

### ***III. The Man in the Myrtles***

16-Dec-07 Zechariah 1:8-12

*Theme:* Christ dwells in the midst of His covenant people.

*Key Verse:* Zechariah 1:8a I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow.

#### Review

Last week, we studied Zechariah's opening message of repentance (1:2-6). God declared His anger upon the forefathers, an objective statement of fact that was clearly demonstrated by the destruction of both Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC and the resulting Babylonian captivity. The generation of Zechariah's day clearly understood this truth, since they themselves had only returned to Jerusalem 18 years previously and were still living within the ruins of Jerusalem.

The heart of Zechariah's opening message is "Return to Me and I will return to you" (1:3). God continuously calls His sinful people to repent of their sins and return to Him. This is a message that we also need to hear. As we continue to grow in grace and sanctification, the more we recognize that we need His grace. Instead of closing the holiness gap between us and God, we more clearly realize how wide the gulf between our righteousness and that of God truly is. "Repentance always needs to become deeper and deeper as we move along."

Happily, the people of God repented and returned to Him. The prophet Haggai pronounced God's blessing upon His people as they continued to work on the temple restoration project. To further encourage them in this work, God granted the prophet Zechariah a series of eight Night Visions. We briefly reviewed their contents and themes last week. In these visions, God gave His people assurance of His care and protection over them, His presence among them, and His blessings upon them. He declared that the temple would be rebuilt. But these visions go further than just predicting the completion of the temple construction project. They make wide declarations of God's justifying and sanctifying love for His people, of His will to punish lawbreakers and cleanse sin from the church, and of the coming ministry of the Branch, the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### Introduction

This morning we will begin our detailed study of the Night Visions by looking at the first vision, "The Man in the Myrtles." There is a tremendous amount detail we need to understand to draw out the full meaning, and thus we will not be able to complete our study of this first vision today. However, since the second vision is much shorter, next week we will finish up the first vision and also cover the second one as well.

#### Exposition

##### **A. The First Vision (1:8-11)**

<sup>8</sup>I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him were horses: red, sorrel, and white. <sup>9</sup>Then I said, "My lord, what are these?" So the angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they are." <sup>10</sup>And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are the ones whom the LORD has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth." <sup>11</sup>So they answered the Angel of the LORD, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said,

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“We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly” (Zechariah 1:8-11).

“I saw by night, and behold ....” The first vision comes to Zechariah at night, after sundown on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of king Darius of Persia (February, 519 BC). We should understand that all of these visions were revealed by God to Zechariah over the course of a single night, starting at sundown and going until sunrise. Implied in this temporal sequence is a transition from wrath to grace, a movement from darkness to light. This transition is portrayed within the Night Visions as we see God’s wrath removed from Jerusalem, God’s justification and sanctification of His people, and His establishment of them in the land and the world.

Each of the Night Visions is introduced by visual language, such as “I saw,” “I looked,” “He showed me,” “I raised my eyes,” and so on. This is contrasted with the more normal means of God’s communication to His prophets, which is typical auditory: “The word of the LORD came....” Zechariah also experienced this type of divine compulsion (1:1; 6:9; 7:1), thus distinguishing or setting apart these Night Visions as a special type of God’s revelation. For this reason, the visual elements of each vision are an important part of God’s message to us. As Zechariah looks on this particular night in 519 BC, there is quite a lot to see, particularly in this first vision! In order to understand it, we will have to study each of the visual elements in sequence.

### 1. *A Man Riding on a Red Horse (1:8-11a)*

The first element of the vision we are introduced to is “a man riding on a red horse” (1:8). This rider is at first sitting on his horse in the midst of myrtle trees, and then later is standing (presumably dismounted from his horse) in the midst of the same myrtles (1:10). This man is further identified in 1:11 as “the Angel of the LORD, who stood among the myrtle trees.” This Angel of the LORD is to be distinguished from a second angel, “the angel who talked with me” (1:9).

So, we have two angels described to us in this first vision. One angel is often called “the interpreting angel.” He is the one who is standing next to Zechariah, helping him understand what he is seeing. Zechariah asks him, “My lord what are these?” (1:9). The Hebrew word for “lord” is not YHWH, the covenant name of God; rather it is *adonai*, which can be used of both God and men. In this context, it means “master,” implying that Zechariah recognizes his position as inferior to the interpreting angel.

This attendant angel accompanies Zechariah on his journey through the night visions. He is mentioned either explicitly or implicitly in every single vision. Generally, this angel does not participate in the visions; rather he stands outside of the visions to show them to Zechariah and to help explain them. An exception is in the third vision, where the interpreting angel gets involved in the action. Likewise, Zechariah generally remains outside the action of the visions, although he inserts himself into the fourth vision, the cleansing of Joshua.

The main character of this first vision is the other angel, the Angel of the LORD. Who is this “Angel of the LORD”? The Angel of the LORD is a key personage who appears periodically in the Old Testament. He is first described in Genesis 16 when the Angel of the LORD appeared to Hagar in the wilderness. The Angel made promises to Hagar that only God could keep (Gen. 16:10-12). Hagar recognized that the one who spoke to her was in fact the LORD God (Gen. 16:13). In the book of Exodus, the Angel of the LORD was the one who appeared to Moses in

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the burning bush (Ex. 3:2). As in the case of Hagar, it became clear that the one speaking to Moses was not simply a messenger sent by God, but God Himself (Ex. 3:4, 6; 14). Joshua saw this same person in the role of the Commander of the army of the LORD and worshiped Him as God (Jos. 5:13-15). When the Angel of the LORD came to Gideon (Jdg. 6:12-16), He spoke in the first person as God. And when the Angel of the LORD came to announce the birth of Samson, Manoah thought he and his wife were going to be struck dead because they had seen God (Jdg. 13:22). Later on in the book of Zechariah, we see the Angel of the LORD sitting in judgment over the high priest Joshua, with the power to condemn him or to cleanse him (3:1).

All of these pictures in the Old Testament point to the undeniable conclusion that the Angel of the LORD is actually God Himself in physical form. Most commentators thus view the Angel of the LORD as a pre-incarnate theophany or appearance of the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is because Jesus is “the express image of the invisible God” (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15). Further, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (Jn. 1:18). Thus, when the Bible describes God’s visible presence as the Angel of the LORD, we should recognize that it is not God the Father, but God the Son who appears to men. So, as we consider Zechariah’s first vision, we need to understand that Jesus Christ is the focal point of it. He is the central character of the vision; He talks directly with Zechariah (1:10); He receives the reports of the other riders (1:11); and He intercedes on behalf of His people (1:12).

### 2. The Myrtle Trees (1:8, 10, 11a)

The second important element in the vision is the environment in which the Angel of the LORD is located. He is described three times as standing “among the myrtle trees” (1:8, 10, 11a). Thus, these myrtle trees are a significant feature of the vision. The Hebrew word for myrtle is *hadassah*, which is also the Hebrew name for Esther (Est. 2:7).

Myrtle trees were common shrubs or small trees in Israel. They are dark-green evergreens that typically grow to a height of 6-8 feet. They have beautiful white flowers which emit a sweet fragrance when they are crushed.

Apart from the three references here in Zechariah 1, there are only three other references to myrtle trees in Scripture. In Isaiah 41:17-19, the myrtle is listed among a number of other “good” trees (including the cedar) that God will plant in the wilderness as a sign of His blessing by transforming the desert into a well-watered garden. Isaiah refers to the myrtle tree once again in a similar context in 55:13, where the myrtle and the cedar are named as replacements for the thorn and the brier. Because thorns and briars are signs of the curse (*cp.* Gen 3:18; Heb. 6:8), their replacement by myrtles and cedars is a sign of blessing and the reversal of the curse. The only other reference to myrtles is in Nehemiah, where they are included among the types of trees used to build booths for the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:14-16).

So, what can we conclude from this brief survey of myrtle trees in the Old Testament? Well, we know in general that trees are often used in Scripture to represent people. Good, strong, fruitful trees are often symbolic of righteous people. For example:

<sup>1</sup>Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; <sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup>*He shall be like a tree* planted by the rivers of

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water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper (Psalm 1:1-3).

However, unfruitful or useless trees often represent the wicked. When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem in the week before His death, he cursed a fruitless fig tree so that it withered and died (Mt. 21:18-19; Mk. 11:12-14, 20-21). This act was a symbol that prefigured what would happen to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Because they were fruitless and useless like the fig tree, they were also cursed and ultimately destroyed in AD 70.

Trees are also used to build the house of God. The Tabernacle was composed of boards of acacia wood. Solomon's temple was built out of the cedars of Lebanon. The cedar is a large, fragrant evergreen, while the myrtle is a small, fragrant evergreen. The myrtle is linked to the cedar by Isaiah in both 41:17-19 and 55:13. The temple was further decorated with palm trees and flowers (1 Ki. 6:19). All of this tree imagery associated with God's house was intended to represent the people of God surrounding the LORD, with Him in their midst. That was the same imagery intended in the construction of the booths at the Feast of Tabernacles: little wooden houses surround the big wooden house of God – all a picture of God in the midst of His people.

So, because of all these associations between people and trees, virtually all commentators are in agreement that the myrtle trees represent the people of Israel. The myrtle is an interesting choice of tree to represent God's people. We probably would prefer to be likened to the majestic cedars of Lebanon or the strong and mighty oak tree. But instead, God's people are represented by the lowly, unpretentious, little myrtle tree, which emits "its sweetest graces when bruised by the weight of affliction" (Moore).

I believe it is significant that the rider of the red horse—the Angel of the LORD, the Lord Jesus Christ—is described for us three separate times as standing "among the myrtle trees." This is the heart of God's covenant with man, the presence of God in the midst of His people. This idea is summarized in "The Immanuel Principle," the statement that God dwells with His people: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (Lev. 26:12; *cp.* Ex. 6:7; 29:45; Jer. 31:33; 32:38; Ez. 37:26-27; Zech. 8:8).

The Immanuel Principle is an objective statement of the reality of the temple symbolism of trees surrounding the glory of God. It was also the current status of Israel as Zechariah viewed this vision. Even though their situation seemed hopeless—surrounded by enemies, living in poverty, frustrated in their temple building project—they could be encouraged by the knowledge that God was truly in their midst. Despite the external circumstances, their spiritual reality was very different.

We experience exactly the same spiritual reality today. Christ is in the midst of His church, even when we feel low, or unloved, or crushed under a weight of affliction. Remember that our external circumstances are not nearly as important as the inward spiritual reality. The apostle Paul uses exactly the same Old Testament language to apply the Immanuel Principle to the New Testament church:

<sup>16</sup>And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

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### 3. The Hollow (1:8)

There is one more important detail about the location of this myrtle grove in which the Angel of the Lord is standing. It is said to be “in the hollow.” The Hebrew word here literally means “the deep,” “the abyss,” or “the depths of the sea.” Virtually every other usage of this Hebrew word is translated in this way. It is not merely a nice little valley, but a dark and dangerous place.

<sup>5</sup>The *depths* have covered them; they sank to the bottom like a stone (Exodus 15:5).

<sup>11</sup>And You divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors You threw into the *deep*, as a stone into the mighty waters (Nehemiah 9:11).

<sup>22</sup>The Lord said, “I will bring back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the *depths of the sea* (Psalm 68:22).

<sup>6</sup>You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the *depths* (Psalm 88:6).

<sup>23</sup>Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, <sup>24</sup>They see the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the *deep* (Psalm 107:23-24).

<sup>3</sup>For You cast me into the *deep*, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me (Jonah 2:3).

<sup>11</sup>He shall pass through the sea with affliction, and strike the waves of the sea: all the *depths* of the River shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart (Zechariah 10:11).

So what does it mean to picture the myrtle trees of God’s people as located in the depths of the sea? Many commentators take it to emphasize their low position. They are not strong and mighty; they are not high and lifted up on a mountain. Rather, they are weak and lowly, located in the abyss of trouble and affliction. For example, Boice says that this location probably points “to the particularly low state of the Jewish people at the time of the vision.”

While I agree with this assessment, I believe there is a further meaning in the use of the word “depths” to indicate the position of God’s people. In Scripture, the Great Sea (Dan. 7:2) is used as a picture of the Gentile nations, those who are hostile to God’s people. Thus, the four Gentile empires of Daniel chapter 7 arise out of the Great Sea of the Gentiles.

<sup>12</sup>Oh, the raging of many nations—they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples—they roar like the roaring of great waters! <sup>13</sup>Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale (Isaiah 17:12-13).

<sup>20</sup>But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. <sup>21</sup>“There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked” (Isaiah 57:20-21).

In the beginning of Creation, God separated the land from the sea (Gen. 1:9-10). This separation thus becomes a paradigm for the separation of the godly and ungodly lines. To the godly line, the children of Abraham, the nation of Israel, God promises a *land*; a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Meanwhile, the other nations, the Gentiles, are pictured as unstable, restless, and raging, like the *sea*. Thus, the “depths” of the sea—the word used by Zechariah—is a picture of these Gentile nations, these world powers that struggle against God and His people.

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So, when Zechariah sees the myrtles in the abyss, it is a picture of God's people among the nations. They are surrounded and controlled by the Gentiles. They have been conquered by Babylon, which in turned was overthrown by Persia. They face opposition from Samaritans and other peoples around them. They are no longer a sovereign nation; Zerubbabel is not a king, but merely a governor by the good grace of Darius, king of Persia. But even in the midst of the nations, even in her lowly position, the Jews need to remember that God is still present in their midst. They may be in the abyss of the Gentiles, but the Angel of the LORD is standing among their myrtle trees.

### 4. *The Colored Horses (1:8, 10)*

There is one last major element in the vision: the colored horses. In addition to the red horse of the Angel of the LORD, we are introduced to three other horses: red, sorrel, and white (1:8). Although not explicitly mentioned, we should assume that these horses had riders, because in verse 11, these horses speak to the Angel of the LORD. The image is thus one of angelic scouts, members of the host of the LORD, returning from a patrol and reporting back to their captain.

It should come as no surprise to us that the "LORD of hosts" has legions of angels at His beck and call to carry out His work (*cp.* Ps. 68:14; 2 Ki. 6:17). The angelic hosts of God represented by these three horses have been sent out by God "to and fro throughout the whole earth," and now they have come back to make their report to the Angel of the LORD. Baron points out that the adversary, Satan, also roams "to and fro on the earth" (Job 1:7; *cp.* 1 Pe. 5:8). Thus, it is the mission of God's messengers not only to report what is happening throughout the earth, but also to protect God's people from the evil designs of the wicked one.

This concept of riders going to and fro throughout the earth would have been a familiar one to Zechariah in the context of his day. Horses represented military might and power, and there were plenty of them in the employ of the Persian Empire. Kline writes that "the far-flung Persian government was noted for its rapid communication via a system of horsemen stationed along the roads of the empire." Similar to the Pony Express of the nineteenth century, these ancient horsemen were able to provide speedy reports to the emperor, governors, or military leaders as needed for the continued well-being of the empire.

However, the angelic hosts of the LORD are far more powerful than the "Persian Pony Express." Phillips points out that they represent the omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God in His rule over creation. As His messengers roam to and fro throughout the earth, there is nothing that God cannot know, there is nowhere that God cannot go, and there is nothing that God cannot do in His administration of the world. Although God's presence is in the midst of His people in a special way, as signified by the Angel of the LORD among the myrtle trees, there is nowhere in the world that is beyond God's reach, knowledge, presence, or control. What a comfort this is! Our sovereign LORD of hosts is ruling over His creation.

One question remains about these horses: what is the significance of their colors? A few commentators (such as Phillips and Robertson) suggest that there is no symbolic meaning to the color of the horses. But if that is true, why bother to mention them? It seems to me that each detail of the vision has significance, and this is true of the colors as well.

The book of Revelation can help us here, because John in his vision also saw similarly colored horses:

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<sup>1</sup>I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, “Come!” <sup>2</sup>I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. <sup>3</sup>When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” <sup>4</sup>Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword (Revelation 6:1-4).

Red is the color of fire and blood; it is associated with bloodshed, warfare, and judgment. The red horse thus represents God’s judgment upon the world. It is significant that the Angel of the LORD is also riding a red horse – He is not on a mission of peace but of war and judgment. White is the color of triumph and victory. Revelation 19:11 pictures Christ on a white horse conquering His enemies. So, the white horse represents God’s victory over His enemies. The third color is variously translated as “sorrel,” “speckled”, or “bay.” It is likely that this horse’s color is in between that of the red and white horses, and thus would represent a mixture of war and victory. The progression from red to sorrel to white seems to indicate a progression from war to peace, from conflict to victory. Thus, the colors of these horses symbolize God’s power and control over the nations.

Jordan points out that “ancient horses were described in five colors: dark red-brown, light red-brown, gray, white, and black. It is best to understand the red coloration as a real horse color rather than an imaginary one.” In this case, the “red” horse would be dark red-brown, while the “sorrel” horse would be the light red-brown color.

Jordan also points out an interesting fact: there are only three colors of horses mentioned here. We should rightly expect four different colored horses going out. The number four represents the world, and it is the mission of these horses and their riders to scout the world and to conquer it. Thus we should expect there to be four of them, just as there were four different colored horses in John’s vision of the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:1-8; white, red, black, and pale).

The number four is prominent in two of Zechariah’s other visions: the second vision of four horns and four craftsmen dealing with world powers, and the final vision of four chariot teams. Significantly, in this last vision of the chariots of God, there are four differently-colored horse teams, sent out into the world. So why are there only three different horse colors in this first vision? Jordan explains: “The reason is that this vision is designed to show an incomplete situation. Although these horses roam the earth, everything is not yet complete. There is an unsatisfactory factor here. There is something left to be done before we can have all four and send them to all four corners of the world.”

What is that “unsatisfactory factor”? It is revealed to us in the substance of the angelic report.

### 5. *The Report (1:11b)*

“Behold, all the earth is resting quietly” (1:11b). On the surface, this sounds good, peaceful, restful. Surely this is not an “unsatisfactory” report. Or is it?

Historically, this report described the current state of the Persian Empire. In 522 BC, the son and heir of Cyrus the Great, Cambyses, was overthrown in a rebellion and took his own life. Out of the chaos of this time rose Darius, one of Cambyses’ generals, who gradually restored peace and order to the empire. It took two years to overthrow the usurper, but by 520 BC, when the book

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of Zechariah opens, peace had been reestablished. Thus, this report was an accurate state of affairs in the Persian Empire.

However, the main emphasis of this angelic report is on the contrast between the nations of the world and the people of God. Mackay describes this issue well:

‘Rest’ indicates sitting down relaxed (Is. 13:20; Jer. 17:6, 25; Ez. 26:20), and ‘peace’ is not the usual word *shalom*, but another expression related to ‘had rest’ (Jos. 11:23; 14:15). It may not refer to a contented peace, but simply to an absence of strife. It is, however, a description of a situation that contrasted with the current condition of the LORD’s people, who might understandably have been perplexed by it. How could God have allowed the unbelieving world to settle down even to a measure of prosperity while His own people were still enduring great difficulties?

The nations of the “deep” were supposed to be raging and restless like the sea; they were not supposed to be at rest and peace! Meanwhile God’s people were sore oppressed on every side. Who was enjoying peace and prosperity? It wasn’t the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but rather their enemies.

So, let’s put all the elements of the first vision together. What does Zechariah see? He sees the Angel of the Lord – the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ – in the midst of His people, the myrtle trees of Israel. Israel is in a poor and humble state, signified both by the choice of the lowly myrtle tree as well as their position in the hollow or abyss of the sea, representing the Gentile nations. The angelic messengers of Jesus Christ come back to Him and report that the Gentile nations are at rest – that is, they are satisfied with their position of opposition to God and His people. While this accurately portrays the current state of affairs in Jerusalem, it describes a situation which is inherently unsatisfactory. Why should the nations be at ease while God’s people continue to struggle? Of course, this is exactly the question that the psalmist Asaph asks: Why do the wicked prosper?

<sup>1</sup>Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. <sup>2</sup>But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. <sup>3</sup>For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 73:1-3).

### B. The Intercession (1:12)

<sup>12</sup>Then the Angel of the LORD answered and said, “O LORD of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?” (Zechariah 1:12).

When God the Son (the Angel of the LORD) receives this report of the nations at peace and rest, He goes to God the Father in intercessory prayer. Here we see our Lord in His role as the great High Priest of His people. Jesus Christ is our great High Priest, our great Intercessor; He is constantly interceding for us:

<sup>24</sup>But He [Jesus], because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. <sup>25</sup>Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:24-25).

Jesus lifts up the concern of Israel to the Father and cries out “How long?” “How long will You be angry with Your own people, O LORD? How long will You allow the pagan nations to be at peace while Your own people are downtrodden? How long will You allow this situation to

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continue?” This is a time-honored prayer of those who seek relief from God (*cp.* Ps. 6:3; 13:1; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3; Hab. 1:2). It is the prayer of tension between the “now and the not yet,” between receiving the promises of God in faith and experiencing their reality. Because Jesus Himself prays this prayer, we can learn that it is not sinful to bring our questions and struggles to God. When we feel distressed and oppressed, we can come to God in prayer. “God invites His people to unburden their cares to Him” (Phillips).

Furthermore, notice also that this prayer is Scriptural. The Angel of the LORD refers to the “seventy years” of wrath prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10-14). Thus, it is based on Scripture, on the revealed will of God. This seventy-year period is likely figured from the temple destruction (586 BC) to the finish of its reconstruction (516 BC). In any event, it seems from the prayer that the seventy years is coming to a close. So the question is, now that God’s wrath has been satisfied, where is God’s blessing upon Israel?

### Conclusion

Well, with that question, we will need to close for today. Next week, we will finish up our study of this first vision and answer the question – Where is God’s blessing upon Israel? But even before we get to God’s answer to this intercessory prayer, before we hear the “good and comforting words” (1:13) that follow the cry of “How long?”, we already have a sense of the answer to this prayer from the elements in the vision.

One way to answer to this question is to see that even though the church of God is located in the abyss of the nations, Jesus Christ is already dwelling in the midst of the Church. Our hope and our joy are not in our external circumstances, but come from the inward reality of the Immanuel Principle. The Angel of the LORD is in the midst of the myrtle trees, now. That alone should be sufficient reason for us to rejoice.

The New Testament paints exactly the same picture for us, although in different symbols. In John’s vision of the Apocalypse, he sees the glorified Christ standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands (Rev. 1:12-16). What are these lampstands? Well, the text leaves no doubt: “the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches” (Rev. 1:20b). Thus, John sees Jesus Christ standing in the midst of His church, in the midst of the golden lampstands. The lampstand is an apt symbol for the church. If you can visualize a *menorah* or lampstand, it is essentially a stylized tree – it has a central shaft like a tree trunk with branches extending on either side to hold the lamps. The lampstand is a glorious tree, a beautiful picture of God’s people. This symbol will become important to us as we study Zechariah’s fifth vision.

So whether Zechariah sees the Angel of the LORD among the lowly myrtle trees, or John sees the glorified Christ among the glorious lampstand trees, the meaning of these word pictures is exactly the same: Jesus Christ dwells in the midst of His church. And if Jesus Christ dwells in the midst of His people, then we can be content in this world despite our external circumstances.

Amen.

Next week: Lesson 4 – Four Horns and Four Craftsmen – Zechariah 1:13-21

Close in Prayer.