

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH
Lesson 2, Chapter 1 Continued

I'll begin this 2nd lesson in the Book of Zechariah with a plea I made in the 1st: do not proceed until you have first studied the Book of Haggai with us. It is a very simple matter: these two books are connected and in fact, Haggai sets the stage for what we will study in Zechariah. Haggai comes first. Assuming you have, we'll continue.

We opened, last time, with a relatively condensed introduction to Zechariah and then took a look at the first few words of the 1st verse of chapter 1. We didn't get far because we immediately encountered a long-established issue within our Christian Bibles: the issue of God's name. I set before you that at Mt. Sinai God told Israel His formal name that He was always to be known as, it was (using the Hebrew alphabet) the letters Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh. If we do find this pronounced in English Bibles it is usually Jehovah. When transliterated, it is most often vocalized as Yah-weh. However, I think it is a 3-syllable word, and not 2. Thus, I think the more likely correct pronunciation is something like Yehoveh or Yehovah. Either way, the issue I pointed up is that English Bibles nearly never attempt to include God's name at all. Rather, they simply do away with God's name and substitute it with the term "The Lord". Because this occurs more than 6800 times in the Old Testament, then its effect on our understanding of God and who He is, cannot be overlooked.

Today I won't go into why all this happened (you can review last week's lesson for a detailed explanation), but only go forward with this: virtually every time we see the term "The Lord" in the Old Testament...and especially when it is capitalized... the actual word is Yehoveh. We are to understand this as referring to God the Father, as opposed to God the Son.

The first 6 verses to open chapter 1 are the first prophetic oracle God gave to Zechariah. We read the entire chapter last time, so let's re-read only those first 6 verses to get started today.

RE-READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 1:1 – 6

Both Haggai and Zechariah found it important to set down dates when they received their divine oracles. Usually, we get it in the form of day, month, and year; but this first oracle is given only as month and year. Two different calendar systems are intertwined to communicate the date. The month is given in terms of the Hebrew calendar; the year was given according to the regnal calendar system. Therefore, we learn that this oracle was presented in the Hebrew 8th month of their civil calendar year (called Heshvan). But, it happened during the 2nd year of King Darius's reign as king of Persia. Because of the way this is presented we really don't know how far along into the 2nd year of Darius's reign this is speaking of. That is, this is not meant to say that 1 year and 8 months into Darius's reign this revelation occurred. The 8th month and the 2nd year have no relationship or connection; each is independent of the other as separate pieces of information.

As we discussed last time, despite what the CJB says or what any English Bible says, the literal way the next part of this 1st verse is expressed is "the word of Yehoveh came". The CJB says that "the following message from Adonai came", while all English Bibles say, "the word of The Lord came". The phrase "the word of Yehoveh" was used by biblical Prophets as a kind of standard word formula to announce a divine prophecy coming from the God of Israel. Especially for people of the Bible era, when there were so many cultures and religions, each with their own god systems and god hierarchies, then it was critical for the reader to know the name of the particular god that was giving the oracle. It is still critical.

Within so-called Western society, a generalized cultural label that has been around for a few hundreds of years, it is the biblical God that is automatically assumed when a god is spoken of. Therefore, it seemed to the Church that the need to know or use God's name wasn't important. However, that is a false assumption. Especially in the 20th and 21st centuries, with the rise and infiltration of Islam into Western culture, it has become common for many leaders in Christianity to teach and believe that Allah, the god of Islam, is the same as Yehoveh, the God of the Bible. It has also become rather popular among the more Evangelical Christian branches who already confuse God the Father with God the Son in the Bible (due to long ago having dropped God's

name from the Scriptures), to say that Muslims are really worshipping Jesus, they just don't know it. Nothing could be further from reality.

The first part of God's message is found in verse 2: "Yehoveh was extremely angry with your ancestors". This is not meant to look back for many centuries in history, but rather mainly to the previous couple of generations... those immediately preceding the invasion of Judah by Babylon and then the Judeans' exile. That is, it was divine anger that caused what has been going on for the past 80 or 90 years. So, it wasn't just the lack of good harvests that had been plaguing the Judeans since they got back that was part of their punishment... and that mostly about dragging their feet in rebuilding the Temple... that indicated Yehoveh's displeasure with them; it went back another few decades.

I think there is something that we all must face up to here. It is that on a national level, God's blessings and then punishments don't vacillate at the fast frequency that modern societies seem to. We don't displease Him for 8 or 10 years, and then get punished for the next 5 or 10 years, and then with sufficient repentance the pendulum again rather quickly swings back to blessing. God is long-suffering. He will observe, warn, and wait for significant amounts of time... decades, scores of years... before He finally reacts. And then when He does, the time of punishment is not brief, and some short burst by leaders and the people of sorrow and change doesn't immediately reverse the awful effects of His discipline. Especially in the 21st century, when time seems to be very compressed and changes seem to happen quickly, even a few months is seen as a long time; but not in God's economy.

I cannot speak for other nations on this planet; but in America, where so many of us with faith in God have watched our nation rebel against the very notion of morality, and many others within our faith that claim morality, but approach it totally subjectively based upon evolving manmade traditions, this now endemic trespass against Gods laws and commands has gone on for a long time. Lately, even those who are atheist see our steep national decline coupled with chaos and confusion. It seems that with each election cycle, our hope is that we'll find a better leader to solve our troubles by enacting different policies. And, especially people of faith who vote for someone they think embraces a Godly faith, we sort of deep down believe that once that right

person is voted in that our national changes for the good will show good results rather quickly. The reality is that if indeed the chaos and confusion and troubles of all kinds are God-caused punishment for our unfaithfulness towards Him, then this cycle of sinning, warning, punishing, and restoration takes a long time... several decades at the least to complete. Goodness, the cycle for the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel has been going on for 2700 years and is still not fully complete. So, the consequences for God's actions against us can last far longer than we wish they would. It is, therefore, most important that we do our part to ensure that we never force God to react against us so that we experience His severe side, and that avoidance always revolves around obedience to His objective moral code: the Law of the Moses.

Once caught in this cycle there is only one way out of it. That way is stated in verse 3.

CJB Zechariah 1:3 *Therefore, tell them that Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says this: "Return to me," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot, "and I will return to you," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot.*

To return to God means to return to the terms and obligations of His covenant with Israel. This is not speculation; it is stated in verse 6. As I have noted in many of the Torah Class lessons on the Minor Prophets, God's covenant (since Egypt that generally means the Covenant of Moses, but often also includes the Covenant of Abraham) is at the center of how God deals with Israel. God's covenant is sacred, forever, and it is something Israel agreed to abide by. It is full of terms and conditions that are usually called laws and commands; terms and conditions that obligate Israel to God and God to Israel. Along with those laws and commands, the consequences (the curses) for breaking those laws are spelled out. There is a command, and then there is the prescribed punishment for breaking that command. It wasn't some ethereal notion of malpractice that the Judeans committed that caused God to react by expelling them from their land; it was trespassing against a precise and known code of conduct that was violated, and then Yehoveh exacting the penalty for that particular sin that had long ago been spelled-out. So, today, when we go astray, it is by one standard alone that determines that, indeed, we have

sinned: the Law of Moses. And, it is by that one standard alone that we will be disciplined, according to that contained in the Law of Moses.

If, says Yehoveh, these Judeans will return to obedience, He will return to them. To return to them means to restore blessings. At this point, their disobedience was in not rebuilding the Temple. And (I contend), that another part of that disobedience was the Judeans sacrificing on the altar but with no Temple building yet completed. This lack of blessing was currently mainly showing up in poor harvests. The Hebrew word used here for return is **Shuv**. It is also used to mean repent. Therefore, we get a better idea of exactly what it means to repent; it means to turn, or to return. The world picture is of something going in one direction, but then changing direction back to where it came from... kind of like a U-turn. The assumption is that a person came from good place, was heading towards a bad place, realized it and turned back towards the good place. Biblically the thought is of heading in a wicked direction and turning back towards a righteous direction. Here's the thing that I hope you can gather from this: this is not about being "sorry". Being sorry for your sinning ought to be the motive for turning back; but sorrow by itself is little more than an emotion. God doesn't forgive the sorry; He forgives those who have turned back to good... back to Him. I want to say this in another way. If as a God-worshipper you were doing what was right, and then sinned and continued to live in that sin; and then at some point you realized it and asked for forgiveness, you have yet to reach the point of repentance (and thus the possibility of being forgiven). Only when you actively change your behavior back to righteous behavior has any forgiveness transaction become possible. So, the thought that I can be sorry for awhile and during that time be in a state of forgiveness for that sorrow, assuming that eventually when I'm ready I can bring myself to finally make the necessary changes, is a fantasy. First return, then forgiveness; that is the order that it happens. And, this is expressed in exactly the order we see it in verse 3: Return to ME, and then I will return to YOU.

You know, verse 4 reminds me of the patient, kindly talks my father had with me when I was young. He explains what He saying, and He expands upon it in hope that I will finally stop fighting against it, and instead to embrace it.

CJB Zechariah 1:4 *"Don't be like your ancestors. The earlier prophets proclaimed to them, 'Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says to turn back now from your evil ways and deeds'; but they didn't listen or pay attention to me," says Yehoveh.*

So, the idea is that this cycle has happened before to their even earlier ancestors. Haggai and now Zechariah are the prophets speaking to this current generation of Judeans. But, a long time ago there were other prophets that spoke to their ancestors. And, they proclaimed exactly the same message then as is being proclaimed now: "return to Me". But, sadly, those ancestors ignored the warning and the pleas of Yehoveh...and the consequences were...well... catastrophic. Ironically, we find these same words to "don't be like your ancestors" spoken by King Hezekiah to the ancestors of Israel just prior to Assyria being God's instrument to destroy and scatter the Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel. Now that we have been seeing what horrors happened to Israel and then to Judah for their unfaithfulness and disobedience towards Yehoveh, perhaps these following words from Chronicles will carry the deep emotion with them that we need to understand are present in them.

CJB 2 Chronicles 30:4-8 *⁴ The idea had seemed right to the king and to the whole community; ⁵ so they issued a decree that it should be proclaimed throughout all Isra'el, from Be'er-Sheva to Dan, that they should come to keep the Pesach to Yehoveh the God of Isra'el at Yerushalayim; for only a few had been observing it as prescribed. ⁶ So runners went with the letters from the king and his officers throughout all Isra'el and Y'udah. They conveyed the king's order: "People of Isra'el! Turn back to Yehoveh, the God of Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov! Then he will return to those of you who remain, who escaped capture by the kings of Ashur. ⁷ Don't be like your ancestors, or like your kinsmen who sinned against Yehoveh the God of their ancestors, with the result that he allowed them to become an object of horror, as you see. ⁸ Don't be stiffnecked now, as your ancestors were. Instead, yield yourselves to Yehoveh enter his sanctuary, which he has made holy forever; and serve Yehoveh your God; so that his fierce anger will turn away from you.*

"Don't be like your ancestors". These are words that Yeshua could easily have spoken with great passion to all of us. Notice in Chronicles that the current problem was that the Israelites, other than for a few, had stopped coming to Jerusalem on certain biblical feasts as instructed in the Torah. The specific one mentioned is **Pesach**... Passover. So, we find that there have been several different specific areas of disobedience that had occurred over the centuries, and each one was eventually addressed with its accompanying disciplinary action.

Then in verse 5 another aspect of those ancestors who disobeyed is addressed. The rhetorical question is asked: " So, where are your ancestors? Where are the prophets?" The proper response is, of course, they died long ago. So, those who delivered those earlier oracles were dead just as were those who disobeyed them. The issue is that both the prophets and the people were mortal. This contrasts with verse 6 that begins with "BUT...My words and My laws". That is, God's laws and commands are **immortal** compared to humans that are mortal.

CJB Zechariah 1:6 *But my words and my laws, which I ordered my servants the prophets, overtook your ancestors, didn't they? Then they turned and said, 'Yehoveh has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he intended to do.'"*

Humans live only for a short time, but God's laws and commands live forever. The Prophet says that even though God's laws are old and overtook those of you from past generations, so they are still alive and well, and now those same laws and commands have overtaken you. Those laws are about the ways and deeds... the behavior... of God's people (all people in a certain sense), and it is through these laws of His covenant that God intends to deal with people. There is no plan "B".

OK, Believers; think very hard on what we have just heard because a great lesson is being laid out here... one that Israel never could seem to learn, and one that the Constantinian Church denies still exists. A lesson that Our Savior, Yeshua, emphatically also warns us about. It is that a person ought not try to resist the words of God (that is, His laws and commands) because indeed

those words live on forever, are the mechanism through which God determines the measure of a person's behavior as good or bad, righteous or wicked, and in equal measure to a person's obedience He rewards or punishes. And those who refuse to heed this lesson have only themselves to blame for the terrible consequences.

CJB Matthew 5:17-20 ***¹⁷ "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. ¹⁸ Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. ¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and P'rushim, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!***

Just as God tells us in Zechariah that all humans are mortal, but God's laws are immortal, so says Yeshua it remains the same even after His advent. Just as God tells us in Zechariah that it doesn't matter how old these laws are, because they are immortal in substance, then it is always that the immortal will pursue and overcome the mortal, so says Yeshua these laws and commands remain the same even after His advent. Just as God tells us in Zechariah that the measure of how well or how poorly one follows those immortal laws will determine whether that person will be given much or little blessings, Yeshua says that it remains the same after His advent and goes on even until the heavens and the earth cease to exist. In other words, by any human measure, this goes on forever.

There are 2 principles presented here that no man can alter. First, God responds to us in like kind to the way we respond to Him. And second, God's message to us never changes because God's word never changes. And, conversely, God's word never changes because God's message to us never changes. If Christ brought a different message to us than the one we just read in Matthew 5, then by definition it would have to have come from a different

word than His Father had given to His people long, long ago. And, I'm sorry to say, that despite what Yeshua told us in this passage, the Church says a new message from a different word was given to us. This error has only compounded over the centuries and led so many into wrong doctrine.

Let's move on to the next oracle given to Zechariah. This next oracle consists of a few parts with each part called a vision. This first vision takes up the remainder of the 1st chapter.

RE-READ ZECHARIAH 1:7 – end

Whereas it was in the 8th month of the Hebrew calendar year, in the 2nd year of Darius's reign over Persia that the first oracle of God was given to Zechariah, now in the 11th month of the Hebrew calendar (Shevat) and still in the 2nd year of Darius's reign, another oracle is given. This time a fuller and more complete date is provided by including the day...the 24th day... of that 11th month. When we look at the composite work of Haggai and Zechariah together, we see that this date given in Zechariah is 2 months later since the last prophetic oracle given in Haggai.

I mentioned that Zechariah chapter 1 verse 7 begins this next oracle; what I didn't tell you is that it continues all the way through the entire 6th chapter, so there is much information to cover. What we can understand overall is that the ceremony that dedicated the re-founding of the Temple (as we see in Haggai), is in our rearview mirrors in Zechariah; it has already happened. So, Zechariah's job is less to exhort the Judeans to finish the Temple that it is to explain to them what the meaning is for this new Temple in the context of the very different circumstances under which it was built. That is, it was built when Israel had no king of their own, and even the land it was being built upon was now but a province of another nation: Persia. This seemed to defy all the traditional reasons and significations of and for a Temple in the first place.

The new oracle begins with the same word formula and identification of the name of the Prophet that received it, as did the first one. Around 3 months after Zechariah was first called to be God's Prophet (and I assume he had not been a prophet prior to this general timeframe because nothing recorded

would indicate it), this new revelation came to him and it was quite expansive. Much of it involved Israel's relationship with the rest of humanity, as well as the destiny both the people and the nation would experience. Because this was, of course, entirely in the future, then it makes sense that nearly all of it was given through visual symbolism. What can be pretty challenging is trying to decipher even the general nature of what each symbol was communicating. So, some amount of thoughtful speculation will be necessary in some cases.

The first words of the first vision of this new oracle are: "It was night, and I saw...". I saw is in Hebrew *ra iti*. It lets us know that this was not a dream that he was having (which we might otherwise have guessed since it happened at night). Zechariah was awake and conscious. Immediately following this word, in the original Hebrew Scriptures, we find *hinneh*, which means "behold". "Behold" then indicates it is something important, unusual, and spectacular.

Knowing this is occurring at night means more than just telling us something about the time of day. It is part and parcel of the symbolism itself. This symbolism begins with the appearance of a man riding on a russet (a red) colored horse. There is much differing opinion, if not confusion, about this man sitting on the red horse. The Hebrew word is *ish*, definitely meaning a man. And, yet, the preponderance of scholars believes this must be an angel that comes in the form and appearance of a human male, something this is quite typical for the Bible. So, rather than to declare him either, I'll just call him "the rider". Interestingly he was a bit of a distance from Zechariah, with the horse and rider standing amidst some myrtle. These myrtles were, themselves, growing in a depression...some Bibles translate it as a valley, others a glen, still others a ravine. Probably more appropriate to the vision is that they were in the shade. This is where myrtles tend to grow; along river banks, in low moist depressions.

A myrtle is a somewhat low growing plant that falls in size somewhere between a large bush and a small tree. They grow dense and thus produce shade. I think that the issue of the shade is quite critical to the scene as it works in conjunction with the fact that it is nighttime. In other words, shade and night together say that the horse and rider were rather obscured; they

were somewhat concealed. It also tells us that the horse and rider were more or less standing still and not moving around.

Behind the man on his horse were 3 more horses. Another red one, a sorrel and a white one. A sorrel is sort of copper colored. This description alone creates all sorts of problems. Because the rider and his horse in the myrtles are said to be red, do we have 2 red horses? Or, are they possibly the same horse? And then, how much difference is there really between a red horse and a sorrel? Even more, considering what comes next, are there a total of 3 horses or are there 4? Verse 9 only deepens the mystery.

In verse 9, a new character is added to the scene: "the angel-who-talked-with-me".

CJB Zechariah 1:9 *I asked, "What are these, my Lord?" The angel speaking with me said to me, "I will show you what these are."*

Zechariah asks someone he calls "lord" (**adon** in Hebrew) who these 3 other horses are (assuming we have a total of 4 horses). At the same time, this new character is called in Hebrew **malach**... meaning messenger or angel. So, is "lord" the rider on the horse standing in the myrtles, or is this referring to the angel that speaks with Zechariah? Or are these both the same person? Because Christianity has tended to ascribe the person of Jesus to every mention of the word "lord" or "the lord" even in the Old Testament, and likely because that reference is not correct except for a few times at best, then one level of typical confusion can be eliminated. That is, whomever this rider is, or this angel is, it isn't Jesus.

I also think we need to be cautious about assigning much meaning to the horse colors; in other words, I don't see any necessary connection between the meaning or purpose of each horse as based upon its coloration. In fact, I see it as sending us down needless rabbit trails. Zechariah asked the angel that talked with him to explain what these horses were about, and the angel says that he will. Just for the sake of clarity, I'm going to assign the name of this angel as "the interpreting angel" since that does seem to be his function. That is, he is not so much part of the symbolic meaning of the vision as he is

the one that seeks to help Zechariah understand it. So, the interpreting angel says to Zechariah:

CJB Zechariah 1:10 *The man standing among the myrtles said, "These are those whom Yehoveh has sent to wander throughout the earth."*

If you are paying close attention, then we have a very difficult nuance to spot. The person answering Zechariah is said to be "**standing** among the myrtles". But, we have another figure who is **sitting** on a horse among the myrtles. Are these 2 different beings? Or, whether standing or sitting is it the same person and he has merely dismounted? After all, it does say (in Hebrew) that the **ish** is standing in the myrtles, whereas the Hebrew for angel is **malach**.

It seems to me that what we have here is two different figures: one on horseback, another standing a little further distance behind him, but himself still in the myrtles. Going back and forth between using the terms man and angel don't have to be so confusing if we take the word **malach** in its more generic form as meaning messenger rather than as meaning angel. This way we have the man sitting on the horse, and we have a messenger standing behind him... that is, we don't have to try figure out exactly what kind of being this is. His **place** in the vision, and his function or role, is more important than precisely what that figure's substance and nature is.

So, what I have determined to call "the interpreting angel" (just so we can more easily differentiate among the characters) tells Zechariah that those 3 horses he sees (that do not count the one in the myrtles with the rider) were sent by Yehoveh to wander around, all over our planet. These horses may also have riders upon them (unless these horses speak), because the next verse gives a response from them about why they were sent to wander around the earth.

CJB Zechariah 1:11 *Then they themselves answered the angel of Yehoveh standing among the myrtles, "We have been wandering throughout the earth, and the whole world is quiet and at peace."*

Oh, goodness. Do we now have a 3rd figure standing in the myrtles? A figure called the angel of Yehoveh (which, again, is obscured in Christian Bible because 100% of the time, it is "angel of the Lord" and never the literal original "angel of Yehoveh"). We'll get to that at another time, because first I want to talk about these 3 horses.

Unless one lived in those ancient times, or is a historian, we wouldn't know that horses were NOT what Israelites normally rode upon... rather it was donkeys. Only royalty and the very rich used them for transportation, so, these horses aren't just a common way to carry things or people around. Horses were expensive and primarily for military use. Horses were not from the Middle East; for the longest time they were a specialty of Egypt. So, militaries that had horses spent significant funds to acquire them, and this gave them a real advantage over those that didn't.

In this case the 3 horses were a symbol of God scouting out the earth to collect information. That they had riders or didn't is irrelevant because it was what they represented to the ancient mind that was the point. God wanted to know what was going on everywhere, and the scouting horses bring back their report.

CJB Zechariah 1:11 ***"We have been wandering throughout the earth, and the whole world is quiet and at peace."***

So, the report is: "the whole world is quiet and at peace". Let's put this together. First, notice that the 3 horses all play the same role, and their coloration has no recorded meaning... at least in this particular vision. Second, this report is of global dimension and is about what is happening ONLY on earth, and not in heaven. Being quiet and at peace is speaking politically, which itself plays out militarily. That is, there is only war involving militaries when the political leadership (the kings and their courts) decide to direct their militaries to go to war. It is no different now than it was then. Therefore, in general, the report to God is that there were no notable wars going on; rather, the world was rather stable for the time being.

While this likely had future implications, it also describes the condition of the known world at the time of Zechariah. Persia had some time ago completed their takeover of Babylon and their empire, and now any kind of serious military action was over. King Darius had more or less reinstated Cyrus's enlightened governing policies (that had been overturned for a while by his immediate successor, Cambyses). The Persian Empire was vast, stretching horizon to horizon, and had become stable. Darius's satrapy governing system that honored each province's culture and traditions was operating very well. This was the world at that moment in history, and so it was the way things were in Yehud, where the returned Judeans from Babylon were now living.

We'll stop here and continue in Zechariah next time.