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Zechariah 3 - 4



Zechariah - Steve Gregg

This lecture by Steve Gregg provides insights on the spiritual meanings and symbolism within the books of Zechariah and Exodus. Gregg delves into the significance of the high priest's ornate garment and how it represents the sins of Israel. He also touches on the role of Satan as an accuser and the symbolism behind the olive trees in Revelation.

Transcript

Let's turn together to Zechariah chapter 3. I'm guessing it's not very often that a teacher or a preacher asks people to turn to Zechariah chapter 3. Zechariah is not an extremely popular book to teach. It's a rather daunting book to teach, in fact. And so, I have to say that I didn't hear an abundance of teaching on it when I was young and in church.

And for that reason, I didn't understand much of it. But I think I'm gaining some insight because I'm finally looking at the book and studying it and it's actually not as difficult as I first thought. Though it's not a cinch.

It's not super easy. Let's look at chapter 3. Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the Lord said to Satan, The Lord rebuke you, Satan.

The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is this not a brand plucked from the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and was standing before the angel. And he answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him.

And to him he said, See, I have removed your iniquity from you and I will clothe you with rich robes. And I said, that is Zechariah got so caught up in this, he decided to interject. He said, Let them put a clean turban on his head.

So they did. They put a clean turban on his head. And they put the clothes on him and the angel of the Lord stood by.

And then, as in the previous chapter, after the vision, there's sort of an oracle, sort of a

prophetic word related to the vision. It says, Then the angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts. If you will walk in my ways and if you will keep my command, then you shall also judge my house and likewise have charge of my courts.

I will give you places to walk among those who stand here. Here, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign. For behold, I am bringing forth my servant, the branch.

For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua, upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription, says the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, says the Lord of hosts, everyone will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his big tree.

Well, that's all fairly self-explanatory, I suppose. Let's go to the next chapter. Now, there are a few things, perhaps, that could bear some comment.

Joshua was the living high priest at that time, though it's very unlikely that he played a personal role in this vision. These are visions, not things that are actually happening in the space-time world. Joshua was probably at home asleep while Zechariah was having this night vision in which Joshua was a character, a player.

Just like when you dream and someone you know is in your dream, they don't know it, they're somewhere else, they're not really there. This is just God presenting to Zechariah's mind a dramatic picture in which Joshua, the high priest, is ill-clothed, dressed in filthy garments. Now, actually, the high priest's garments were very elaborate.

According to Exodus, they were some of the most beautiful garments to be imagined and very ornate, but in this case, the high priest was ill-clad. He had filthy garments, very inappropriate, very disqualified, we might say, to go about his duties, to enter the temple, as a high priest should, and to go to the Holy of Holies, as a high priest must at times, and to stand before God. He was not in any condition to approach God.

Yet, God speaks to those about him, probably angels, and says, remove those filthy garments, put clean garments on him. So he was reassigned new clothing, and Zechariah himself was more than just a viewer here, and that's always the case in his visions, maybe not always, but frequently. He's there and he asks questions, who are these people? What's this about? Where's that guy going? And here he just can't help himself, put a turban on his head, too, put a clean turban on his head.

He's really getting caught up in the drama here. And so they did, interestingly enough, Zechariah interjected, hey, I think they should put a clean turban on his head. Good idea, let's do it.

So they put a clean turban on him. And so the man had all clean clothes now, and the angel of the Lord stood by. Now, when his clothes were filthy, there was Satan accusing him.

And the reason for that is that the filthy garments, of course, are symbolic, and it's not even hard to know what they're symbolic of, because it says in verse 4, in the middle of the verse, and to him he said, see, I have removed your iniquity from you. So the removal of the dirty garments is representative of the removal of iniquity. Now, Joshua himself is symbolic.

Although he was a real man, he was not an ordinary man, he was the high priest of Israel. And according to the understanding of what a high priest is, and what he did, and why he existed, we understand that he was, in fact, representative of the whole nation. And so in the vision, I believe this was really saying something about Israel, personified in the representative of the high priest.

We know that the high priest was to be the representative of the whole people, because that's what it was all about. When he went into the Holy of Holies, he went in there offering sacrificial blood, himself representing the whole nation, and offering a sacrifice for the nation's sins. In Exodus chapter 29, excuse me, 28, Exodus 28 and verse 29.

It says, so Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place as a memorial before the Lord continually. That is the high priest, one of his accouterments was a, what they call a breastplate. Actually, it was a cloth bag.

It doesn't seem like what we'd normally call a breastplate, but it was a cloth bag, a square, sort of like an envelope with an open end at the top. And it had 12 gemstones arranged on its front, as inherent in the bag, showing. And each of the gemstones represented one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

So as he wore this on his chest, he was, as it were, bearing the 12 tribes upon him. Even as, say, a sacrificial animal bore the sins of the people, when a hand was laid upon it and the sins were confessed over it, as the animal sacrifice came to represent the worshiper. So the high priest at all times represented the people, the nation.

And so in this vision, this is saying something about Israel, more than about Joshua. You could not have found a better representation of the nation than the high priest, as his role was understood. And here he was, really in no condition to stand before God.

And Satan was quite aware of that, and was accusing him before God. Now Satan got himself rebuked, but first we need to pause and mention. Satan is very seldom mentioned in the Old Testament by name.

Even in the Garden of Eden, we never read of him. We read of a serpent, but we don't

find out that the serpent was Satan until you get to the Book of Revelation. So you encounter, as it were, Satan in the first chapters of the Bible, but you don't have any confirmation from Scripture that he is Satan.

It's only described as a serpent, one of the creatures that God had made. And yet in Revelation 12, 9, we read that the great serpent, the devil, is the ancient serpent, Satan, and so forth. We do encounter Satan in the early chapters of Genesis, but we don't find out that he is Satan there.

The word Satan, or Satanos, in Hebrew simply means adversary. It's the common word in Hebrew for an adversary. It is often used of adversaries of another sort, like in war.

A king who comes against another king is his adversary. That's the ordinary word, Satanos. And so in the Hebrew, actually, many translators prefer to translate this as the Satan, the adversary.

It is arguable that in the Old Testament, Satan was never seen as a proper name for the devil. The devil is in view here, but he is simply the adversary, the Satan in Hebrew. Now, why then do we call him Satan as if it's a proper name? The reason is because the name Satan, which is Hebrew, is carried over into the New Testament untranslated.

The New Testament is written in Greek, but whenever it mentions Satan, it doesn't translate Satan into Greek. It doesn't use the Greek word for adversary. It just carries over the Hebrew name Satan.

And so the Old Testament does not even reveal so much about Satan as to say that's his proper name. Even Jesus refers to him in the New Testament as Satan in using the Hebrew word, though the rest of Jesus' statements are in Greek. So that the name comes over untranslated into the Greek New Testament, and therefore we understand it to be a proper name.

But there's very little reference to him by name in the Old Testament. When I say very little, the earliest reference to him is in the book of Job, and we read probably more there than anywhere else in the whole Bible about him, and that's because he's in a drama in which he and God are having a conversation, and Satan has more than one speaking part. And in the first chapter of Job, Satan comes before God and accuses Job, saying Job's motives are not what you think they are.

You think he's a faithful and sincere follower, but believe me, he's not. He's like any other man who would give up on you as soon as you stop blessing him. Let me afflict him, and you'll see he'll curse you.

You see, Satan is accusing God's man, Job, and he does so again in Job chapter 2. Outside of Job, we never hear of Satan in the Old Testament again, except here and in 2 Chronicles, excuse me, 1 Chronicles. At the end of 1 Chronicles, we're told that Satan

tempted David, or more properly, Satan moved David to number the people. This is something of a problem because the parallel statement in 2 Samuel says that God moved David to number the people, and this has been a notorious difference between Samuel and the parallel in 1 Chronicles, in that Samuel says it was God, and Chronicles says it was Satan who moved David.

Now, rather than seeing this as a contradiction, I myself have felt that both statements are true. I tend to believe all the statements in the Bible are true. And if one Bible verse says God did it and another verse says Satan did it, I have to figure they both had a hand in it.

After all, we know that Satan and God both had a hand in what happened to Job because Satan came to God and said, remove the hedge that you have currently around Job, which protects him from me, and let me get at him, and you'll see something you've not seen from that man. You'll see another side of that man. And so God said, okay, you're on.

And so God removes the hedge and Satan goes after Job. And when Job loses everything, what does Job say? Does he say, the Lord gave and Satan took away? No, he says, the Lord gave and the Lord took away. Now, we might say, well, that's just because Job didn't know.

It really wasn't the Lord, it was really Satan. No, it was Satan and it was the Lord. This was a joint effort.

And this is what makes it very strange because after, when Job says the Lord gave and the Lord takes away, the next statement is, and Job didn't speak wrongly of the Lord. In all this, he didn't speak ill of God. And later on in Job 42, it says that Job's friends did not speak rightly of God as Job did.

So the book of Job tells us that Job didn't make a mistake in saying the Lord takes away. It was indeed the Lord who took it away through the agency of Satan. Satan wanted to do it.

He couldn't do it without God's permission. God gave permission and Satan did it. And thus, in a sense, Satan and God were in cahoots.

It was a joint effort. This could never have happened if God didn't want it to happen because God had a hedge already around Job that kept the devil from getting to him. And God could have simply left the hedge in place if he wanted to.

When the devil said, let me take these things from him, God could have said, not in your life. You go do something else because I'm not going to let you at Job. And that would have been the end of the story of Job.

We wouldn't have heard of him ever again. But, you see, because God said, okay, this sounds like something worthwhile. I think the man can be tested because I think he'll pass this test.

You think he won't? I've got a bet on him that he's going to pass. You've got a bet that he won't. Let's see who's right.

And so God and Satan, agreeably, tested Job. The same thing, I think, is true of David. One passage says God moved David.

The other says Satan moved David. I don't think it's any different kind of a situation than we have in Job. I think Satan wanted to get at David.

God, generally speaking, didn't allow that kind of thing unless, except in special circumstances, and this was one of them. God allowed David to be tested, and Satan is the one who tested him. They're both involved.

Now, this is a difficult thing for us because we often tend to think wrongly that God and Satan are opposed to each other in a certain way, a little bit like two equal rulers of hostile kingdoms are opposed to each other. This is not what the Bible teaches. Satan is not the polar opposite of God.

There is no polar opposite from God. Everything is the polar opposite of God because he's the creator, everything else is a creation, and those are polar opposites. Satan is not himself like an equal adversary of God.

He's our adversary, and that's because God allows it because Satan is a creation of God, just as everything else is, and just as every other creation, Satan is lower than God by a magnitude of infinity. There's no way that any creation approaches comparableness with God. When Satan comes to God about Job, Satan doesn't come and say, listen, if you don't let me at Job, I'm going to hurt you.

No, he says, listen, I can't do a thing to Job because you won't let me, and he had to find some way to argue to persuade God to go along with what Satan wanted to do. In this case, it fit God's plans, and so he let him tempt Job. Likewise, David, and apparently, likewise, here we have, this is probably not an actual occurrence taking place because it's a vision, but we see Satan in the same kind of role.

He's accusing the high priest, and this is no doubt the reason why we read in Revelation chapter 12, and verse 10, that the accuser of the brethren has been cast out. That's the only time in the Bible that Satan is called that, though we probably are well familiar with that title for him, the accuser of the brethren. The statement, the phrase is only one time in Scripture, in Revelation 12, 10.

But he is called the accuser of the brethren because in Old Testament times, that's

exactly what he did, at least every time he's seen. He is seen only in the book of Job, and in this place in Zechariah, and in the place where he moved David to number the people in 1 Chronicles 29, I think it is. And so, Satan is really obscure in the Old Testament.

Whenever he is seen, he's accusing God's people, or testing them in some way. And so, that is what he's doing here, in one of these extremely rare appearances that Satan makes in the Bible, and he's not even really there probably, because this is a vision. He's probably not really there anymore than Joshua is really there.

This is a depiction of a truth in symbolic form to the consciousness of the prophet. And what it means, of course, is that Satan apparently has a legitimate accusation to make against Joshua, or Israel, since Joshua represents Israel. Why? Because Israel is covered with iniquity, just like the high priest is covered with a filthy garment.

Because that's why they went into captivity. This is written after the captivity, when the Jews have come back. But they went into captivity for seven years because of their iniquities.

They were addicted to idolatry and to sin, and therefore they had to go through that chasing of the Babylonian exile. But now the remnant had come back, but they were still bearing on their conscience, no doubt, the awareness of their failures, their historic failures, which had led to their recent trials in Babylon. And now they are back, and you know what's happening? They're still being accused.

The Samaritans who were in the land when the Jews returned didn't like them there, and they accused them of being troublemakers. They wrote letters to the kings of Persia and said, these people are bad people. You can check out their past.

Just look in the records. Every king that ever ruled them found them unruly and difficult. In other words, they were still experiencing accusations, and they probably hung their heads because they knew, unfortunately, this was true.

The accusations are true. Satan doesn't have to make things up in order to find fault with people because people are sinners, and Satan exploits that, and he uses that to accuse them before God and try to alienate them before God. And no doubt the Jews at this time were feeling that well enough.

They didn't come back all cocky and hot and, you know, sassy. They were a chastened people, coming back a small trickle of them from Babylon with meager resources, meager population, and with a big task to do in the midst of very hostile neighbors. And they probably were not the least bit cocky.

They were probably somewhat discouraged, somewhat guilty. You know, when your conscience isn't clear, it's hard to be confident about anything. It says in Proverbs, the wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

That's because if you're wicked, your conscience can't be clear. When your conscience isn't clear, you're always paranoid. You'll run away when no one's even chasing you.

The wicked flee when no one's even chasing them, but the righteous, they're confident. They're bold as a lion. It says in 1 John 3, brethren, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence with God.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. If our conscience, if our heart is not condemning us, we've got confidence. But when your heart is condemning you, you don't have confidence.

And here these people are surrounded by hostile neighbors, given a task that they barely have the resources to perform, still smarting under the conscience that they are a sinful people, who have just come out of a bad chasing experience because of their sins, and they're still being accused by those who don't like them. And God's depicting this symbolically as the high priest covered with dirt, iniquity, covering the people of Israel, and there's the adversary, Satan, and he's speaking against them. Now, notice, this begins by God rebuking Satan.

The Lord rebuke you, Satan. And basically, when you rebuke someone, you're saying, you are wrong. That's what rebuke means.

Rebuke means saying, you're wrong. Now, the truth is that Satan probably wasn't wrong. I mean, Joshua's garments really were dirty.

There really was iniquity there. They really could be justly accused. But God removed the filthy garments, put on clean garments, and now there was nothing there for the devil to talk about.

We don't read of the devil any further. He was banished. Because although Israel had done wrong, God had just decided, I'm done thinking about that.

I'm going to replace your filthy garments with clean ones, so that when I look at you, you're clean. Now, this obviously has something of a parallel in Revelation, where Satan is referred to as the accuser of the brethren, because in Revelation 12, and it may very well be that Revelation is alluding back even to this vision, though I wouldn't be dogmatic about it. But again, when the Scripture refers to him as the accuser of the brethren, it says in Revelation 12, 10, Then I heard a voice saying in heaven, Now salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ have come.

For the accuser of our brethren, who accused them, past tense, before our God day and night, has been cast down. He has been thrown out of court. Now, why would he be thrown out of court? Well, we know it's because of what transpired in the verses before,

the war in heaven, which ended up with Satan being cast out, which I believe corresponds with the victory that Christ obtained at the cross.

Why would I think a thing like that? Well, it says the dragon was cast out, and isn't that what Jesus said in John 12? By the way, written by the same author. John 12, 31. Jesus said, Now is the judgment of this world.

Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. What's the now in that sentence? Now that Jesus is going to the cross, now the ruler of the world, Satan, is going to be cast out. So Jesus associated the casting out of Satan with the cross, and rightly so.

Here too, in a symbolic depiction, the dragon is cast out of heaven. He is said to have been the accuser of the brethren. That means he was like the prosecuting attorney in a court of law, and he has been thrown out.

His case is not going to be heard any longer. He has been expelled from the court. The prosecutor is gone, but he is not dead.

He is cast out of heaven, which means God won't be hearing him anymore, but he is cast down to earth, where he still accuses. He is still the accuser of the brethren, it's just that he can't do it before God, because God is not interested in hearing it ever since Jesus died. Remember what it says in Romans 8? We haven't studied it in Romans yet, but you know, you've read it before.

It says, who can bring anything, who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It's God who justifies. Who condemns? Who can accuse? If God says you're okay, who's got a case against you? Certainly not the devil or anyone else. His case is thrown out of court, dramatically displayed as Satan thrown out of heaven.

Now, he is still around, he still accuses, and he still attacks us on an earthly plane, and still accuses us, but it says in verse 11, they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Now, if I was teaching tonight on spiritual warfare, I'd talk about all that verse, but I want to talk about the first part, because it's related to what we're looking at in Zechariah. They overcome Satan's accusations, because that's what he is in this passage, an accuser, a prosecutor.

They overcome him, they defeat him, they win in court. His accusations are neutralized. By what? By the blood of the Lamb.

You see, when you are on trial in a court of law, you're being accused of something, and the judge says, how do you plead? There's two expected, one of two, you know, pleas. Do you plead guilty or not guilty? Did you do the crime or did you not do the crime? You tell me at the beginning, then if you say you're not guilty, we'll find out by witnesses and things like that. If you say you're guilty, we'll pass over all that stuff.

But is your plea guilty or not guilty? Well, how does a Christian plead before God? I can't plead that I'm not guilty, because frankly, in some cases, depending on what the deed is, I did do it. I can't say I didn't do it, but I can't plead guilty if God has forgiven me, because that's not believing that he's really said, you're not guilty anymore, you're acquitted. What can you plead then? You plead the blood of Jesus, and pleading the blood is not, to be understood in the classic, you know, Pentecostal sense of, you plead the blood like a magic covering over your finances and over your house and over your car, and it's a magic protection against all things, and the demons can't penetrate it.

This is the way that Pentecostals, I know because I've been among Pentecostals all my adult life, and read the books about this. Pleading the blood is sometimes thought to be almost like a magic rabbit's foot, you know, that protects from all attacks from the enemy, and they get it from here. They overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb.

The thing is that Satan is not here attacking their finances or their health. He's attacking their conscience. He's the accuser, and they overcome his accusations by appeal to the blood of the Lamb, and it's a good plea, just as I am without one plea, but that your blood was shed for me.

That's pleading the blood as my justification. That's how I defeat an accusation from the devil. It's the blood of Jesus.

It's not about me being good or not being good so much. It's about what God's thinking about me, and Israel in Zechariah's day had in fact done bad things, but God was saying, I'm done being angry at you right now. We're going to put that in the past.

I'm giving you clean garments now. You're fresh now. You're cleansed, and this is, of course, an emblem of the cleansing and the immunity from accusation of the devil that is, of course, made more obvious and real and permanent and so forth in Christ later on, and so the prophecy that is then uttered pertaining to this vision ends up talking about Christ, as we shall see.

The angel spoke in verse 6 and said, Thus says the Lord of hosts, if you walk in my ways, speaking to Joshua, but really addressing Israel in the representative of the high priest, if you walk in my ways, and if you keep my command, you shall also judge my house. Now this would be, of course, the priest would do that, would in a sense, judge would mean rule, rule the temple, and likewise have charge of my courts, I will give you places to walk among those who stand here. Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, probably the other priests, for they are a glorious or a wondrous sign.

Now that a person is a sign does not mean there's anything at all miraculous about them. We think of signs and wonders as referring to miracles, and there are such signs and wonders, and they are miracles, but the word sign is not a word that always refers to

something supernatural or miraculous. A sign is just something that communicates information.

A sign has information on it that you can read and be informed from. And the priests here, and what is said to them, becomes a sign that God is, that God wants you to know something, and he's gonna say what it is he wants you to know. These priests, they stand as a sign to the people of a promise that God's going to make, a wondrous one.

He says, for behold, I'm bringing forth my servant, the branch. Now, the branch is, I believe, a reference to Jesus Christ. It's a messianic title.

In fact, it's going to be used again later on in chapter 8, or chapter 6 later on, he's going to be referred to as the branch again in chapter 6, verse 12. And in both cases, these are prophecies about Christ. Now, Joshua, being the high priest, is not only representative of the people, he's also a type of Christ, the high priest.

And it is in that role that he sort of stands in for the occasion of this prophecy to be made about the high priest that is not Joshua, although has the same name, by the way. Joshua is Jesus' name in Hebrew, but that's more or less coincidental, I think. No specific significance is given to that fact here necessarily, though it may be more than coincidental.

But he says, my servant, the branch, for behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua, upon the stoner's seven eyes. Now, we had not read earlier of any stones in the vision laid before Joshua. Nor are we given any explanation of it, except that there's a stone with seven eyes that is now laid before Joshua.

What is this stone with seven eyes? Well, one thing we know, that in certain passages of the previous Old Testament scripture, the Messiah is referred to as a stone. In Isaiah 8, as a stumbling stone. In Psalm 118, as a cornerstone.

As a foundation stone in Isaiah 28, 16. There's a number of times the Messiah is spoken of using imagery of a stone. Furthermore, Jesus himself, in Revelation 5, 6, is said to have seven eyes and seven horns.

He's depicted there symbolically as a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. So has this stone. Is that a coincidence? I think not.

In fact, I personally think that in Revelation, when it speaks of Christ as having seven eyes, it's a very deliberate echo of this very passage. This stone has seven eyes. And a stone is an emblem of the Messiah in a number of other passages.

So I have some confidence that this stone with seven eyes is supposed to be Jesus. And that he's saying to Joshua, the high priest, I'm laying before you, that is putting before you to call your attention to this other high priest named Joshua, Jesus. This stone, he's

my servant, the branch, and I'm going to use this occasion to give an oracle about the Messiah, the branch, the stone.

Behold, I will engrave its inscription, says the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. Now, just as in this vision, God had removed the iniquity of Joshua by taking off filthy clothing, but that's in the past. Verse 4, God says, see, I have removed your iniquity.

But now there's a prediction of the future. I will remove the iniquity of the land in a single day. In the vision, the iniquity of the high priest was removed, but that has already happened.

Now God says, something's going to happen. In the future, I'm going to remove the iniquity of the land in one day. What day would that be? Would that be the day that Revelation 12 was talking about, when a voice says, now has come salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ for the accuser of our brethren has been cast out, cast down, the day that Jesus died, when God made atonement.

We don't read in this case that the Israelites in Joshua's day or Zerubbabel's day or Zechariah's day had any particular atonement offered for them. They had just gone through chastening and God was done being angry about that. But the removal of guilt, the absolving of them of all their past, which was indicated by the removal of the high priest's dirty garments and the replacement, was a type and a shadow of a time when God would in the future remove all the iniquity of his people, all the iniquity that the Jews had committed, that is, if they are, when they are his people, the remnant, and he'd do it in one day.

And in that day, says the Lord of hosts, everyone will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree. What in the world does that mean? Well, this is a late prophecy. Zechariah was, of course, after the captivity.

An earlier prophet, contemporary with Isaiah, named Micah, had famously made a prediction about vines and fig trees in a messianic prophecy in Micah chapter 4, right after Jonah. And in Micah chapter 4, there's a prophecy that was very likely influenced by Isaiah 2. Isaiah 2, the first few verses, and the first few verses of Micah 4 are, they're not verbatim, but you can't find a dime's worth of difference between their content. It's about how Mount Zion will be elevated and all the nations will flow into it and they'll learn the ways of the Lord and it talks about the Gentiles coming to God.

This is, of course, in the present age, in the church age. And in that prophecy, Micah adds something that Isaiah did not say. It says, in verse 4 of Micah 4, But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

Now notice, everyone under his vine and his fig tree is really having no reason to be afraid. It's a peaceable, idyllic image. The idea is, you haven't had your own land at all.

You've been in exile for 70 years. Even when you've been in your land before that, you were invaded numerous times by the Babylonians and Assyrians and others before that. The time will come when you will just be able to relax in your own garden, under your own plants, and no one will make you afraid anymore.

It's a picture of peace. Now, of course, it's a picture of, we might say, political peace, in that they're not being oppressed, they're not being invaded, they're not terrified anymore. But these images from the Old Testament are the way that God depicted spiritual truths.

Remember, Jesus said, These things I've spoken to you, that in me you'll have peace. In the world, you'll have tribulation. But be of good cheer, I've overcome the world.

You can have peace even in a world with tribulation. To sit under your vine and fig tree in a peaceable, fear-free environment is, if it were literal, certainly a tribulation-free period of time. But Jesus said, In the world, you're going to have tribulation.

I'm giving you peace in me. You're living on two levels here. In the world, it's not all that peaceful for you.

There's tribulation. But in me, you will have peace and that will be constant. That will be transcendent.

And I believe that these prophecies about the Messianic Age are using earthly imagery that the Jews could appreciate in a natural sense because they were not spiritual men. They didn't have the Holy Spirit. And the Bible says the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God.

They're foolishness to him because they're spiritually discerned. At a time before the Holy Spirit was given, God had to use earthly analogies, just like Jesus did with Nicodemus. He said, You have to be born again.

He said, It's like the wind. You don't know where it's coming from, where it's going. And Nicodemus said, What's this all about you're talking about? And Jesus said, Are you the teacher of Israel who don't know these things? If I've spoken to you in earthly analogies and you don't understand, how are you going to understand if I speak of heavenly or spiritual things? You see, God first speaks to the Jews in the natural and then the spiritual.

First the natural, then the spiritual. And you see, these Old Testament prophecies were expressing spiritual truths in natural ways. Unfortunately, the Jews who were not spiritual came to believe them only in the natural ways, intended to think the Messiah was going

to come and make them have all their enemies go away, their political enemies, and give them prosperity and bring Israel physically back to the land.

And all this they took in an entirely natural way. But the New Testament writers make it very clear, No, we're talking about spiritual enemies. We're talking about spiritual peace.

We're talking about spiritual gathering. We're talking about a spiritual land. I mean, you read the New Testament and this is the way they interpreted these promises.

But nonetheless, Micah in a Messianic prophecy had said everyone will sit under his vine and fig tree. Not literally, but an image of idyllic unmolested peace and security. And so also in Zechariah when it says when the branch, the Messiah takes away the iniquity of the people everyone will have this serenity, this peace, this security.

Everyone will call his neighbor to come visit him and have a cup of lemonade under his fig tree and under his vine. Same imagery of Micah 4.4 and that's intended to be about the same subject. Zechariah certainly would have read Micah.

And even if he hadn't, the Holy Spirit had. And he was giving these words. So, here in this chapter the sign is of the cleansing of the garments of the high priest as an emblem of a future cleansing of the iniquity of the people of God altogether through a servant of God named the Branch.

Or called the Branch. You know that at the end of Matthew chapter 2 when it's talking about how Jesus' family when he was a baby, they came back from Egypt and they didn't resettle in Bethlehem where he was born or in Jerusalem area. They went north and settled in Nazareth.

And Matthew says that it might be fulfilled what was written in the prophets. He should be called a Nazarene. Now what's interesting about that quote, he should be called a Nazarene, is it's not a quote of anything in the Scripture.

When Jesus settled in Nazareth and Matthew said, this fulfilled the prophecy or the words of the prophets. He should be called a Nazarene. There are no words of the prophets that say he should be called a Nazarene.

And this has been perplexing for Bible scholars. There's different ways they've come to understand what Matthew had in mind. But one thing that we can see is that there are four other times in the gospel in Matthew chapter 2, just four other times in that same chapter where Old Testament prophecies are quoted.

And it always either gives the prophets name or just says the prophet singular. But when it comes to he should be called a Nazarene, it's the prophets that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, not a particular prophet, more or less prophets. How many prophets said he'll be called a Nazarene? Well none of them said it in those exact

words, but there must have been something that the prophets, plural said, that Matthew thought would well translate into he should be called a Nazarene.

What was Matthew thinking? Well Nazareth in the Hebrew language means the town of the branch. A Nazarene is someone from Nazareth. A Nazarene by the way is not a Nazarite.

People sometimes make that mistake. A Nazarite was somebody who took a special vow described in Numbers chapter 6 where they didn't cut their hair or come near a dead body or eat anything from a grapevine for a period of time. That's what a Nazarite was.

Jesus was not one of those. He did touch dead bodies and he also drank wine and so he was no Nazarite. But, John the Baptist was, but Jesus was not and Jesus drew that contrast.

He said John came not eating meat or drinking wine, but I came drinking and eating and you call me a wine bibber. So John was a Nazarite, Jesus was no Nazarite, but he was a Nazarene which is simply a reference to somebody who's from the city of Nazareth. And when Matthew said the prophets said he would be a Nazarene, well they didn't ever say he shall be a Nazarene.

They never used those terms, but a number of prophets did call him the branch and Nazareth, if a Nazarene is someone from the town of the branch, is not the town of the branch where you'd expect the branch to come from and Matthew is not being very literal at all. But he is, I think, seeing significance in the fact that the prophets, Jeremiah did and Zechariah did and I'm pretty sure Isaiah did too, referred to the Messiah at least once as the branch or at least a shoot from like a plant out of ground. This agricultural image of him branching and growing like a branch.

And here in Zechariah twice, Messiah is called the branch. And lo and behold says Matthew, what do you know? Jesus grows up in the branches town, the town of the branch. Doesn't that connect with the prophets calling him the branch? I think that's what Matthew has in mind, though he's very oblique in what he's saying.

Now we come to chapter seven, excuse me, chapter not that far ahead yet, chapter four. This is a very famous chapter, probably more than most chapters in Zechariah because it has a famous line that is quoted frequently by Christians. But let's look at it real quickly here.

Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, what do you see? So I said, I'm looking and there's a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it and on the stand are seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it.

One at the right of the bowl and the other at the left. So I answered and spoke to the

angel who talked with me saying, what are these, my lord? Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, do you not know what these are? And I said, no, I wouldn't have asked if I did. And so he answered and said to him, or said to me, this is the word of the lord to Zerubbel.

Interesting, he didn't see a word. He saw an image, but this was a word. This was a prophecy.

What did he see? He saw two olive trees, the source of olive oil, of course. Olive oil is used for many things, among others, lighting the room when you have a lamp. Oil lamps were a major means of keeping light in the house once the sun has gone down.

And so olive oil was used to light lamps. He saw a lamp, a menorah, actually, such as you might see if you went into the holy place in the temple. It was lit.

And it had two olive trees, sources of olive oil on either side. And although it's not explained well here, a little later on we're going to see, especially in verse 12, that what he saw included gold pipes that ran directly from the olive trees into a reservoir that fed the gold lamps. In other words, the imagery is there's a steady supply of oil from these olive trees flowing through these pipes into a reservoir that keeps the lamps going.

Now, of course, you don't really get olive oil that way. It's not like maple syrup. You don't tap into the bark of an olive tree and have an olive oil flood.

You actually get olive oil crushing olives and all that. But this is symbolic. An olive tree is clearly the source of olive oil, and that's what you need to make the lamp burn.

And there's pipes running from the trees directly to the reservoir, the fuel of the lamp. And so we see an unceasing supply of olive oil coming to the lamp, keeping it lit. Now, it's very likely that the lamp, which is probably an image of the menorah, represents Israel's very existence as a light to the world.

It's very continuance. There is a saying, you find sometimes in the Old Testament, that when someone almost died but didn't, that God didn't let, for example, a number of times it says in Samuel, that God didn't let David get killed when he almost got killed because he didn't want the lamp of Israel to go out. David was the lamp of Israel.

And in the book of Proverbs sometimes it talks about how the lamp of the wicked will be put out. What is a lamp? The spark of life, perhaps? Maybe more than that? It's hard to say, but the lamp, insofar as it is representative of anything, of Israel, probably speaks of Israel's ongoing existence. It's living on regardless of the opposition it faces and continuing to bear light for God.

The very existence of Israel bore light for God, even if they weren't real good at evangelizing other people who weren't Jews. Nonetheless, God's testimony was seen and

the nations were informed and enlightened by the fact that God had restored Israel in fulfillment of promises he had made. And he hadn't done that for Esau.

He hadn't done that for Edom or the lots of others. And so the lamp is burning and it's going to burn continuously because it's got an unlimited supply of oil coming from these two trees. That's what Esau saw.

And this is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel. Now, interestingly, the last vision related to Joshua, the high priest. This one now is addressed, essentially, to the governor who led the people, Zerubbabel.

He was not only in charge of the community, but in charge of the project of getting the temple rebuilt. Not an easy project with the budget and the manpower they had and the opposition they were facing. And something of an obstacle faced Zerubbabel.

Enough so that he could become discouraged. He might even think that he wouldn't succeed. He might even think that this whole project would fizzle out.

The lamp would go out of Israel. But, if this vision is meaning anything, it means the lamp's not going to go out. There's a constant supply of oil.

We'll soon find what the oil is. This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel. Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain, and he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of grace, grace to it. Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple. His hand also shall finish it.

Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord.

That's those seven eyes on the stone in the previous chapter. Those seven eyes are the eyes of the Lord, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth. So God's watching everything.

The eyes of the Lord are scanning the earth. Of course, in the first vision, there were actually horsemen patrolling the earth, bringing back information, but that's symbolic. God doesn't really give His information that way.

This is changing the imagery to get the same idea. God's watching everything. God's keeping tabs on everything.

And He really is happy to see this. These seven are going to rejoice to see. Zerubbabel finished the project.

He had laid the foundation actually years earlier, and it had been interrupted, but now they were back on the job. He says, you know what? God says you're going to finish. This mountain, who are you, O mountain? Before Zerubbabel, you will become a plain.

Now, the pastor I studied under when I was younger felt that this mountain referred to a literal mountain of rubble. That because the Babylonians had destroyed the city and broken down the walls and burned things, that there was all this rubble from the former city. They'd been just laying there for 70 years, and now it's got to be cleared.

They've got to get it out of the way. On the other hand, I don't know that this is intended to be taken as a literal mountain of rubble that's going to be removed and become a plain. I know it's this obstacle, this physical obstruction that's going to be removed for the simple reason that the foundation was already laid.

It's not like they had to do new site preparation. If there was rubble around it, it had been already removed from where the temple was going to be built because this foundation was there, finished. So, I don't think this is talking about the removal of an actual mound of trash and rubble that had to be removed, and that was intimidating.

Zerubbabel. I mean, when you do have 50,000 workers, you can get rid of most mounds of rubble without too much trouble. It might be a lot of work, but they did have at least enough hands to do that without that being the biggest problem they had.

But I think a mountain simply represents obstacles. Obstacles to progress. Traveling was hard over mountains.

And we shall see that there's another reference to a mountain that's, I believe, symbolic later on in chapter 14 where a mountain splits in two and a valley providing a removal of the obstacle for flight is there. A mountain in the Bible is not always a literal thing, especially in the prophets. And it usually, in a case like this, refers to something that obstructs travel.

And if Zerubbabel is seen as someone who's traveling toward a goal, whatever obstruction is there, God's going to just make it smooth. He's going to smooth out the way before him, just like what John the Baptist is said to have said in Isaiah chapter 40. Every mountain shall be removed.

Every valley shall be filled up. The way of the Lord shall be made smooth. This voice crying in the wilderness saying that.

Now, John the Baptist didn't really smooth any valleys. He didn't change any topography of the land of Israel at all. He's talking symbolically.

The Lord is coming. We need to give him a smooth welcome. Whatever is obstructing needs to be removed.

We need to make ready a way for the Lord. And so the removal of mountains simply means to remove obstacles, which are not literally mountains in most cases. But whatever obstacles there are in the project we're involved in.

So, I think what he's saying is Zerubbabel no doubt feels that this project is overwhelming. He probably feels like he's facing a huge mountain that he has to overcome. Well, God's on it.

Before him, that mountain is going to become a plain. It's going to be smoothed out. Which simply means that God is going to assist supernaturally by His Spirit.

Not by might or by power but by the Spirit of the Lord. God's going to assist Zerubbabel in completing the project so that he will have the plumb line dangling from the top when the last stone is put on. Just to make sure the wall is plumb.

You don't use the plumb line until the wall is already erected. And so the idea is that he built the foundation. He's going to when it's all done, he's going to be up there making sure the walls are straight.

He's holding a plumb line in his hand. He's going to put the capstone on there. This is simply saying Zerubbabel, you may feel like you've bit off more than you can chew.

You started a project that seems overwhelming. Don't worry. You're going to finish it.

And you're not going to do it by your own strength. You're not going to do it because you're a great leader or a great construction contractor. You're going to do it because of my Spirit.

Not your might. Not by your power. My Spirit is in this project.

I'm behind it. I'm feeding it like the oil that flows from these trees to keep the lamp burning. That oil is like my Spirit coming continually to you to keep this project going until you have finished it.

That's what the word to Zerubbabel is. Verse 11 When I answered and said to him, What are these two olive trees? One at the right of the lampstand and the other at the left. And I further answered and said to him, What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains? We hadn't been told about them before, but they were there and he just mentioned it now.

You've got this oil dripping from the olive trees into the receptacles that go into the pipes that go to the lamp to keep it burning. What is that about? Then he answered me and said, Do you not know what these are? And I said, No, I don't, my Lord. So he said, These are the two anointed ones, literally in the Hebrew, the two sons of oil, but probably anointed ones is what is meant by that idiom, who stand beside the Lord of the

whole earth.

Now it's clear that the lamp was being kept burning from the input from these trees. There apparently were two individuals who are represented by these trees through whom the Spirit of God was ministering and inputting into the project so that the project would keep going like the lamp would keep burning and it wouldn't fizzle out. Most commentators believe that the two sons of oil are referenced to Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, the political and the religious leader of the community.

We know that the high priests were anointed with oil, that was part of their inauguration. We don't know if Zerubbabel was ever anointed with oil because he wasn't actually a king. He was just a governor of the royal line.

He was descended from the royal line, but he was not a king. He may never have been literally anointed, but as Israel's leaders, religious and political, were typically anointed with oil. It may be that because Josh, because Zerubbabel was as it were the political leader, he's included as one of the anointed ones.

God has anointed him to be the political leader, and Joshua to be the religious leader, and through their leadership all that is necessary will be supplied. Now there's another way to look at it. I've never heard a commentator say so, but it's always struck me as a very real possibility, and that is that the anointed ones are Zechariah and Haggai, the prophets.

After all, the oil is the Holy Spirit, and it's the prophets who are speaking by the Spirit, supplying the spiritual impetus, the spiritual encouragement, the spiritual blight, the spiritual power that got the community going and got them successfully finishing the project. It's impossible to argue for sure which way it is. Is this a reference to Joshua and Zerubbabel, the political and the religious leaders, or is it a reference to the two prophets who themselves certainly if they're true prophets, the Holy Spirit was speaking through them.

They were anointed ones. And not only were they anointed themselves, but the Holy Spirit was ministering through them, like through these pipes into the project and encouraging the people and giving them the strength to go on. As you can see, I personally think that my theory is better, but since most commentators take the other, it must not be all that bad.

So either theory is available. Now one thing interesting is when Revelation 11 talks about the two witnesses, it says these are the two olive trees that stand before the Lord of all the earth. Now that's what's said about these two.

These olive trees are the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth. Very clearly, Revelation 11 is making some kind of connection between the two

witnesses and the two olive trees in this vision. This would get us off our concern for Zechariah.

Too much for me to go into too much detail, but let me just say this. There's no commentator I know, and certainly not myself, I'm not an exception, who would say that the two witnesses in Revelation are Zerubbabel and Joshua, nor Zechariah and Haggai. But you see what Revelation does is it regularly borrows imagery from Old Testament prophets and frequently from Zechariah, and we can see from this very passage.

Revelation has borrowed the imagery, but not necessarily to assume that the images have the same application. Revelation is full of hundreds of images from Old Testament passages, but with a new application. So the two witnesses are not really intended to be the same olive trees that we have here in Zechariah 4, but like the two olive trees in Zechariah 4, they too are anointed by the Holy Spirit, and their voices, their witness is that which keeps God's kingdom, or God's message alive, or God's project going while they are witnessing.

And I, my own thought is that the two witnesses represent the church throughout the whole age. There's a lot of other opinions, some of them better than others, but the point is that the two witnesses are analogous to the olive trees in this passage, in that they, and since the two witnesses are not ministering as political leaders, the analogy would be better served if the two witnesses being prophets, because it actually says my two witnesses will prophesy for 42 months, then the olive trees might be better seen as prophets, if they are analogous to the witnesses, they're prophets, and therefore Haggai and Zechariah would be a better choice of the two olive trees in Zechariah 4. It's not very important, but one thing is interesting is the two witnesses also have certain things said about them that remind us of Moses and Elijah. For that very reason, many people have said they are going to be Moses and Elijah, because they turn water into blood and smite the earth with plagues, which Moses did, and they can stop the rain for three and a half years and call fire to heaven, like Elijah did, and so the clear references to Moses and Elijah in the two witnesses sometimes makes people say oh, it's going to be Moses and Elijah, but you might as well say it's going to be the same two guys as were the olive trees here.

Just because Revelation borrows this imagery from the Old Testament doesn't mean it's talking about the same people. In any case, I think probably the two olive trees here are the agents through whom the Holy Spirit is being ministered to the Jewish community, which is probably Haggai and Zechariah, the two prophets that were involved there. So we had two visions, one pertained to Joshua, and one pertained to Zerubbabel, in the sense that one was really addressed to Joshua, and the other to Zerubbabel.

The one to Joshua actually morphed into a prophecy about the Messiah. The one to Zerubbabel just remained, from start to finish, an encouragement to the man that

whatever opposition he may have faced in the project, he would finish and succeed in the project of rebuilding the temple. And it was the prophecies of, like this, the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah that actually stirred the people up and encouraged them and actually led them to finish the project.

And when it was finished, it was not by might nor by power. It was because of the ministry of these prophets. It was by the Spirit of God energizing them and inspiring them.

Okay, so we'll stop there. There's more kind of strange visions to come in the chapters ahead, but we have no time for them today, so we'll take them next time.