we have to make educated guesses while being humble enough to admit up front that we might have it wrong.

Let's re-read the final few verses of Zechariah chapter 3.

RE-READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 3:6 – end

As we discussed in the previous lesson, verses 6 and 7 are warnings from God. The warning is that the Priesthood (and by extension, all Israel) is to obey Him in every facet of life or risk finding themselves once again facing God's wrath. Recall that the Judeans listening to this oracle, priests and laymen, had only recently returned from exile in Babylon for what they knew was the rebelliousness of their ancestors. While over time their conditions in Babylon

improved somewhat, especially for the first several years the Judeans were but miserable captives with no hope. The more zealous of the Judeans who did return 70 years later of course wanted to be acceptable to God, but they had been infected with Mesopotamian culture and beliefs, so it was going to take a concerted effort by the priesthood to not only reform their institution and themselves, but also to retrain these Judeans in the ways of the Torah. This sort of thing doesn't happen overnight or even in a few years. Even so, it is vital that we grasp that the earliest foundations of a Synagogue-based Judaism and their associated doctrines and traditions that had never existed prior to their exile had sprouted up in Babylon (well before the words synagogue and Judaism were ever coined), which had the effect of only further muddying the proper worship of God and adherence to the spirit of His laws and commands.

That situation for the Judeans was very much as we see things happening in modern times. While there was a core of truth in what was believed and practiced by those ancient Judeans, it had become corrupted with paganism and manmade doctrines for so many decades that even the priests had unconsciously developed and accepted some wrong ideas...doctrines... which they sincerely thought were right. Today, we find Judeo-Christianity in a similar situation. The Hebrew Roots movement has sprung up because of the growing recognition of our dilemma as Believers. So, in an attempt to revive the Scriptural truth as compared to what has been erroneously taught and practiced within Christianity for far too long, such that some of the basic Church doctrines are so ingrained that they are taken for granted and haven't been challenged for centuries to determine their authenticity, the Hebrew Roots movement seeks to break out of that mold and our best to return to the purer ways that look more like how it was when Yeshua roamed the Holy Land. And, it's not as though the Hebrew Roots movement has everything correct in what we teach; we, too, have been subjected to corrupted teachings and thoughts and so we can unknowingly get off on the wrong track at times. The only remedy... whether for Jew or gentile... is for us as the body of Believers and followers of Yeshua to start over again, beginning with Genesis, and allowing God's Word to speak for itself with the least intrusion possible caused by our own thoughts, and built-in filters, and memories of perhaps some cherished traditions we grew up under.

After the prophetic warning of verses 6 and 7, a stern command is issued to Joshua and to his colleagues in verse 8.

CJB Zechariah 3:8 *Listen, cohen gadol Y'hoshua, both you and your colleagues seated here before you, because these men are a sign that I am going to bring my servant Tzemach [Sprout].*

In this verse God is singling out the entire priesthood that He has put into a special role with much expanded areas of authority than what they had in earlier times. This expanded role has come about because of the noticeably different circumstances under which they lived and operated. When we read of them (meaning the regular priests) all being seated before Joshua, it means sitting in the sense of being selected to hold down certain official offices, tasks, and positions. It would be like saying "those who sit in judgment" as meaning a jury or a judge who is officially tasked to make judicial determinations. So, the idea is that these priests have not only their historical authority, but an even greater authority given to them by the Persians, and they are to understand this has happened as God's will and so they should not shy away from exercising it.

The next few words of this verse have been called "very difficult" by language scholars (and that is an understatement), and so we'll find it translated a number of ways. The CJB interprets the words as "because these men are a sign". The KJV says "for they are men wondered at". The YLT says "for men of type are they". I think the RSV uses words that are closer to how we're able to understand it in the sense it was meant, at least for modern Western ears: "for they are men of good omen". The Hebrew word the translators of these various Bible versions are stumbling over is **mopet**. **Mopet** is used in a few places in Scripture and it most usually means signs, omens or portents. All of these meanings essentially indicate a forewarning of something that is good or evil. So, that being the case, then the idea is that these priests sitting before Joshua are a prophetic sign or omen of the coming of someone future to them. That is, the actions, authority, and the character of the priesthood as being of God's will is (in this unusual case) a portent of the coming of someone called **Tzemach**... the Shoot or Sprout or the Branch. I think the validation for this as

the correct interpretation of those difficult words is strengthened when the next few more words are "I (Yehoveh) will bring forth". That is, just as the existence... even the re-institution... of the priesthood was a sign of an act of God's will (because otherwise it seems so unlikely to have happened), so will be the coming of the Shoot or Branch that is unlikely to happen in any natural way, but Yehoveh says that "I" will make it happen.

This term, either ***tzemach*** in Hebrew or perhaps it sounds more like ***semah***, is an agricultural word. It speaks about the first growth of a tree, a vine, or a field crop... although it could include the newest or latest growth of a plant that regenerates year after year. Some Bible versions translate it as "rod". Interestingly the Jewish Targum and the Syriac Bible take it to mean "shining". Nonetheless, however we decide to nuance the term ***tzemach***, it is agricultural in its nature and it is used in prophecy as a metaphor to speak of a future king. What I just said might leave us with much doubt about who this branch is, but fortunately we find the same term used in Isaiah 4, and in Jeremiah chapters 23 and 33, which speak of a future monarch over Israel that comes from the dynasty of David. Christianity takes this as referring to a Messiah, and it seems to me that this is correct as the idea of Yeshua being a Davidic king coming about in the End Times is well laid out especially in the New Testament.

On the other hand, because of the way biblical prophecies typically operate, let's look at this the way Zechariah would have understood it. If you recall what I mentioned earlier in this lesson that when prophecies are fulfilled, it usually happens 2 or 3 times, with the first time being immediate and occurring within the specific context of the period that the Prophet who gave the prophecy was living. It is so very important for us to grasp this, because in years past so many very good Bible scholars have failed to recognize that 1) prophecies are nearly always fulfilled at least twice, and often 3 times (or more), in different circumstances and eras, and 2) that whatever the political and societal setting was at the moment those prophecies were originally written, that was how the Prophet understood them and how the first fulfillment would play out. Therefore, if we can look at the symbols and meanings in that light, then it will go far towards explaining how we modern Bible students are to understand them. That said, sometimes those meanings

are so obscure and lost to history that we may never know some of them with any confidence.

So, I am going to explain how I see these various symbols and their meanings, and do it according to their immediate historical setting, based on what was happening at the time. And, as we have also discussed, what was happening at that time is all wrapped in these returning exiles coming home to a whole new set of realities. Chief among these was that while it may have been their former homeland (Judah), now it is Persian land under a Persian government, and the place is now called Yehud. Further, even though the priesthood and the Temple are being revived, one of the most important historical elements of that Temple's legitimate existence was its pairing with an Israelite King. And currently there was not one and nothing was on the horizon that even hinted that someday in any discernable future might there might be. It's hard for me to find the words or an analogy to help you picture just how weird and unsettling this was for the returned Jews, and how confused and conflicted these circumstances made them feel, as they were especially sensitive and aware that they didn't want to upset God.

So, here is one way to think about it. Imagine if somehow in the USA, we were invaded and captured by a cruel foreign enemy. But then, some years later the Catholic Church stepped forward with a huge coalition force that they somehow assembled, and they defeated our captors, and then in an enlightened and merciful way said that we can re-establish our government, and our most prized institutions, and these can be run by Americans. However, we won't be fully independent. The Pope in Rome will be our ultimate government authority, and an American-born Catholic Archbishop selected by the Pope will rule over us instead of President elected by the people. This Bishop will sit in the White House Oval Office of this renamed country that is now called the Holy Romerican Union. Weird. How might we all feel no matter how well-intentioned the ruling Archbishop and Pope are? Probably better than in our previous situation as captives, but somehow being ruled over by a Catholic Bishop just isn't the same as a traditional secular politician being selected by the American people. So, we of course would have mixed and conflicted emotions about it all that keep us uneasy, but also not

sure if this was God doing something for us... or was it against us? The Judeans faced a similar dilemma.

Thus, for the returned exiles, there were reasons to be concerned. Was the Temple going to be legitimate since it was not directly associated (as it always had been) with an Israelite monarch? Was the priesthood legitimate since the High Priest was chosen and given his position by a Persian King? How, exactly, ought the Judeans consider Zerubbabel, their governor? As just a willing Persian puppet, or as a God-provided Jew from the line of David, who at least would have Jewish interests in mind? This background, then, says that Zechariah would have expected that Zerubbabel was that *tzemach*... that shoot or branch of David... and the reason God gave this prophecy to Zechariah was so that the people would not doubt that Zerubbabel was indeed God's will and choice for their good, and not as punishment. And, because Zerubbabel was from the dynasty of David, then it gave the people some hope (no matter how faint) that perhaps in some way not currently visible, he might escape Persian control and become an independent Israelite King over them. So, this strange situation winds up with a resolution endorsed by a recognized Prophet and now the people can rest easier knowing that what is happening regarding Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the Temple reconstruction is God's will and plan... and it was a positive development... even if it looked so very different from how things had ever been.

Beyond any understanding that Zechariah could have had is the End Times event that would also come about as a result of this prophecy. Two things: 1) always remember that in God's economy, when He determines it is time to give His plan and purpose to a Prophet, once that Prophet announces the prophetic oracle, that is the energy that puts its fulfillment into motion. Once announced, it is written in stone and actual movement towards its fulfillment gets underway. The Prophet, then, is not a bystander or merely a passive messenger. His words *are* the energy and impetus to get that now unstoppable prophetic ball rolling. 2) I've always opined that our problem with understanding prophecy, and then not recognizing it when it happens, is that we never take it literally enough. So, in the current case, while Joshua is the name of the High Priest in the days of Zechariah... and he is from Tzadok's dynastic line... and so it well fits with the prophecy itself, it should not go

unnoticed that the End Times fulfillment of this same prophecy also involves a person of that same name and from the same ancestral root. Joshua and Yeshua are exactly the same name. Joshua is an English name, not Hebrew, because Hebrew has no "J" sound. So, in Hebrew it sounds closer to Yoshua not Joshua. And Yoshua and Yeshua are the same name and in Hebrew essentially vocalized the same. So, imagine: we could just as easily strike out the name Joshua in our Bibles, and insert Yeshua. That is, the name of the High Priest at the time of Zechariah was Yeshua; but the English translations obscure this reality especially when they insist on calling the New Testament Yeshua, Jesus. The literalness of the prophecy for its fulfillment in both Zechariah's time and then in the End Times, even as it comes down to the name of the person involved, is amazing.

Verse 9 is yet another series of words that are extremely challenging to untangle. It revolves around the ambiguous word "stone".

CJB Zechariah 3:9 For look at the stone I have put in front of Y'hoshua: on one stone are seven eyes; I will engrave what is to be written on it,' says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot; and I will remove the guilt of this land in one day.

The variation of opinions from Bible academics on this passage, and especially what the "stone" is or represents, generally falls along 3 different paths. The first is that the stone is a priestly gemstone attached to the High Priest's garments. That there are indeed a number of stones with engravings on them that is part of the High Priests garb is backed up in Exodus chapter 28. The reason many academics say that this is what this passage is referring to say that it is obvious this is the case since this entire chapter is about the High Priest and by extension the entire priesthood, and so nothing outside of that narrow realm can be seriously considered.

The second line of thinking is that it is an important and ceremonial stone used in the reconstruction of the Temple, since after all, it is the Temple that is at the center of everything that has been going on in Zechariah up to now. The High Priest and the priesthood exist only to serve God and His Temple.

The third line of thinking is that the stone is the Messiah. Some say it is the premier stone in the Messiah's crown. Perhaps the central reason for this determination is that Yeshua is sometimes called the Rock. Or, in an offshoot of this line of thinking, the stone represents God's Kingdom... but in the sense that it is also the Messiah's Kingdom.

But then we're also told that on this stone will be 7 eyes. Again, there is nothing near a consensus on what that meant. First, does it mean that the stone has 7 eyes contained in it? Or, does it mean that the gaze of 7 eyes is upon it? Clearly, the number 7 indicates that it is something divine, and the number 7 represents a perfect completeness, which can only be embodied by God. More complicating is that it is said that this stone with the 7 eyes is set before Joshua. The thing we can know is that it is God... Yehoveh... who initiates this action with the stone because He says so. Further complicating the matter is that in our next chapter (4) that switches the main character to Zerubbabel, we also find a verse speaking of a stone.

^{CJB} Zechariah 4:7 *'What are you, you big mountain? Before Z'rubavel you will become a plain; and he will put the capstone in place, as everyone shouts, "It's beautiful! Beautiful!"*

Other Bible versions will, instead of saying "capstone" say headstone, excellent stone, or top stone. Yet, the Hebrew word being translated here is **eben**, which is a generic word that is rendered in Zechariah chapter 3 merely as "stone". So, the question is, is this stone in Zechariah chapter 4 the same as the one in chapter 3 that we are currently discussing? Naturally, academic opinions strongly differ on that answer because it is so ambiguous.

I'm not going to spend a great deal of time on this because the arguments for and against all these competing viewpoints of the meanings of "stone" and the "7 eyes" have good scholarly and logical reasonings behind them. Here is my conclusion. Each Bible scholar tends to select one or another of all these choices as to what this passage must be referring to. If a person is an Evangelical Christian, the answer is nearly universal that it can only be the Messiah. And then, their choice is upgraded into a doctrine (added to a long list of other doctrines) and so no other possibility can be considered. The

solution to this is what I spoke about a few minutes ago. Every prophecy is fulfilled more than once, and with each fulfillment the scope widens and the distance in time from when the Prophet lived gets larger. So, the answer as to the symbolic meanings must be attached to a certain fulfillment of that prophecy. If there are 3 fulfillments, then the symbols could point to 3 different things. It is not a matter of either/or; only one correct answer that is universal no matter where or when it is finally played-out.

In our case, the first fulfillment likely has to do with the stones on Joshua's garment that is typical for when the High Priest is ordained into office. In the next fulfillment, it likely has to do with the ceremonial completion of the Temple (which comes just a few years later) and a special stone as a kind of capstone with a commemorative engraving on it is laid. And in the 3rd fulfillment of it, Yeshua comes the first time to take away the guilt of the people of Israel, but He is also the stumbling stone for those who refuse His gracious offer of forgiveness of sins and Salvation. And in a 4th fulfillment, Yeshua returns as the Priest/King over His Father's kingdom and rules for 1000 years and the stone speaks of the crowing stone in the crown Yeshua will wear when He becomes the undisputed ruler of the earth. Each and every one of these fulfillments has to do with taking guilt away, whether from the land or the priesthood or the people in general, it's only that it is each in its own time and own way.

I readily admit that the precise way I see this might not be exactly correct. Yet, it has merit because we can see how the stone, and the 7 eyes (the divine impetus) can be manifested upon a sequence of several fulfillments of this prophecy, as opposed to a common one-size-must-fit-all approach that is standard in systematic theologies. Because of lack of acceptance of multiple fulfillments, rather it must always be just one.

The final verse of chapter 3... verse 10...

CJB Zechariah 3:10 *When that time comes,' says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, 'you will all invite each other to join you under your vines and fig trees.'*

The key to this verse is discerning what the meaning and timing of the first few words is indicating... "When that time comes". However, in literal Hebrew it says "in that day" and not "when that time comes". Nearly always in Scripture (especially prophetic scriptures) "that day" is eschatologically oriented ... that is, it is about the End Times. Once again, there are different views on when this time that is being spoken about is the right one. Some say that it connects to verse 9, meaning it happens to bring about the subject of verse 9, which is when God will remove the guilt of the land. Others see it as having no connection to whatever has been said previously can only be about the End Times and have to do with a Messiah.

So, the question that arises is what it means to invite each other to join you under your vines and fig trees. In the setting of Zechariah's time, it has to do with a restoration of the Jews' homeland such that the fields and orchards and vineyards are once again producing in abundance. Christianity, of course, says that this can only be about the return of Christ at the End of Days. However, is that the only time from the days of Zechariah forward in which people will be in harmony with one another, living peacefully? And that there is plenty of food and drink for everyone? History alone proves that was not the case. Rather such peace, unity and abundance seemed to come and go in cycles.

In Zechariah's time, the thing that was holding back this peace and unity was the lack of abundance. It is scarcity that brings on an every-man-for-himself mentality, and so there is invariably social discord and disorder. The thing that was holding back abundance was the peoples' procrastination about rebuilding God's Temple. In the Book of Haggai, it is flatly said that God is intentionally withholding agricultural fruitfulness because of the general disinterest in rebuilding His Temple. However, Haggai and now Zechariah ushered in a renewed enthusiasm to accomplish the task and so abundance will be upon the Judeans very soon. This is what Zechariah was envisioning in the near term.

As this prophecy plays out again later, I'm not sure that it is until the End Times that we could truthfully say that the Branch came and fruitfulness and contentment reigned. So, I see this part of the prophecy being played out within a couple of years or so of Zechariah pronouncing it, and then again the End Times.

As always, hold anything that seems future to us lightly. Not because it isn't sure to happen, but because the circumstances and the way it will play-out may be nothing that we can even envision today.

Let's move on to Zechariah chapter 4.

READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 4 all

Depending on your viewpoint, this is either the 4th or the 5th vision. I think it is the 5th. This most famous vision centers on a symbol that is again most difficult to discern it's meaning. Whatever it is, we must look to find it in the minds and circumstances of the people of Zechariah's day (late 6th century B.C.).

A Lampstand and two olive trees form the object of the vision. This complex and symbolic scene that unfolds before Zechariah doesn't make much sense to him. Which, by the way, is only further evidence that Zechariah isn't pronouncing his own prophecy coming from his own thoughts (which many modern scholars believe all the Prophets do because they do not believe in legitimate prophecy as real) but rather he is being given a divine vision that he did not expect, which his own mind is struggling to comprehend. Therefore, we have a reappearance of the Interpreting Angel to both prepare him to delve deeply into perceiving what it is about, and to guide him to understand the Angel's words as he explains its meaning Zechariah.

I have mentioned that Zechariah really only becomes understandable in the whole after we have struggled through each vision/oracle and considered each symbol. This particular vision of the lampstand and 2 olive trees is critical to get right, because what we decide here will send us off in a particular direction for how to we are to understand what the remainder of Zechariah means.

It seems that some time has passed since the previous vision. By saying that this angel aroused Zechariah probably means that he brought Zechariah back into a heightened state of awareness rather than literally awakening him from a sound sleep. This heightened state makes Zechariah know that something

special is happening; he is not dreaming. Therefore, there is this thread of understanding among Bible academics that all of the visions that came to Zechariah were at night, and here Zechariah is asleep in his bed at night, and now is awakened. That isn't what we're being told otherwise we would have heard that like little Samuel awakening the slumbering Eli, the angel woke Zechariah up to show him something. Rather, this circumstance is said only to be *similar*, but not entirely, to being woken up from a sound sleep.

This fifth vision/oracle is about Zerubbabel, the Persian-appointed Jewish governor of Yehud. The vision is fully complementary to the one of chapter 3 that concerned Joshua the High Priest. When taken together we understand that in God's eyes the leadership of the returned Judeans legitimately rests in the hands of the 2 men Joshua and Zerubbabel, who govern jointly.

In whatever way visions like this are seen by Prophets... probably in the deepest recesses of Zechariah's consciousness that are not accessible other than by divine inspiration... the Interpreting Angel asks Zechariah what he sees. Zechariah responds that he sees a lampstand and then gives a somewhat detailed description of it. And he also sees 2 Olive Trees, one standing on each side of the golden lampstand. That this is the Temple menorah is rather plain to see except that this is not really as it is described in the Torah for use in the wilderness tabernacle. It is the precise description of this menorah that we need to work through in order to tear the symbolism apart and then reconstruct it in a way that leads us to the truth. And, this is where we'll begin the next time we meet.