

## THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

### Lesson 20, Chapter 10

We barely opened Zechariah chapter 10 last time before we needed to stop. So, we only got through the first verse. Let's start things off by re-reading the entire chapter.

#### **RE-READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 10 all**

Verse 1 could be summed up by saying it was a summons to prayer, with the prime directive of the prophet being to "ask Yehoveh". The underlying meaning is that Israel should only approach their own god, Yehoveh, for any and all of their needs. They shouldn't approach any other god. This reality can bother Believers because there is this assumption, especially within Christianity, that ancient Israel only believed in one God: The Father... Yehoveh. This is a false understanding and comes from not reading what the Bible actually says or from not knowing history.

The Hebrews right up through the end of the Old Testament believed that they had only one God, but that hardly precluded there being many other gods in existence. They fully accepted the several other pantheons of gods that various nations worshipped, and thought of those gods as quite real. It was common (but wrong) for Israelites to approach the Canaanite gods of fertility and rain when they wanted and needed those things they thought those gods were in charge of. This is one of the reasons for this "ask Yehoveh" exhortation that we find in verse 1. It was primarily BECAUSE they tended to approach other gods for some of their needs that Yehoveh stirred up Babylon, and then later Assyria, to conquer and exile His people as punishment for their idolatry.

The other part of the meaning is that prayer to God ought to be a regular occurrence. For us in the modern era, we need to make more time to pray about more things. Not so much as long and elaborate prayers, but rather as brief but explicit prayers as we daily face what might seem as rather minor decisions on mundane matters, or as praise for even the small things in our

lives, and especially as we encounter serious matters that can have longer term effects.

Verse 2 moves to the practice of divination with the use of **teraphim**.

**Teraphim** were house-deities and even deity objects used by pagan priests in religious services, which were employed in the worship of other gods, most typically when asking for the exact blessings God just said that only He ought to be approached. Remembering that Zechariah is speaking only to Israelites (not to pagan gentiles), then it is inescapable that this oracle reveals that some of these same Israelites were still using these worship objects, even after all that had happened to them. Old habits and beliefs are very hard to break, because when we are chastised for it, we often think "surely these things that I do cannot be what this is speaking about". If that is our thought pattern, then most of the time we can rest assured that those things that we do are EXACTLY what is being addressed.

But, what did these **teraphim** look like? Much new, and some old, archeological evidence and more recent literary gleanings from ancient documents make the case that rather than the **teraphim** attempting to represent the unique image of one god or another, or of animal/human hybrids as the Egyptians tended to do, for Hebrew culture they were more likely meant as images of their ancestors. Ancestor worship was very much part of the Hebrew worship system, even though it wasn't supposed to be so. Ancestor worship, itself, was very fuzzy about exactly how it was practiced, and it seems that practically every family had their own view of it. I'll meddle (and likely offend) for a minute.

Ancestor worship has been practiced in various religions as far back as history can take us, and is still practiced within many modern-day religions. And, even when not explicitly practiced, borrowed remnants of it remain and often unnoticed. Bits and pieces of ancestor worship was the norm in pretty much every culture and society in ancient times; thus, that was the lens through which everyone tended to operate. It was so automatic and embedded in practice, that thinking deeply about it, or challenging it, rarely happened. We need to be careful in judging Israel too harshly, because we, today, still have elements of all sorts of pagan things explicitly outlawed by God as part of our

lives. We overlook them, because we think that these practices just can't be what God is talking about.

While I'm sure the practitioners never think of it this way, the worship and/or consultation of Saints is nothing less than a form of ancestor worship done in the guise of Christianity. The idea that deceased people are venerated by a religious organization, and that as a result their prior existence somehow elevates them to a special spiritual state that can be consulted by the living, or used to protect, or that prayers can be directed to them concerning certain needs, is absolutely a principal feature of ancestor worship. Many of our modern burial practices reflect it as well, or when we tell one another that a cherished but deceased family member is "looking over us". This stuff is so normal for us, that we don't back away and realize what it amounts to. It was the same for ancient Israel with their use of **teraphim** and diviners.

There is much scholarly debate on who, exactly, these diviners and prophets are that used these **teraphim** objects. And, is this oracle dealing with things that used to happen in Israelite society, but don't any longer, or was it a current problem? While on the one hand it doesn't explicitly say so, I have no doubt that it must be talking about a current and ongoing issue among Israel, otherwise what is the point? The biblical prophets and their prophecies were aimed at the Hebrews, not other peoples who worshipped other gods, so this certainly is not speaking about pagans. And, the exile of God's people is so far in their rearview mirror at this point, and why God caused it to happen has been so thoroughly explained, that it makes no sense for this to once again remind Israel of what happened in the past.

Thus, God is saying, "quit it!" These **teraphim** have given you nothing but grief because what they supposedly reveal is nonsense. And the diviners who either use the **teraphim** in their conjuring or who seek truth and wisdom in dreams, are self-deceived. Oh, they are actually quite sincere about their profession; they truly believe in the power of these ritual objects and in what they think the answers are to the questions that are asked. So, when you, Israel, listen to them, you are listening to and intend to follow nothing more than delusions. Once again, it is the same for us, especially in the case of Christianity, when there are those who fancy themselves as modern day

diviners and prophets, and regularly want to tell someone "I have a word from the Lord for you", or are certain they know of something (like a fire or a flood) that is going to happen on such and such a day, but in the end rarely if ever get it right. Nonetheless, they keep on doing it. And people keep on listening to them and keep on passing along what they say. Rarely, out of politeness, are they challenged. But they ought to be. This is the same thing that Zechariah is speaking about in verse 2. So, for those of you that do this, or for those of you who put stock in what these folks say, think again.

One of the saddest aspects that is brought up in this passage is in the false comfort these objects and their diviners offer. Telling the unknowing and vulnerable parents of a deceased child that their child is now an angel. Or that a lost loved one looks over them. Or that even though the deceased never professed Christ, that they were a good person is good enough to go to Heaven. Or that if someone just has enough faith they will get well and defeat some horrible disease (implying that if they do die it is a lack of their faith that is the cause)... all of these are false comforts because none of it is true. Truth is always the best comfort; lies never are because at some point they will be exposed and then cause greater pain. So, it is the source we seek for truth that matters.

The final words of verse 2 explain the outcome of such folly, and again the rather standard sheep/shepherd metaphor is used to explain it. Perhaps the #1 characteristic of sheep without a shepherd is that they are not likely to thrive or even survive. But, to think that they can "go their own way" without a shepherd to lead them and care for them also says they will inevitably get lost and never make it to the intended destination. So, since sheep and shepherds are metaphorical representatives of certain groups, in our passage who do the sheep and the shepherds represent? Verse 3 gives us the answer.

God says that His anger burns against these shepherds. And, a bit later says that the flock is the people of Judah. The shepherds then are certain of Israel's leaders. The next question concerns the "when" of it. Is this talking about Israel's current leadership, past leadership, or a later leadership? I suspect it is partially about all of the above, but proportionally only a little concerning the current, even less about the past, and it is much more about the End

Times leadership. We find very similar use of the sheep/shepherd metaphor in Jeremiah and Ezekiel that points to the End Times, so, here, too, it is likely pointing towards a future matter of Israelite leadership... an End Times scenario.

Since the way the term shepherd is used in this case is decisively negative, this is referring to irresponsible civil or religious leadership, or perhaps false prophets, who lie and tell people things that keep them from knowing the truth. False prophets don't necessarily have to be prophets in the technical biblical sense that concerns an official office called Prophet. Rather, it can be spiritual leaders of any kind who teach the people incorrect things about their faith, claiming to come in the name of God when they are not, or it could be politicians that lie and make promises and claims things that do harm to the nation... bad, corrupt leadership on every level. For God, a bad shepherd is no shepherd at all; he's a wolf come to devour the flock. The result of such bad leadership is that people suffer under it.

Therefore, God's anger spills over against these charlatans, and the passage says that God will punish the he-goats. The Hebrew term we translate as he-goat is **attud**. The use of animals as figurative for human leaders is usual in the Bible. In Jeremiah 50:8 we read this:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Jeremiah 50:8 *Flee from Bavel! Leave the land of the Kasdim! Be like male goats leading the flock;***

So, here a he-goat leads the flock and that is how we should take in Zechariah. In this context it is these civil and religious leaders who are most to blame for leading Israel away from the truth, away from God, and into troubles. A recurring biblical principle is the heavy load of responsibility that Yehoveh puts upon leadership. Leadership will be held to a higher standard of behavior and judgment than the followers because they have the duty to lead sacrificially and beneficially, and therefore have the capacity to cause people who they lead to adopt lies and to behave wrongly. They can lead those people into conflict with God, and into bad decisions and choices. They can teach evil as good and good as evil. Even in the common modern English language, when we use the term sheep to describe people, it is meant in the sense that

people are so easily led. That people, like sheep, left to themselves, will wander aimlessly and get lost without leadership. Sheep usually don't realize that or believe it. So, leadership is a must among humankind; that is how God created us and ordered us. Some leaders who understand this take advantage by convincing the easily suggestable to follow them and their falsehoods, or they maliciously manipulate people for their own personal gain. Rabbis and Pastors are he-goats. Prophets are he-goats. Civic leaders and elected politicians are he-goats and so are patriarchs of families. So, it's not that he-goats are a bad thing; they are a necessary thing. But, a bad or fraudulent he-goat can be a disaster for those he has authority and sway over, and leads people down a dark path.

In autocratic nations or dictatorships, the people have more excuse for their predicaments that these bad he-goats put them in. But, in democratic nations, we have much less of an excuse to blame all our troubles on our leaders since we, collectively, selected them. Democracy is only a recent, modern system. In Bible times, there was no such thing as a leader voted into their office by the people. Thus, that national leader bore even greater responsibility than he does today.

So, to be clear, the statement to open verse 3 "My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the he-goats" is constructed poetically with shepherds and he-goats being the same things. They caused harm to the flock and now they will bear a special divine punishment.

Although nearly all English Bibles will say that what comes next are the words "The Lord of Hosts", or in the case of the CJB its Hebrew equivalent **Adonai Tzva'ot**, both are incorrectly translated. The original Hebrew is Yehoveh of Hosts. Although this term is used many times in various books of the Old Testament, is it used most in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. It is not really understood why this coupling of words is used so much by this group of prophets when it is to refer to God. What I feel quite certain about is that every time we see 2 or 3 words strung together to refer to the God of Israel, it is meant to impart a certain attribute or characteristic of Him. Typically, Yehoveh of Hosts is thought to picture God as a military leader (His army being the heavenly hosts... a military of angel warriors). To me that makes a

lot of sense and seems to fit, and I'm pretty content to leave it there acknowledging that might not be the correct nuance.

We are told that **Yehoveh Tzva'ot** has attended to (**paqad** in Hebrew) His flock, which is the House of Judah. **Paqad** is variously also translated as visited, cares for, remembered and a couple of other terms. The main point is that it is a positive term. It is meant to oppose the previous term **al hara** meaning to burn against the bad shepherds. God is angry and will act against the bad he-goats, but he will care for or attend to the flock that has been badly led. Interestingly, because the grammar of these words is in the perfect tense, that means that it is an action that has already begun and is ongoing.

What we see happening here is that God is replacing the bad leadership of Israel with His own perfect leadership, and He is going to, first, rescue the Judeans (The House of Judah), and then, second, lead them in order to rescue the remainder of Israel (Ephraim, the 10 Lost Tribes). Recall that I told you that beginning with chapter 9, the focus was on the Northern Kingdom, Ephraim, commonly known today as The 10 Lost Tribes of Israel. Let me put this another way: because the perfect tense is used to describe what God is doing, then it lends full credibility to what we are reading as meaning that since God has already rescued and restored the Southern Kingdom (the House of Judah)... that is, He has returned the Babylonian exiles... now He can begin the process of rescuing the other half of Israel, which is the House of Ephraim. Judah is going to be given the privilege of being a prime participant in the redemption of their brother tribes, Ephraim.

God says He is going to make the restored Judah like a majestic horse or better a war-horse as used in battle. War-horses were the ultimate battlefield weapons of that era. I want to take this opportunity to again point out something that Christianity typically chafes at and usually denies. God is as much a God of war as He is a God of love. God always uses war to make big changes on earth, and among people and nations. Wars that he directly starts are even called Holy Wars. Humans are inherently war-like creatures. We weren't created to be that, but becoming that way is one of terrible effects of Adam and Eve listening to Satan and not trusting God, which led them into sin and The Fall. From that moment forward, mankind would use violence to bring

about change. And, God would use that war-attribute of humans to bring about the progression of His plan of redemption because humans are always the tools God uses on earth to effect change. Thus, to constantly refer to God as being only a God of love is to make Him into Cupid. It completely mischaracterizes Him. This false characterization in no way reflects what we read in the Bible. It is but another in a centuries' long series of manmade doctrines that misleads. And, we just read what God thinks of leaders who do not properly lead.

As we move into verse 4, I want to immediately address a translation issue that matters significantly. The first words in the CJB version are: "Out of **them** shall come forth". Other versions say "Out of **him** shall come forth". Sometimes instead of "from" it says "out of"; either way it expresses the same thing. This is speaking of either a single entity or a collective. The problem is the identification of just who or what these things are that come forth "out of". The leading two candidates are that this is speaking either of the House of Judah or it is of Yehoveh. Therefore, the proponents of "them" are those who think this means the House of Judah, as opposed to the proponents of "him" who think this means Yehoveh. And, there are those Christian scholars that extrapolate from Yehoveh that this is actually meaning Yehoveh's Son, the Messiah.

I favor "them" because of its clear connection (at least it is clear to me) to the previous verse. In verse 3, it ends with Judah being made a powerful military that God would use to rescue the House of Ephraim from its long exile. So, when the next words (verse 4) begin "out of" either them or him, it makes more sense that this has to be referring to the House of Judah, and so "them" is the better fit. I cannot reconcile the alternative of verse 4 suddenly switching to talking about Yehoveh, although I also cannot say it is impossible.

We then get a sequence of phrases beginning with "from" or "out of". There is a total of 4 of these in verse 4. The prophecy is that God is going to rescue the 10 Lost Tribes from their exile using the House of Judah, so Judah (who is tasked with this rescue) is going to have to be very strong. And on this earth, strength will first and foremost be measured in military might. Sad, but true. That the timing of when this is going to happen is expressed by the words



shall or will come, means it hadn't happened yet in Zechariah's time. It is a future matter, which means nearly certainly from the context that this is an End Times matter since that is the furthest out that any of these prophecies can look. And, by the way, Hebrew and Christian scholars agree on that much, at least.

One of the 4 things that is to come out of Judah is the cornerstone. In Hebrew this is **pinnah**. This is same word and probably the same thing that Isaiah is speaking about in his book in chapter 28.

**CJB Isaiah 28:16** *therefore here is what Adonai ELOHIM says: "Look, I am laying in Tziyon a tested stone, a costly cornerstone, a firm foundation-stone; he who trusts will not rush here and there.*

This is another passage that Hebrew and Christian scholars agree is speaking of a Messiah. Sometimes **pinnah** is translated as foundation stone or as premier stone. That is, it is the first stone to be laid, or it is the one from which (when laid) is the starting point and measuring point from which all further building is to take place. Often, it is used ceremonially as an official beginning to a building project. A word of caution: this is a **metaphor**. Far, far too much in traditional Christian Churches, Pastors use these metaphors as though they are exact equivalents... down to the last detail... of the person or object or event that it is being compared to. So, for instance, if Christ is the cornerstone, then exhaustive allegorical homilies are contrived using what is known about cornerstones and they are expected to fit as exact representations in every detail to Christ. Metaphors are approximations, rough examples, simple illustrations, not precise twins. It is the general understanding of the use and purpose of a commonly known object or creature or activity as a metaphor that is used to create a mental comparison to what it is being compared to.

So, if a new government is involved, then the cornerstone of it is representative of the supreme leader. If a new structure is being built, then the cornerstone is the starting point and perhaps the first load bearing piece of it. Thus, it was always a king that laid the cornerstone of a new temple. Since we find the term cornerstone used to speak of a coming Messiah in several

places in the Bible, then that is how we ought to take it here. And, of course, as the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews learned, indeed the Messiah came out of the House of Judah.

The next term is tent peg; some translations say "nail", which I think is off the mark. The tent peg speaks of two different things depending on the era and on the circumstance. It is used to refer to a permanent house, mud brick or stone, that has a row of pegs embedded in the walls upon which to hang things. It is also used to refer to tents and other temporary shelters where these pegs are used to secure the tent firmly to the ground. In The Book of Judges, Yael drives one of these wooden tent pegs through Sisera's head to kill him. It can also be thought of, then, as a kind of mooring... a secure place.. then. Still, it is difficult to grasp, exactly, the mental image that is being conjured up, here.

Interestingly, what might be of help is a passage out of the Book of Ezra that is from the same general historical era as Second Zechariah. The CJB puts it this way:

**CJB Ezra 9:8-9** ***<sup>8</sup> Now, for a brief moment, ADONAI our God has shown us the favor of allowing a remnant to escape and giving us a secure foothold in his holy place, in order for God to make things look brighter to us and revive us a little in our slavery. <sup>9</sup> For we are slaves. Yet our God has not abandoned us in our slavery, but has caused the kings of Persia to extend grace to us, reviving us, so that we can rebuild the house of our God, repair its ruins, and have a wall of defense in Y'hudah and Yerushalayim.***

Here is a more literal version of this passage that better demonstrates the issue of a tent peg or nail.

**NAS Ezra 9:8** ***"But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage.***

So, the NAS says "give us a peg (a tent peg) in His Holy Place", while the CJB says "giving us a secure foothold in His Holy Place". The tent "peg" is a literal translation of the Hebrew, but a "secure foothold" is the editor's attempt to explain what the tent peg does, to an audience that has no idea what a tent peg has to do with anything. If we can extrapolate that to our Zechariah passage (which I think we can), then we get the idea that the tent peg is used metaphorically or figuratively as a way of alluding to a person of the future who will either be part of, or will facilitate, the rule of a Davidic King. That is, it speaks of the future political structure and the one who will firmly secure it. That's not unlike in more modern terms using our expression to "cement" something. That is, while cement literally means the construction material that hardens like stone, or a very powerful glue, the idea is that it creates something secure and firm. Only modern people in the Western world would even understand this use of "cement" as a metaphor. So, don't be surprised that no one in our era quite gets what a tent peg represented as a metaphor 2500 years ago. But, I am confident that the meaning I just gave you is on the mark, and so, now you know!

Next is the bow of war, or war-bow. This is representative of all weapons of war. So, this is a clear military meaning. This is saying that the House of Judah will one day have its own independent and powerful military. This can only happen when a nation is sovereign and independent, and has the means and national will (usually emanating from a strong leader) to build such an army. With an army, a nation can project its power beyond its borders, as well as ably defend itself against enemies. Now, with a powerful Judah, Yehoveh will use them to rescue the exiles of the Kingdom of Ephraim and to attack God's enemies. For sure, this is speaking of a time far future to Zechariah. And, all one has to do is to pay attention to current events to know that Israel has built one of the most powerful and effective militaries in the world. So, by my estimation, this prophecy of God readying Judah for war and for getting the 10 Lost Tribes back home, has happened and we have been eye witnesses to it.

The final words of verse 4 are: "from them all the rulers together". Or in other versions: "out of them every captain". The word for rulers or captain, sometimes also rendered masters or exactors, is *nagas* (some say it is

**noges**), but it is simply an issue of how to verbally pronounce the word. It means to exert pressure. This is referring to Judah's military leaders and perhaps is extended to certain governing officials that hold sway over the use of the military. The idea is that it is those humans that will actively see to it that God's will is carried out through their military. This is a positive term. In the end, this is the final one of the 4 terms explaining how God will use the restored and made powerful House of Judah to advance His plans and intents.

Verse 5 continues this line of thought. These **noges** will be like **gibborim**...mighty men...heroes... the most powerful and elite of Judah's warriors. When it says they will be "like", it does not mean they will all actually be **gibborim**, such as was King David. It's only that the common soldiers will have a high level of courage. It is interesting that in the end, Israel will be battling against nations larger than themselves; even against a superpower. Under typical means, it would seem impossible that little Judah could defeat them all. But, with Yehoveh leading the way, and Judah's army fighting as though every combatant was a hero, they will achieve victory.

When next we are told that Judah's military will trample down the enemies in battle, it means a decisive victory. A victory that brings discouragement to their enemies. And why will they fight so fiercely, and win so decisively? Because, we're told, that Yehoveh is with them. Their successes will be totally dependent on Yehoveh. Believe this. All throughout the Bible, we're reminded that whatever power a worshipper of Yehoveh holds, it is because of God's presence. He is the actual source of that power. This passage ends by explaining that the enemy on horseback will be confounded. That is, they will be confused and thrown into chaos. The horse, and the horse with chariot, were in the biblical era the most powerful battlefield weapons in existence. They were very nearly invincible. I think this is exactly speaking about superpowers of the world and their most advanced weaponry that will be thrown in staggering amounts at Israel (Judah), but to no avail. While everything one would expect to happen in a battle where one side has superior weaponry and superior numbers of soldiers, it doesn't. That is what confounds those who attack Israel.

I have an acquaintance who is Egyptian. In the 3 week-long war of 1973, Israel was attacked by the superior forces of Egypt and Syria. Those 2 Arab nations were quickly and soundly beaten. My Egyptian friend was one of thousands of captured Egyptian soldiers. He remains dumbfounded to this day. This was the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 6 years that a powerful coalition of Arab states attacked Israel, and lost. It made no sense how that could happen. He told me how the imprisoned soldiers spoke to one another and could not believe that they could lose in such a manner. They had everything going for them.

Interestingly, this soldier was a Coptic Christian and was literally conscripted against his will to fight. He now understands better how God is on Israel's side. But at the same time, from a purely earthly standpoint, Egypt's defeat makes no sense. I think this was but a mini-fulfillment of what is coming in the End Times. Israel is simply not big enough, no matter how clever or prepared, to take on armies far larger than their own. And yet they have, and they have won. And in the End Times, the size of the enemy army will dwarf anything ever thrown at Israel until then. And still, Israel will win because God is with them.

We'll pause here and pick up at verse 6 next time.