

# OpenTheo

## September 30th: Zechariah 10 & Matthew 21:23-46

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A new Exodus from oppression and restoration in the land. Jesus teaching parables in the temple.

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## Transcript

Zechariah chapter 10. I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them.

For I am the Lord their God, and I will answer them. Then Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior, and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and be glad.

Their hearts shall rejoice in the Lord. I will whistle for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as many as they were before, though I scattered them among the nations. Yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return.

I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria, and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, till there is no room for them. He shall pass through the sea of troubles, and strike down the waves of the sea, and all the

depths of the Nile shall be dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart.

I will make them strong in the Lord, and they shall walk in his name, declares the Lord. The oracle that began in chapter 9 of Zechariah continues into chapter 10. Chapter 9, I argued, foretold the coming of Alexander the Great, and then looked forward to the period of the Maccabees.

The conflict between the sons of Zion and the sons of Javan, or the sons of Greece, relates to the conflict between the Hellenized Jews and the traditional Jews within that period. Chapter 9 contained allusions back to the story of the patriarchs and to the Passover and the Exodus, in details such as that of the waterless pit that recalled the pit into which Joseph was thrown. Such Exodus themes continue and become more prominent in chapter 10.

From the waterless pit in chapter 9 verse 11, to the rain of verse 1 of chapter 10, we might see a deliverance from drought. This recalls Deuteronomy chapter 11 verses 13 to 17, verses that promise the rains in their season, if the people obey the Lord. Verse 2, which speaks of the futility of the household gods, or the Teraphim, and the lies of the diviners, seems a little out of place within the historical context.

After the Jews returned from exile, there do not seem to be the same problems with idolatry as there were prior to it. Indeed, the reference to household gods and diviners might recall an earlier period of Israel's history. The Teraphim, of course, are most associated with the story of Jacob and Laban.

Jacob's Teraphim, or household gods, being taken by Rachel. The character of Micah in Judges chapter 17 also has household gods. Perhaps, as with the reference to the waterless pit in the preceding chapter, the people's failures in the area of idolatry are being described in a way that is designed to bring to mind these earlier stories of Israel's history.

It is also possible to see the reference here as referring back to the reasons why they were sent into exile in the first place, rather than to sins that would happen later in the nation's history. Such a statement would certainly be reminiscent of prophecies such as that of Jeremiah. In verse 16 of the preceding chapter, the Lord had described his people as a flock.

On that day the Lord their God will save them as the flock of his people, for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. Flock, sheep, and shepherd imagery becomes more prominent within this oracle, especially in the following chapter, but also here, where the Lord speaks about the people wandering like sheep, lacking a shepherd. The shepherd that they lack here might be a reference to a Davidic ruler or another sort of good king.

This figure should be distinguished from the shepherds plural that are mentioned in verse 3, the ones against whom God's anger is hot. Those shepherds are most likely the leaders of other nations. They are related to the leaders, or more literally, the he-goats.

In places like Ezekiel chapter 34, the Lord speaks against the false shepherds of his people. Here the false shepherds are most likely referring to the Seleucid rulers. The Lord will rise up against those false shepherds as the true shepherd of his people.

He will make Judah, the ruling tribe that represents the whole, like a majestic steed in battle. In the preceding chapter he described making Judah his bow and Ephraim his arrow. Once again, the Lord is going to act with power, not just for his people, but through his people, equipping them as a weapon of his warfare.

As the Lord's majestic steed, they would put to shame the riders on horses that are mentioned in verse 5. The riders on horses are most likely the Seleucid kings and their armies. The Lord acting as the shepherd of his people to restore them and re-establish them, placing faithful shepherds over them, is also described in places like Jeremiah chapter 23 verses 3 to 5. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. Verse 4 of Zechariah chapter 10 also describes the establishment of new rule within the nation. Here however the governing metaphor is architectural.

The ruler is compared to the cornerstone from which the building is built up, the tent peg that gives security. The Lord would also make Judah, as in verse 13 of the preceding chapter, his battle bow. Where formerly Judah had been harassed and oppressed, Judah would subdue their enemies and trample them underfoot.

Former oppressors would be crushed, receiving the consequences of their wickedness. The northern kingdom of Israel had been removed from the land in 722 BC by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom had finally been overthrown by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

The great division in the kingdom, first a judgment for the sin of Solomon, and a consequence of the arrogance and hubris of his son, continued for many years where the nations warred against each other and sometimes enjoyed a fragile peace. However both Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretold a time when the two nations would no longer be separate. There was already a sense in which this was coming to pass after the return, when the

people were defined not so much by tribal identities but as Jews, all entering more fully into the status of Judahites.

However in the time of Zechariah, the people who had returned to the land were only a small number relative to the numbers that formerly existed there. Their territory was limited, much of the former land had been lost to them and they were also under the rule of the Persians. The overwhelming majority of Jews still existed in exile communities outside of the land.

Here the Lord seems to be speaking of a greater restoration still to come. He will re-establish his people, not just as a small territory within the former region of Judah under foreign rule, but as an independent nation enjoying something nearer to the extent of its former boundaries. It would be as if they had never been sent into exile in the first place.

As the nation enjoyed its new independence and its boundaries extended, the land would be dramatically repopulated. The people had been sown among the nations, dwelling in exile communities for a few centuries and yet as the Lord whistled for them, as a shepherd might whistle for his flock, many would return to the land. The Lord speaks of bringing them from Egypt and from Assyria, a number of different waves of refugees from Judah had gone down to Egypt at various points in history.

One of the most notable of these waves of refugees is described for us in the book of Jeremiah as people fled after the assassination of Gedoliah, the governor of Judah. Egypt of course was the place from which the original exodus had come up. Assyria no longer existed as an empire, but the Assyrians were the ones who had removed the people from the northern kingdom and settled them in territories far from the land.

While the Assyrians were no longer a power, the consequences of their historic actions remained. The Lord speaks of bringing his people to the land of Gilead and Lebanon. Gilead in the region of the Transjordan and Lebanon in the far north represent some of the furthest extremities of the land of Israel.

As the Lord brought back the people and repopulated the land, it would also recover territory that had long been lost. The Lord describes his paving of the way for this using imagery taken directly from the story of the exodus, passing through the sea of troubles, striking down the waves of the sea and all the depths of the Nile being dried up. Foreign rulers would also be humbled as the Lord restored his people.

Perhaps the Assyrians here are standing in part for the Syrian Seleucids who will be humbled through the Maccabean revolt and the subsequent rise of the Jewish nation under the Hasmonean dynasty. A question to consider looking closely at this chapter, how can you see the theme of strength and strengthening being played out within it? Matthew chapter 21 verses 23 to 46 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man? And they discussed it among themselves saying, If we say from

heaven, he will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say from man, we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, We do not know.

And he said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. What do you think? A man had two sons, and he went to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today. And he answered, I will not.

But afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, I go, sir.

But did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, The first. Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Here another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a wine press in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants. And he went into another country.

When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did the same to them.

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, They will respect my son. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.

And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? They said to him, He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet. The second half of Matthew chapter 21

occurs on the day after the triumphal entry, after the cursing of the fig tree.

We should notice the movement back and forth between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount. Jesus here is back in the Temple and being asked concerning his authority, but then he returns to the Mount of Olives later on. And that movement to and fro between these two mountains is significant.

The Mount of Olives is the site from which judgment is declared upon the Temple Mount. The movement between the two mountains then has a theological import. Jesus has entered the city like a king and has declared judgment upon its temple, has healed within the temple, and there are people gathering around him and behind him, and he is the head of a new movement.

And so the chief priests and the leaders of the people, the elders, try and trap him. They ask him concerning his authority. If his authority is from man, it can be dismissed.

If his authority is claimed to be from God, they have other grounds to move against him. And so Jesus answers their question with a question, and yet the answer to the question that Jesus asks them is the answer to the question that they have asked him. John the Baptist was sent by God and his prophetic ministry was one through which God authorized and bore witness to his son.

So Jesus traps those seeking to trap him, as he does so on several occasions, by asking a question in response to a question. And had they answered that question, they would be caught in the position of recognizing John the Baptist's witness to Christ, and yet they knew that they couldn't just dismiss John the Baptist as a prophet, because the people knew that he was a prophet. And so they're caught in a dilemma, and that dilemma is one that shows Jesus' cunning and wisdom as he deals with some of these serpents.

Jesus is wiser than the serpents. Having responded in a shrewd way to their opening gambit, Jesus gives a further parable that serves to put them on the defensive. He asks them about two brothers and the vineyard, and one of the brothers starts off being committed to go out on the vineyard and then ends up failing to do so.

The other originally expresses disobedience and unwillingness and then turns out to do so. Israel may be the vineyard here, but I'd be wary of putting too much weight upon this identification at this point. It would seem to be a fair identification to make, but I don't think it's the primary point of the parable here.

The vineyard is more incidental to this parable unlike the next. Both of the sons are disobedient in some respect. Neither of the sons is fully obedient, but neither is fully disobedient either.

Peter Lighthouse observes that this puts the chief priests and the elders in a difficult position. Either way they answer, they are caught in an unfavorable comparison. Either

they fail to exhibit remorse after rejecting the ministry of John, or they are responsible for their failure to believe John.

Either way, they have neither of the sons virtues and both of their vices, whereas the tax collectors and the prostitutes have at least one of the sons virtues. The parable of the tenants that follows is an important one to read in the light of Israel's identity as the vineyard. Such an identification is found in the Old Testament in places like Isaiah chapter 5 and Psalm 80.

In Isaiah chapter 5 we read, And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured. I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

I will make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon the vineyard.

I will also make it a place of worship, and it shall be a place of worship. I will also make it a place of worship, and it shall be a place of worship. I will also make it a place of worship, and it shall be a place of worship.

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Isaiah's parable focused upon the failure of the vineyard to produce good fruit, but Jesus focuses upon the wickedness of those working within it. The fruit seems to be there, but the workers are rebellious. And so the Master is sending His servants, the prophets, and finally His own servants to the vineyard.

The Lord's servants are His own son, and all are being rejected. And Jesus, we should note, foretells His own death within this parable. They will see the Son, and they will seek to kill the Son when He is sent to them by the Father.

That reference to the Son being seen as He arrives is one that should draw our minds back to Genesis chapter 37. They saw Him from afar, and before He came near, they conspired against Him to kill Him. They said to one another, Here comes this dreamer.

Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what becomes of his dreams. The

workers on the vineyard are therefore being compared to the brothers of Joseph, those who attacked the beloved Son of Israel.

Once again, as with the preceding parable of the two sons, Jesus presents this parable as a question. A question that the elders and the chief priests are asked to answer. And in answering this question, they are brought to a position where they must judge themselves, and they condemn themselves in their answer.

Now it's important to consider what they would have seen in this parable. They would have seen the wicked tenants as some other party. The party of the Romans, for instance.

They are oppressing the vineyard of Israel. They are the ones that are preventing God from getting its fruits. But the trap is about to be sprung.

Jesus gives a verse that interprets the parable. And this verse makes clear that the parable is about the chief priests and the scribes themselves. The verses in question come from Psalm 118 verses 22 to 23.

Now that's in the context of the oppression of the servant of the Lord. He's calling out to God for deliverance. All the nations are surrounding him.

And he calls to God for salvation. The key words are found in these verses. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing. It is marvellous in our eyes. And this verse is used on a number of occasions in the New Testament with reference to things such as the resurrection.

In Acts chapter 4 verse 11. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

And then in 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 4 to 8. The cornerstone is being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

And a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. In Acts 4 then, the apostles are using these verse to refer to the resurrection of Christ, the vindication of the rejected stone.

In 1 Peter chapter 2, the rejected stone is the cornerstone of a new building that's being erected. It's the new temple that God is building. There is a wordplay here between son,



Ben, and stone, Eben, and the fact that the builders are associated with the religious leaders.

This helps to explain that the chief priests and the elders are the ones in view. It brings the temple themes to the forefront. Christ is the rejected stone and becomes the cornerstone of a new temple.

Christ brings this point home by a statement that alludes to Isaiah chapter 8 verses 14-15 and Daniel chapter 2 verses 44-45. And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it, they shall fall and be broken, they shall be snared and taken.

And then in Daniel chapter 2 verses 44-45, And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever. Just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, a great God has made known to the king what shall be after this.

The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure. So Jesus is orchestrating a number of different Old Testament verses and prophetic witnesses to the kingdom, and to the establishment of a new temple, to the rejection of the Messiah, and to the way that the Messiah will be vindicated. And he's bringing these all together into a powerful statement that springs the trap upon the chief priests and the elders of the people.

He is the rejected son. He is the one that was put to death by the wicked vine dressers. And he is the one that will become the base of a new temple that's going to be built.

He has declared judgment upon the old temple, and he will be the one who is the cornerstone of the new. The riches of the Lord's vineyard will be given to another party. They will be given to a faithful party that will bear the fruits that are supposed to be borne by it.

It should be noted that this is not a claim about Israel itself being dispossessed, but about the wicked tenants of the chief priests and the scribes. Their places will be taken by the twelve, who are the true tenants of the vineyard of Israel now. And this looks forward to fruit from Israel.

The vineyard isn't abandoned. It's given into different hands. A question to consider.

How do the two parables that Jesus gives here reflect back upon the earlier question about authority? How do they expose the true character of the authority with which Jesus acts, and challenge the authority of those who are questioning him?