

## Zechariah Chapters 5-6- John Karmelich

1. I read something this week that made me stop and think: If God wanted a new temple for people to worship Him, He could have "snapped His fingers" and that's that. Instead, He called for the Israelites living there at that time, to go through the work to build it. If God wanted it that much, why go through all this trouble? Why give Zechariah all these weird dreams in Chapters 1-6 that give visions about the future after the temple was built? Why can't God just say, "Here is My Temple that all of you will use to make Me the center of your lives?" Why does God expect us to do all the hard work needed to honor Him? Good question. One reason is that we value more what we have to pay for (be it time or money). Which reminds me, I need to start charging for these lessons one of these days. By having the Israelites go through all that time and trouble to build a place to honor God, it shows the world around them how God should be worshipped and why it's worth all the trouble to make Him the center of our lives.
2. With that said, let's be honest, Zechariah got weird on us. God gave him a set of visions over the last four chapters and there are a few more in these two chapters that are equally as strange and to be honest are difficult to explain. These visions have filled Jewish and Christian libraries with theories as to what they mean. That's why as a big part of my preparation for the lessons, I read a whole bunch of them, just to make sure I'm no more in left field than any of those other theories. My goal in these lessons is not to throw weird stuff at you, but to explain what it is God's trying to communicate to us through Zechariah's letter. While the whole book is full of unusual ideas and visions, the first six chapters are probably the most difficult to explain.
3. OK then, with that lofty introduction completed, let's talk about visions. To begin I should recap the visions of the first four chapters as they help to explain these two chapters. Here we go:
  - a) It started in Verse 8 of Chapter 1. Zechariah saw four types of super-horses that traveled all over the world and reported it was at peace. This was bad in the sense that God wasn't the center of that peace. Zechariah's predicting all unrepentant sinners will be eternally punished and only those who have faith in God's payment for our sins will have eternal peace when He will literally rule the world from Israel.
  - b) The second dream involved four "craftsmen". Think of them as good powerful angels that came to undo the damage done by the great empires that conquered and destroyed Israel.
  - c) The third vision starts in Chapter 2. It had an angel who came to measure Jerusalem. It is significant because the prediction is Jerusalem will be so crowded, it will grow to a point where it will greatly exceed the walls that stood at that time (and rebuilt around the 11 Century AD if memory is correct). That city today is a fulfillment of that prediction based on it's size. The second chapter finishes with some pleas for other Israelites to "come back home" and with promises that God will wipe out anyone who opposes His rule there.
  - d) The next one opens up Chapter 3. This one involves Joshua the current high priest at that time, God the Father and Satan. It has "double meanings" as it predicts how that Joshua is going to be in service as the High Priest and there's nothing Satan could do to stop it. The second meaning requires knowing that Joshua and Jesus are the same word in Hebrew. It is a prediction of Jesus returning one day to rule the world from Israel. Just to make sure we know this has a double meaning, specific biblical terms used that speak of the Messiah coming into the world. The one used here ties to Jesus as I already implied here.
  - e) The next one opens up Chapter 4. It involves how God is to be worshipped and focuses on the light source of the temple. It's a "play on words" as not only is it the temple light, it is also speaking of God guiding us "with light" as to make a difference for Him. The vision gets strange as the light is fully "self sufficient". I suspect it means God's light source (His Spirit) to guide us through our lives. The last part of Chapter 6 extends the strangeness of the vision to say two men are anointed to serve over the whole earth. I explained in the last lesson how they tie directly to Revelation 11.

4. Bottom line, the last four chapters are full of strange visions. The logical question is "Now what"?
  - a) If these visions establish temple worship and illustrates what is required of us by God, not to mention a lot of what happens in the future, what next? That leads us right to Chapters Five and Six. The short version is "judgment". It's as if God's saying, "Here's how I expect My people (that's you and me) to live and here's how people will suffer who fail to live as I (God) desire they do. These chapters have a "double judgment": One for believers and a different judgment for nonbelievers. That's also how Revelation Chapter 20 describes the future eternal as well. We'll get to details about that in this lesson.
  - b) At this point, before I start explaining more weird visions in Chapters 5 and 6, let's all take a step back and ask, "Why should I care about all this stuff?" Let's say we already believe Jesus is God, died for our sins and believe He is going to return one day to rule the world from Jerusalem. It's like asking, "I already believe all this stuff, why read further?" As my regulars know, nothing makes me happier than answering that question:
    - i) For starters, this is going to be your future and mine. If we believe in Jesus, we will live forever and we'll see all of this. God wants us to be aware of our future!
    - ii) Even if you don't care about that, think of all of these visions as a motivational tool to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus. Let's be honest, it's very easy to get off track of using our lives to make a difference for Him as we start focusing on the problem of the moment. Having God teach us through the prophets of what is our destiny, it helps us to "keep our eye on the ball", so to speak. If we're rewarded in heaven based on how we use our lives now, I'd say that's a great motivation for us to study this stuff and see what God wants us to learn from it.
  - c) Believe it or not, that leads to my lesson title: Understanding our future and why is it we should care about it. That's our motivation to keep on reading. Hopefully that little lecture will keep you going, at least until I quickly describe these two chapters.
5. Chapter 5 is a vision of what I call a "flying billboard". It's the exact same size as the dimension of the temple base as a reminder that God's judging the world. This "billboard" has at least two of the Ten Commandments written on them. The text is primarily for Israelites as if to say to them: "Here is how God expects us to act as believers and when we fail to live as these laws require us to live, we're in big trouble". In effect, this covers the judgment on believers.
6. The next vision is of a woman sitting in a big basket. The basket has a heavy lid on it. This isn't a literal woman, but representative of sin being judged. Two angels carried the basket to the land of Babylon. As my regulars know, I sometimes refer to the bible as "a tale of two cities". It's because a lot of the bible focuses on the history and destiny of both Babylon and Jerusalem. It's God's way of saying, the root of all things that oppose His rule came from Babylon and it will be eternally punished for drawing people away from God. It's judgment time on sin's source!
7. Then we get the final vision in Chapter 6. It's four chariots going out over the entire world so it can be judged by God. Yes there' more to it, but the essential point is after believers go through a judgment, those who refuse to trust in God will be judged based on what they did know or could have known about Him and judged based on what we did with that information.
8. The final part of Chapter 6 is about a crown made of silver and gold for the High Priest. Yes that's strange, but so are all these visions. Usually kings get fancy crowns. If you study God's temple, you'd realize there was nowhere to sit. That's because service to God does not include rest. With that said, why crown the high priest Joshua? Again, realize Jesus and Joshua are the same word in Hebrew. It's a picture of life after the world is judged, where our high priest also becomes the king of the entire world ruling over a world that God has finished judging. There those who trust in that Messiah will worship Him not only as our king, but also as one we seek to guide our lives as the one who's completely in charge.
9. There, I just pretty much gave the whole Gospel message, through a series of strange visions laid out for us by God through Zechariah. If you can handle the weirdness, you can see God's plan to redeem us woven through all of this. With that said, time for the details:

10. Chapter 5, Verse 1: I looked again--and there before me was a flying scroll! <sup>2</sup> He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. "
- a) OK, time to discuss weird visions again: Apparently, Zechariah got all of these visions in one night. If I had a night with visions like that, my first thought is I have to eat better as I am suffering nightmares that never end. Zechariah somehow realized all these visions are God inspired. I suspect he had some sort of writing material near him and he wrote them down either as they happened or all in the morning. I picture Zechariah telling his wife of all these dreams and she responds with, "OK then, no more spicy food for you!"
  - b) Enough of the speculation about what could have occurred, let's just focus on what we do know: Zechariah had all these visions, and he wrote all of them down. Both the Christian and Jewish scholars agree all of this is God inspired, so let's accept it as such for now.
  - c) Let me talk about how things were written down in those days. Realize that books as we know them today we're not invented until the 12th century AD. Ideas were written on an equivalent of paper and then combined and rolled up into a scroll. Anyway, this scroll is a large one. The idea in Hebrew was 20 cubits long and 10 cubits wide. A cubit measure is essentially from the tip of one's middle finger to one's elbow. In "English" that's about 30 feet long by 15 feet wide, and thus the translation is given above.
  - d) How did Zechariah know the exact dimensions? Don't know, maybe it was stated on that "flying billboard" or maybe the angel told him the dimensions. Next, recall that Zechariah was professional trained as a priest. We learned that in Chapter 1. My point is an Israelite priest would recognize a 20-cubit by 10-cubit size is the footprint of the original temple.
    - i) Since the construction of the temple has been the "Hot topic" in Jerusalem when he was there, I'm pretty positive Zechariah made that connection. Maybe that is why he knew or remembered how big this "flying billboard" was.
    - ii) Speaking of the temple, let's recall it was an indoor structure with a large outdoor patio all within a walled area. The dimensions do not include the "holy of holies". The "20 by 10" area is a room where the priests would do all of their work as well as a smaller room where the head priest would only enter once per year.
    - iii) So why am I getting into all of this? Because Zechariah as a priest saw in a vision a flying billboard (with no airplane pulling it), and I suspect he recognized it as the same size as the area where priests were required to work in order to serve God as He demands to be served.
    - iv) The point of all of this is we're about to discover the "billboard" is associated with God's judgment and the temple work area is associated with God's judgment. The reason the priests worked in that temple was to make sacrifices to God in order to show our sorrow for our sins and our desire to be forgiven. Just as Christians will pray for God's forgiveness for our sins, so this service was done.
    - v) Before I get back to the "billboard", let me ask: why should we pray over our sins? Aren't we forgiven of all sins we ever have or ever will commit by Jesus if we trust in His payment for our sins? Yes. However, confession is about reminding us of what we did as we realize it was wrong and need to turn from it. That act is for us to realize what we did wasn't pleasing to God and we should turn it.
  - e) The final question to ponder here is who is the "He" describing the flying scroll? Based on the last few visions, I'd say it's still "THE" angel of the Lord who many Christian scholars will argue is a pre-incarnate Jesus. Whether they (and me) are right about that view, we'll find out one day in heaven if we bother to ask. Whoever is showing Zechariah this vision, He is important enough to tell us that this whole series of visions is God inspired. They're strong enough visions that Zechariah remembered all of those details from what had to be a horrid night's "lack of sleep" and he was able to write all of this down for us to study as well as contemplate their meaning. Realize, we're just getting warmed up on "weirdness" of dreams, so get used to that idea as we go through these two chapters.

11. Verse 3: And he said to me, "This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. <sup>4</sup> The LORD Almighty declares, 'I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.' "
- a) Speaking of getting strange, I present these two verses. It doesn't just say, we'll be judged by God, deal with it! It specifically lists two of the 10 Commandments. So if that's the case, why aren't all 10 Commandments on this thing? Maybe it was and maybe only two are being recalled by Zechariah. All we can do is take the text at face value. You might recall a "biblical trivia detail" when Moses got the 10 Commandments on two tables of stone, it was written on both sides. I simply mention that because as a priest, Zechariah might make the connection between a giant "billboard" with commandments written on both sides to the fact that's how the original tablets were first presented to the Israelites.
  - b) So why this giant flying "billboard" as I like to call it? Why didn't God have Zechariah tell the Israelites "Judgment's coming"? Recall, God's commandments are still in force. As we know, anyone one of us, or all of us collectively are in big trouble if we ignore them. After all, that's why those Israelites parents and grandparents were kicked out of Israel in the first place as they were collectively guilty of ignoring God. I suspect by having a vision of this "giant flying billboard" with two of those 10 commandments there, it's a reminder to them as well as us that God's judgment of n our lives is still the central issue here.
  - c) Remember how I said that the reason for confession is for us to realize how we've messed up? What if there are sins we've committed but never confessed before we die? Will we be suffering for those unconfessed sins? Here's where Protestants and Catholics disagree. As one who grew up Catholic, I accepted the idea of purgatory by faith, until I studied the bible and realized that place isn't biblical. When I consider purgatory, I remind myself, how many of my sins did Jesus die for? The answer is all of them, which is why I've rejected that concept all of my adult life. I'm getting into all that theology here, as we are about to get into the issue of sin and judgment. I wanted to make sure everyone knows where I'm coming from as we discuss the issue of God's judgment. As I love to state, I'm positive we Christians are judged on the question of "what did we do with our salvation" as opposed to "bad judgment" of why did we reject God's free gift of salvation?
  - d) I'm bringing all that up here, as I want everyone to realize, that the judgment described in this particular vision focuses on believers. We'll deal with nonbelievers in the next vision. That's why the vision here lists two of the 10 commandments as if to say here is how God expects us to live with these two commandments being prime examples.
  - e) OK enough background, let's talk about the commandments themselves.
    - i) One of them is about swearing falsely to another god.
    - ii) The other one is about not stealing.
  - f) Let me take them one at a time. If one is "swearing an oath", it's about putting our word on the line that we're telling the truth. When it comes to being a witness, our word is the most valuable thing we own. If we take an oath by a "false deity" obviously means we're not trusting in God. My simple point is swearing by something other than God is an obvious proof, that one who was raised to be a committed believer in God is turning from Him. In that sense, it is a perfect example of ignoring the first four commandments that have to do with our relationship with God Himself.
    - i) The last six of the 10 Commandments focus on how we act with other people. If I had to put all those commandments in one thought it would be "don't steal". For example, if we murder someone, we're stealing their lives. If we commit adultery, we're stealing what doesn't belong to us. Even when we lie, we're "stealing" God's desire that we be a man or woman of our word.
    - ii) My point is these two commandments summarize all ten of them fairly well.

- g) All of that talk leads us back to those verses. The verses don't just say here's what those commandments say. The verses say God will come down hard on those who violate those commandments. So does that mean as a Christian if we ever stole something or if we ever swore something to be true and wasn't we're going to hell? First, realize that the only sin that gets one sent to hell is a lifetime denial that Jesus is God. Yes, we can suffer in this life for sin as prisons are full of people who violate laws. Again, the generation or two that came before Zechariah was kicked out of Israel and that's sort of the point being told in this vision. It's the "don't mess with God or suffer the serious consequences" point.
- i) The point is we need to take God seriously. It doesn't mean we focus on Him 24/7. We can't concentrate on anything that long. It does mean to regularly ponder our life to realize whether or not whatever it is we're doing at any moment is or is not pleasing to God. The reason we are to confess our sins isn't to be "more forgiven". It's so we can recall how we've messed up, turn from that bad action and even take steps to prevent that situation from repeating. It's asking the Holy Spirit to work in our lives to live as He desires we do.
  - ii) Anyway, God calls out those who violate these laws as "thieves" as well as anyone who swears falsely by His name. In fact, the punishment is so harsh, the text says that God will "tear down the houses" of those who violate those commandments.
  - iii) So why tear the house down, it's not the "house's fault". Back in Leviticus, there is a ritual where if one got the horrid disease of leprosy, even the house itself is to be destroyed. It's possible the disease could spread through the walls. The word picture of "leprosy" is also a nickname for sin. It is the idea that sin itself is not to be tolerated, and if left alone "it'll spread all over the house".
  - iv) Let's be honest, if we stole something or swore by another god, we won't get a big hammer coming down out of the sky to smash our houses. The text wasn't meant to be taken that literal. It is the idea that if we violate God's commands for our life, we will suffer and let's be honest, those around us will suffer as well. As a big example, if someone in our house is getting drunk all the time, those living in that house have to suffer because of that person's behavior. If a person is a thief, it will affect those living there. Even if a person who claims to trust in God is giving credit to other gods or even themselves, the "hammer's going to come down hard" one way or another as God doesn't share His glory with anyone or anything.
  - v) So should I live in fear that God's going to "bonk me" on the head hard? Yes living in fear of God's judgment is the beginning of wisdom as the book of Proverbs is very clear about. At the same time, it's living as if we realize God's watching all our actions and we want to be pleasing to Him in all aspects of our lives.
- h) OK then, let me back up and realize the big picture here. The Israelites were back in Israel after being kicked out of there for 70 years. Those who returned must realize, our parents messed up and suffered horribly, so let's not make the same mistakes. Zechariah is saying to those Israelites, "Coming home again" is a good start (as in making the commitment to trust in Jesus for the full payment of our sins). However, it's only a start. The next step is to live as a witness for Jesus the rest of our lives. Having the law as a big billboard across the sky is a nice way of realizing God's still going to judge our lives even as believers. It's not to send us to hell, but our eternal rewards are based on what we did with the "info" of Jesus. Did we desire to learn more and stick close to Him? Did we use our lives to make a difference for Him? Yes we mess up, but we can't change our past, only learn from it.
- i) Zechariah is saying through this flying scroll, the Israelites who fail to turn to God will be judged by the law, because as Jewish people living in the land, we are held accountable not only for what we do know about God, but what we should know.
  - ii) The point for the Israelites is they should know God's law. The point for us living today is we should know about Jesus and again, are held accountable for it.

12. Verse 5: Then the angel who was speaking to me came forward and said to me, "Look up and see what this is that is appearing." <sup>6</sup> I asked, "What is it?" He replied, "It is a measuring basket." And he added, "This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land."
- a) The good news is we actually made it to the next vision. The bad news is, this doesn't get any easier to understand and interpret.
  - b) Remember through all these visions, there is an angel on the sideline, explaining things to Zechariah and even taking questions from him. In Verses 5-6, we get another dialogue as part of the visions. The angel is saying in effect, "Forget about that last vision for now, we are now moving on to the next one". Speaking of the next one, Zechariah says, what I see is a measuring basket. I could get into all the Hebrew specifics of how big the basket was, but let's just say it was big enough for a person to curl up inside.
  - c) Just to make sure the dream's weird enough, the angel explains that the basket represents the sins of the "people throughout the land". I admit, I was puzzled about whether "land" referred to the world or just Israel. Since the topic at hand based on the earlier part of the chapter refers to Israel, I'll argue the "land" is also Israel. I'll make my case for that idea as we go through more of this chapter.
  - d) First, let me talk about "iniquity" in the land. There is an old joke going back to the 1960's of a comedian (Flip Wilson) blaming the devil for his sins. "The devil made me do it" was his tag line. My point is we can blame the "devil" for sin, or we can blame ourselves. In God's eye's, "both" are accountable. That just means we're held accountable for our actions and the sin that entered the world "demonically" is also punished.
    - i) Think that's strange, it's about to get worse. In the early chapters of Genesis is the story of man's first organized rebellion against God. He commanded the people of the world to "fill it and multiply". Instead, they decided to stay together. For those who don't know, that's essentially the "Tower of Babel" story from Genesis 11. It's a true story of the first world-wide rebellion against God.
    - ii) I said earlier in the lesson that a nickname for the bible is a "tale of two cities". One is obviously Jerusalem and the other is Babylon. Anyway, "Babel" and Babylon is one and the same location.
    - iii) OK John, you got me, this is strange. What's the point? The point is as we're about to read is the basket filled with "iniquity" is being returned to where the organized rebellion against God began, in Babylon. Think of it as the judgment of the source behind the sin (demonic influence). Just as the earlier vision with the flying scroll was a judgment on God's people, now we take it one step further, to see judgment of the "source" of all sin.
    - iv) I warned you this is strange and the bad news is we've still got a ways to go!
13. Verse 7: Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman! <sup>8</sup> He said, "This is wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth.
- a) Remember we're seeing visions, not a literal woman being judged. Just as I described how Babel (or Babylon) had its beginning in Genesis, we can also read how it has its ending in Revelation Chapter 18. In the last lesson, I said that the way to understand Revelation is if we realize it speaks in "word pictures that tie all over the Old Testament". Chapter 18 tells of this same "woman" (think demonic system) that's being judged just as it is in Zechariah that we're reading here. Weird? As I said, that's Zechariah's visions, so deal with it!
  - b) Anyway, this verse says the woman was pushed into the basket and a lead cover was put on top of the basket to keep her in. Yes it's strange, but for a person like Zechariah trained as a priest, he'd figure out that the origin of sin being judged has to do with Babel. Even if Zechariah didn't get it, his job was just to see the visions, write them down and let us read them over history and figure out through proper bible interpretation what they mean!
  - c) If you want more proof all of this ties to Babylon, we'll get to that in Verse 11.

14. Verse 9: Then I looked up--and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth.
- a) If there is one idea I've pounded over everybody's head by now, is when we think the text can't get any stranger, it always does. It's one of those situations where you just have to go with the flow, and deal with it in bite size pieces.
  - b) First the literal: Zechariah saw two more women who had wings like a stork who's job it was to carry the woman in the basket away.
  - c) Like women #1, these two women are not literal. Most likely, they're angels. By the way, this is the only time in the bible where we ever see "angel like creatures" listed as women. Personally, I never think of angels as being one sex or the other. I think they appear based on how God wants us to see them. If God wants us to see these two creatures as female, I accept the text as is. For what it's worth, I went through a half dozen commentaries just to figure out what these two women represent. The theories are all over the board. I suspect someone living in Zechariah's time, might have understood the reason, of he just chalked it up to "That's what I saw, deal with it". Anyway, I'll wait to see if God to reveal that bit of trivia to me, before I say anything else on that topic.
  - d) What I do know is these stork-winged women carried the basket with the woman away and also had the wind helping them to carry it. For what it's worth, storks are common in Israel. They can fly great distances, so maybe that's why we have this image. The main point is God's judging the "origin of sin" (a.k.a., "demonic influence") and is taking it away back to its source location to judge "it" as we'll discover in the next two verses.
15. Verse 10: "Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me. <sup>11</sup> He replied, "To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place."
- a) Obviously, this isn't the end of the story. It's the end of the vision, and the next verse after these begin another vision. All we're told here is that the woman in the basket represents sin in the demonic sense of sin's origin. Two angelic creatures carry this woman back to the spot where "organized sin" first began which is in Babylon (part of Iraq today).
  - b) So what does Zechariah mean by "building a house for it"? If this is sin, why doesn't God just wipe it out once and for all? As my kids asked me when they were little, why doesn't God just wipe out Satan once and for all? Why let him live? The answer I gave, is for us to stick close to God as His power is greater than whatever demonic powers can throw at us. God promises to eternally protect those of us who are His through whatever it is we must face in this lifetime. As many have had to suffer and die in Jesus' name, "winning" is not about living forever in this lifetime. It's about us successfully being used by God to make that difference for Him and there's nothing those demonic influences can outdo the power of God working in our lives.
  - c) That lofty little lecture leads me back to these verses. Why does the text say the angels are sending this basket to "Babylonia to build a house for it"? For the same reason I stated in the last paragraph. It's the idea that God allows Satan to have some power to show us the power of God is greater than whatever evil is thrown at us! Which leads back to what my daughters asked me when they were young: Why doesn't God just wipe Satan out once and for all? Revelation Chapter 18 speaks of the final destruction of Babylon. To put this simply, evil will be destroyed one day and it has to be "collected together" to destroy it!
  - d) The idea of the last several visions is that sin will be judged. First those of us who God has called to be His witnesses, we're judged by His laws. We just read of the source of sin, demonic influence, being judged. The only thing left to judge is non-believers. To state the obvious, that's next on the list. Realize Revelation chapters 18 and 20 do the same thing. Babylon is judged in "18", believers and nonbelievers in "20" in separate judgments. We, of course would much rather be a part of the believer judgment, as we're guaranteed to be in heaven once as our eternal rewards are determined at that judgment.

16. Chapter 6, Verse 1: I looked up again--and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains--mountains of bronze! <sup>2</sup> The first chariot had red horses, the second black, <sup>3</sup> the third white, and the fourth dappled--all of them powerful. <sup>4</sup> I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?"
- a) Time for some good and bad news recap:
    - i) We are starting the last of the visions. Once we get through this one, it gets a little easier to study. That's good news. We're not even half way through the book yet.
    - ii) This last vision is as strange as any of them. That's bad news.
    - iii) Zechariah doesn't ask for explanations like he's been doing so far. More bad news.
    - iv) Since we've got through a bunch of these now, we can see a pattern developing.
    - v) The good news as we can make some logical guesses as to this last one's meaning of this final vision based on the pattern developing through all these visions.
  - b) Remember that these visions are here for a reason. By having us think logically about each of these visions, together they form word pictures in our mind of God's plan for mankind. In other words, "this is going to be our future, accept it, deal with it and live our lives with the assumption that this is true". Obviously, we're dealing with word pictures that those in Zechariah's time could relate to as well as us.
    - i) Let me put it this way: Do I think there were literal horses that patrolled the earth to see if it was at peace? Of course not. Do I believe in angelic creatures that God uses to execute His plans for the world? Of course. Do I believe satanic forces are real? How else can one explain all the evil of this world? My point is if we apply a little logic to these visions, most of the imagery is easy to understand. Are some of the visions hard to explain? Of course. That's why I try to use standard bible rules of interpretation. These include looking at what the same author uses elsewhere in the book, and looking elsewhere in the bible for similar images to figure out the meaning of an image. While I admit, I was partially stumped by the image of the "winged female angels" who carried the "basket of the wicked woman" away, I did get the important idea that the image is about God judging the "demonic origin" of sin, which was the key point.
  - c) OK, enough background about Zechariah's visions in general. Let's get started on the last one here to start Chapter 6. The vision involved four chariots coming out from between two bronze mountains. Teams of horses pull the chariots. To state the obvious what all this meant was confusing to Zechariah so he asked a question. Zechariah got his answer in the next few verses, but I'll just say the answers don't make it any easier to understand.
  - d) Before I get into a "piece-by-piece" explanation, let's ponder the big picture for a moment:
    - i) We've figured out the visions in these chapters deal with God's judgment.
    - ii) The first vision in Chapter 5 dealt with His judgment on believers. That focuses on the classic question of, "So you believe Jesus is God, great, what've done with that information?" That's the question that all us Christians should be nervous about. I hold the view that Christians can't lose our salvation. I'm also convinced heaven is going to have rewards based on what we've done with our salvation. That is what keeps me motivated to write and use my life as a witness for God out of gratitude for what He's done for us.
    - iii) The next vision we read had to do with the "source" of sin (i.e., evil). Of course we can't blame the devil for our own shortcomings, which is why we've got a separate judgment for believers and Satan himself. It's another reminder that we don't need to worry about the destiny of "evil" as a source as God's going to deal with it. That is why we got the strange vision of the woman in a basket being carried away to a specific place where the first organized rebellion against God began. The key point of that vision is for us to understand God's going to judge "rebellion itself" and not just people who were influenced by that rebellion against God.

- e) All of that leads to one final category. How do nonbelievers get judged? That's what the last vision here in Chapter 6 deals with. With that said, let's discuss the imagery stated in the first few verses of this chapter.
- i) The first was of chariots. This was not the one horse, two-wheeled kind that we've seen in movies. Think of these chariots as the "tanks" of that day. These were four wheeled chariots pulled by a team of horses. In ancient warfare, those "tanks" did a lot of damage as they could cover a lot of terrain and people shot weapons from the fast moving chariots as opposed to being on foot. Again, one has to think like someone living 2,500 years ago and what images could they relate to.
  - ii) The next thing we read is these chariots appeared from between two mountains. It was not "ordinary" mountains (or big hills, same Hebrew word) but bronze. To understand the bronze reference, remember Zechariah was a priest. It is the idea that he studied the bible "to date" and probably understand it's references.
    - a) When the Israelites first built a tabernacle to honor God, bronze was used as one of the building materials. Since the focus of this book is encouraging the Israelites to build the temple again, a "good clue" to what any image in this book means is to "think temple".
    - b) For example, the original tabernacle had curtains with bronze clasps that held it together. The clasps were like "sockets" that the curtains rested on. My point here is that bronze was used to "hold it together". I'll explain it in a second. First let me give you one more image.
    - c) All the utensils used were made of bronze. The grate for the burning of the sacrifices made were made of bronze.
    - d) Anyway, the original tabernacle was full of bronze, and it appears bronze is associated with God's judgment. Since animals were burned on bronze, since the clean up utensils were bronze, and since the whole tabernacle was connected by bronze sockets, one can see it's association with judgment. In a big picture sense, the purpose of the tabernacle and later the temple is as a word picture for God to judge sin. Consider that all the visions in the last two chapters deal with judgment and hopefully we all see that connection.
  - iii) Now that I've bored everyone to death with a "bronze discussion", why is there a mention of two bronze mountains where the chariots come from between? All the commentaries I've read agree on very little, almost all of them agree that those two mountains refer to Mount Moriah and the Mount of Olives (both key spots tied to the last part of Jesus' life on earth). That valley is better known as Armageddon. The point here is God's judgment comes from where "God is located". If this last vision is about His judging the world, that judgment has to originate where He's located. That's why most of the bible scholars argue these chariots come from that location. In summary, it's a "most likely" guess based on bible text as a whole.
  - iv) Finally, we get four different colored horses. Again Jewish and Christian libraries are full of speculation as to it's meaning. Some tie the horse colors to the different empires that have conquered Israel. That's possible. Whatever they were, they do represent God's judgment on the world as we'll see coming up. The good news is we actually made it to the next set of verses that explain this vision.
17. Verse 5: The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. <sup>6</sup> The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south."
- a) We've got to admit, after almost six chapters down on Zechariah, he never fails to get and stay "weird" on us as he gives us these visions. Remember Zechariah was trying to tell us what he saw. It requires good bible research to figure out it's meaning.

- b) Now that I've made that statement, let's talk about the angel's interpretation of the vision. Since the angel never said for example, "this color horse represents this, and that color one represent that", I think that detail isn't that important or else the book would comment on that fact. What the text does say is the four "horse-drawn tanks" (as I call them) go out to the "Four corners of the world". Let me say first here, the bible does not teach the world is flat. Realize the Psalms are full of references to the earth and the heavens (sky) above the earth. The term "four corners of the earth" is an expression that means His judgment's going out all over the world to judge all nations.
  - c) I said the visions are weird and I meant it. One of the "tanks" went north, one went south and one went west. Other translations say, "two went north". Remember the geography of Israel. To the west was the Mediterranean Sea. Most of the attacks on Israel came from the north, such as Babylon and the Assyrians. The threat to the south was Egypt. The east was mostly desert which is why the "east" isn't mentioned here. The key point here is God is judging the whole earth. If "west" is included, than think of God judging other nations west of the sea. The text doesn't say where the 4th one went. I'll leave that one "hanging".
  - d) Let me put it this way, while some of these vision ideas are confusing, what most people in the world agree upon is that there is a God and He will judge the world one day. Since we already had a discussion of believers being judged and the "source of evil" judged, the last issue is nonbelievers all over the world. That's what we're reading about here.
18. Verse 7: When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth. <sup>8</sup> Then he called to me, "Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north."
- a) This is the end of the last vision. Notice there is no, "Watch me wipe them out". There is no "Send them all to hell, and that's that". Instead, we get the strange point that the horses strained to go throughout the whole earth. I've always figured if "God is God" He doesn't have to strain to do anything. The idea of straining is that the God of Israel will be judging all people and the horses "work hard" to accomplish that mission. It's the idea that God is going to "push hard" the forces that judge all people. As to how they get wiped out, I will just say we have to look elsewhere in the bible such as Revelation to read how people will be judged and what's the fate of that judgment. As I say a lot, I'm convinced the idea of an eternal judgment is "fair" and based on what we did know or could have known about Him and what we did with that information.
  - b) Enough of the "what's not said", let's see what it does say. The reason the "north country" is specified is again, most of the attacks on Israel have come from the north. Remember if you lived in Zechariah's time and place, the Babylonian invasion was fresh in their mind as the people living in Israel moved back there after their parents and grandparents were forced out of Israel by that invasion. That just means these last verses of this vision are effectively saying, "You know that big invasion, our families dealt with? Don't worry any more about that, as God's going to judge harshly those who attacked us".
  - c) But John, Israel got destroyed again with the Greeks, Romans and even Turkish rule over that land for millenniums. How can Zechariah claim "God gave us rest"? Again, we must realize that prophecy is "patterns". The short-term fulfillment is Israelites were back there in that land as the Persians let them return there peacefully. The long-term fulfillment is a great judgment of all nations by God who's going to send His "tanks" out to destroy every opposition to His rule over the world. Now that Israel's in the land, does that mean it will all begin soon? Don't know. God's timing is God's timing and we must accept it.
  - d) As I like to say, the bible predicted every aspect of Jesus First Coming centuries before it (the events of His First Coming) began. That's why I trust my bible when it comes to all of these details about His Second Coming. As I also like to say, this is our eternal future, so we might as well accept it, deal with and be a part of the winning team.
  - e) So after all the judgment is done, then what? The rest of Chapter 6 answers that question.

19. Verse 9: The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>10</sup> "Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. <sup>11</sup> Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak.
- a) This last part doesn't appear to be a vision, but an actual order God gave Zechariah. It's as if God said, "You know those three guys that just came from Babylon? Well, they have a bunch of gold and silver and whether they like it or not, tell them that I (God) want it as to make a crown out of it". Zechariah's next order was to take that silver and gold to the house of another man who we assume has the skills to make that material into a crown. Here's the kicker: The crown isn't for the civil leader (a descendant of King David), but it was for the high priest, who was a descendant of the first High Priest (Aaron).
  - b) Before I get into crowning the high priest, a quick word on "taking the gold". If a religious priest demanded your gold or mine, we're not under compulsion to give it to them. What I suspect is God put into the heart of those three men to donate it and "that was that". I've always viewed Christian giving as voluntary and not mandatory. Many churches argue that we're required to give 10%, puts us under the "law" and I'll just say Christians are not bound by the law to earn our salvation, but I've beaten that point to death by now. On the other hand, the New Testament says God loves a cheerful giver, so again, "that's that".
  - c) OK, onto the big question, why a crown for the high priest? Let's start with the fact that in the Old Testament, there is no reference to any high priest wearing a crown. The uniform is described in detail in Exodus for the high priest and I'll just say a crown isn't on the list.
    - i) As I also pointed out in my introduction, there is nowhere to sit in the temple. All I'm getting it is it's not biblical to crown a high priest so he can sit and rule there.
  - d) To understand this, think in terms of all the judgment visions. We had judgment of those who believe in God based on the flying scroll in Chapter 5. We had demonic judgment as described in the "woman in the basket" judgment. Finally, we had nonbeliever judgment based on the horse drawn "tanks" going out around the world. As I loved to state, all of those visions were strange, but that's the key point they make. The big question of course, is when all that judgment is completed then what? The "then what" is the Messiah ruling over the world. As I love to state, Joshua and Jesus is essentially the same name. Jesus comes from the "Greek" and is based on "Joshua". All I'm saying is we're now reading of Jesus in His Second Coming ruling over the world after all this judgment takes place.
    - i) Religious Jewish people do argue this is "Messianic". They'll just say it just refers to "The" Messiah and not Jesus. As for me, I'm betting on the latter. Obviously I'll argue it is Jesus and one of the many clues is the names "Joshua" and "Jesus".
20. Verse 12: Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: `Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. <sup>13</sup> It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'
- a) Let's start with the "him". Who's he? It's Joshua the High Priest. So why doesn't God tell Him directly? Depends if we're talking "present tense" or future tense. I'm sure Zechariah acted out this ritual with the current high priest even though I suspect he realized it's also something in the distant future. In other words, God gave these instructions to Zechariah and not Joshua, because God wanted Zechariah to "act out prophecy" to show Israelites of what'll occur not only in that present moment but also in the distant future.
  - b) With that said, let's talk about temple construction. I'm positive Joshua didn't just build it by himself, but many Israelites worked on that construction project. From earlier chapters we got the impression that the civic leader was to lead the construction project. So what is all of this about Joshua "building the temple of the Lord...sit and rule on His throne". I'm pretty positive even Joshua had to realize this is something future oriented and all he had to do is "act out his part" for the future.

- c) In my last lesson, I discussed the word picture of "branch" being symbolic of the Messiah. The short version is it's a word picture of a dead tree and new life shooting out of it. This is about the descendants of King David ruling over Israel until one day when "The" guy is going to show up to rule the world forever after all evil is judged. This "act out of God's prediction" is even stranger, because that Joshua wasn't a king nor a descendant of David.
  - d) Obviously religious Jewish people argue that another descendant of David is the guy and we Christians argue it's Jesus at His Second Coming. You know my opinion there!
  - e) What I want to consider now is the idea of this priest ruling. If you've studied most of the Old Testament, you'd know that the roles of High Priest and government leader (the king) has always been separate offices. Yet here we're reading of the merging of the two roles!
    - i) To understand that, we have to realize that when Jesus rules the world one day, it won't just be as a "king" but also as our high priest. It's a promise that one day the two functions will be merged into one.
    - ii) Think of it this way, we Christians accept the idea that Jesus is fully God and fully man at the same time. He remains "fully man" so as a man He can fully relate to us as people. As a man and as God, He can perfectly represent us both before God the Father. We as Christians come to Jesus not only to "once and for" be forgiven of sins, but also as our priest to help us draw closer to God the Father. Remember the purpose of the High Priest, to intercede on people's behalf for the forgiveness of sin for those who want that intercession. Anyway, after sin is judged, those two offices of "king" and "top priest" are merged. We get a picture of that merging here in Zechariah. That idea is explained in the New Testament as to help us better get the idea how Jesus is our High (top) Priest, our king and God at the same time. All of this is discussed in the New Testament book of Hebrews if you want more info.
  - f) Meanwhile, this lesson about our future is tough enough as it is, so let's finish it up:
21. Verse 14: The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the LORD. <sup>15</sup> Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the LORD, and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God."
- a) Remember the three guys who Zechariah was told to take their gold and silver? They get an encore appearance here at the end of the chapter. To state what should be obvious, the man named Joshua who lived at that time and was the High Priest, wasn't going to just sit in the temple wearing this crown, saying "come worship me". As I said in the introduction of this lesson, there is nowhere to sit in the temple. Therefore, after this ritual was finished those three men were in charge of that crown, since they donated the materials in the first place. I have no idea what literally became of it. The important point is it represented the act of the "merging" of the High Priest and King which is what will happen one day after all sin is judged. That's our eternal future, so we must accept it.
  - b) The final verse indirectly centers on Zechariah himself. He says that if you (Israelites) will complete this temple and perform this prophetic ritual, you'll all realize God ordained all of this. Stop and think about this ritual for a moment: If they failed to do it, will God still judge the world as He promises? Of course. Will Jesus still be High Priest and King? Of course. So why does Zechariah say that if you build this temple, you will realize God has sent me (Zechariah)? I recall many years ago, I saw a full size model of the tabernacle at a church near me. What I remember was from the outside, it's not that impressive. All one can see is white curtains from the outside. Even outside the structure, it's nothing great to look at. The point being is that God's temple is only impressive from the inside. What I'm getting at is one doesn't appreciate what God's done for us, until we get "inside" of it. We must accept that God is real. We must accept Jesus as paying the price for sin and then we appreciate what God's done for us. That's Zechariah's point here. As I said when I started this lesson, we must build God's temple "ourselves" in order to appreciate it!

- c) Obviously, God doesn't want us to literally build it, but He wants us to take the trouble to make Him the center of our lives so we can appreciate all the more what He's done for us as well as what He will do in the future. Understanding that God will judge believers, the source of sin, and nonbelievers separately is a fundamental aspect of understanding how it is that God works in the first place. Only after we accept that judgment, can we then go enjoy our lives living as a witness for God. That's why we were created in the first place.
  - d) On that positive note, let's close in prayer.
22. Heavenly Father, Thank You for revealing Your plans for mankind to us. Thank You for letting us realize who You are, what are Your standards to live by, and what You expect of us as Your disciples. Help us not to waste the most valuable thing You've given us, our time and by Your power, help us to use our time to make a difference for You. Guide us to that specific plan that You desire for each of our lives and help us to live as You desire. We ask this in Jesus name, our God, our High Priest and our king, Amen.