

## Zech. 1:7-17 The Sovereign Rule of God

Today's sermon is about sovereignty, particularly the absolute control of God to order and rule over ALL things. I believe this is our main truth in the first of Zechariah's 8 night visions. And, as we will see, there is NOTHING more important to your comfort and your peace in this life than to know and understand that God rules over all, both good and evil. I have 3 truths and some applications. 1) Sovereign Rule, 2) Sovereign Care, and 3) Sovereign Ruler

1. **Sovereign Rule.** Over and over God is called "Lord" in Zechariah. And there is only one Lord; Yahweh, the ONE who is in a class all by himself. There is nothing or no one to compare Him with. Is. 40:18 says: "**To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?**" And v. 25 says, "**To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.**" It is like Adam, after naming the animals says, "**There is none like me.**" With God, there are none like Him, in his essence, in his being as God. He is holy, simple, complete, the One who needs nothing and exists apart from his creation. He is the Sovereign Lord. And this Sovereign Lord rules over all, always has, always will.

In the Book of Zechariah, we see He is called the "**Lord of Hosts**" 46 times. This clarifies the context of his Lordship in Zechariah's prophetic words. To be the Lord of Hosts means that He stands alone as the commander of his armies . . . particularly angelic hosts, those who do his bidding, those who go as He says go and those who come as He says come. The Bible is clear. God uses angels to do his bidding. Now, it is not that God needs angels to carry out his will. He chooses to do so. And, this is good for us. One might say, "*God is a strong tower,*" or "*God is our citadel.*" But, it is better when we read that God comes with a "host" or "myriad" of angels. Do you remember when the armies of Syria were ready to attack the prophet, Elish's city of Dothan, and his servant was afraid when he saw the armies surrounding the city? Elish knew better. He prayed and God opened his servant's eyes. What did he see? He saw chariots of fire all around (2 Kings 6). It is a good thing that angels encamp around those who fear God (Ps. 34:7).

Also, in our text, though in a mysterious way, God rules over the nations of this world. God called the Babylonians to judge Israel. Then, He called the Persians and their armies to judge the Babylonians. Today, God sovereignly rules over the nations in ways unseen, all according to his plan. This truth comes out clearly in Zechariah's first vision.

In this vision we see that God also rules over his people in a special way. Yes, Israel sinned by breaking God's covenant. Yes, their punishment was great, destruction of Jerusalem, its walls, temple, exile to Babylon. But, in God's sovereign rule, the 70 years of prophesied exile have come to an end. Look back to 1:6: "**My words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.**"

So, this vision is about God's rule, his rule over his people, his rule over the nations, even his rule over both good and evil, his rule over all things. This is sovereignty. And this vision of Zechariah displays this fact. Let's look at it for a moment, starting in v. 8: "**I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. 9 Then I said, what are these, my Lord? The angel who talked with me said to me, I will show you what they are. 10 So the**

**man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, These are they whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth. 11 and they answered the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.”** Here, we have 4 main actors. The first of course is Zechariah. The second is a man riding on a red horse. Third, we see other riders on different color horses. Finally, we have an angel who talks with Zechariah, and explains his vision. But, for our first truth, God is saying to Israel (and to us): *“Don’t worry! I am in charge.”* We have a captain. This captain is a mounted warrior. And he has sent his riders to patrol the earth. And they say, **“we have patrolled . . . and the earth is at rest”** (v. 11).

What did he mean by the “earth is at rest?” Here’s what I think. God’s judgment upon Israel at that time was complete. And, after 70 years God had also judged the Babylonians as they were conquered by the Persians. And now, in a manner of speaking, at least in their context, the earth was at “peace.” They were now heading back to Palestine to rebuild their cities including Jerusalem and the temple. And, all of this is because of God’s sovereign rule over the nations and over his people . . . Sovereign Rule! This is our first truth.

2. Sovereign Care (Over His People). God ALWAYS cares for his people. He will not leave them or forsake them. We see this in vv. 12-17. Let’s read them again carefully. **“Then the angel of the LORD said, ‘O LORD of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?’** Stop for a second. If we go back to vv. 10-11, we see that God’s “horsemen” report that the known Persian world is at peace. If this is so, what about the peace of God’s people? This is Zechariah’s concern. Many Jews are still in exile, many have returned, temple construction began, but was put on halt for almost twenty years. The people were questioning God’s character, his words, his promises. This is why we see the words **“How long?”** I believe the Angel is saying *“What about your people? Shouldn’t they have more peace than the nations of the world?”* Now back to v. 13 for God’s answer: **“And the LORD answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster. Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Cry out again, Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.’**

God’s people are special; they are not like the rest of the world. Look over at Zech. 2:8: **“For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye . . .”** I think of the Song of Moses when he speaks of God’s people, he says: **“But the LORD’S portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing**

**them on its pinions . . .** (Deut. 32:9-11). I think of The Lord of the Rings; every time Frodo and his companions get into trouble, and there is sure, an eagle comes and carries them away. Mothers, can you abandon your nursing child? Neither can God.

Look again at v. 13: **“The Lord answered gracious and comforting words.”** And then in v. 14: **“I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.”** Then in v. 17: **“My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.”** We will come back to these truths in our application. But know this truth from Rom. 8:28: **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”** This vision from Zechariah teaches this principle! God cares for his people!

3. Sovereign Ruler. Look at v. 8: **“I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.”** The man on this horse is the One in charge! The other riders are behind him. And our text says he is standing among the myrtle trees by glen (ESV). There is so much here! But I want to highlight three things about this man. First, He is the one in charge of God’s armies. He is the center of attention. All God’s hosts answer to Him as the one mounted on his horse.

Second, this man reveals the immediate presence of God with his people. Notice that he is standing among the myrtle trees. I believe these myrtle trees picture life, particularly the presence of God . . . who is life. These trees are evergreen trees which I believe point back to paradise in the Garden of Eden, the place of God’s presence. Also, myrtle trees were used by Israel to construct “booths” during the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast of booths was a special time of remembrance for Israel. This celebration was given by God to help Israel remember God’s presence as he delivered his people from slavery. When they came out of Egypt, they lived in tents (booths) constructed by myrtle trees. (See Lev. 23.) So, they would build more booths for 8 days of this celebration to remember their time of delivery. They were to remember the presence of God in the cloud by day and the fire by night, and in all the other ways He was near to them in their bondage and in the wilderness. HOW INTERESTING that this MAN, this ANGEL of the Lord was standing between the myrtles.

Third, this man reveals God’s presence in the midst of darkness or (chaos). The ESV says he is standing by the “glen.” The KJV says he is standing by the “*bottom*.” The actual translation is by the “*deep*.” This can picture a valley or deep ravine, or it can be translated as the “depths” of the sea. We see this in the Song of Moses where Yahweh, the divine warrior, throws Pharaoh and his armies into the depths of the sea (Exod. 15). We also see this scene with Joshua. I know you remember the story. Just after God divided the waters of the Jordan and Israel passed through on their way to Jericho, what happens to Joshua? **“A man stood before him with a drawn sword in his hand.”** Joshua asks, **“Are you for us, or are you for our adversaries?”** He answers, **“NO; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come . . . And the commander said to him, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.”** (Josh. 5:13-15).

Brothers and sisters, this is the man on the horse, the Sovereign One standing between the myrtles . . . beside the deep. In Zechariah, this is the preincarnate Christ. In this man we find the presence of God. In Him is life. And all things, even the “deep” are under his sovereign rule. In this man we see heaven meet earth! In this man we see the sovereign plans of God being carried out as He desires. Concerning this picture, Meredith Cline says this: *“Therefore, the presence of the King of Glory above the waters was a preindication that the dark deep would be subdued and filled, that the kingdom of God would emerge with royal earthlings made in the image of God and reigning in his name, commissioned, in imitation of their Creator, to the continuance of the kingdom program of subduing and filling the earth.”* (Gen. 1:26-28).

Brothers and sisters, this is the message of Zechariah. The presence of myrtles, particularly in Isaiah pictures the times of the Messiah (Is. 41:18-19). In Zechariah’s day, this vision was clear: God rules over the nations, over his people, over all things, and He rules through his Commander in Chief. And yes, He would bring physical Israel back to the Land. They would rebuild their temple. And yes, they would see prosperity again. But, this vision, and the other visions, and other parts of this book hinge upon a future ULTIMATE fulfillment with a coming Messiah. As we have seen, the Book of Hebrews speaks to this fulfillment. Do you see this MAN on the Horse? Brothers and sisters, today, our Lord sits on his throne. God took on flesh. He lived a sinless life. He laid down his life on the cross as a sacrifice for sinners. Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus conquered the deep! He did this by taking the wrath of God upon Himself as the ONLY ONE who could endure such. Then, he died. He rose from the dead! This is why we are here today! In this man, we find Zechariah’s fulfillment!

In this man we find God’s message of comfort and hope for his people! In fact, we find every blessing of God. And God’s mercy and his grace and the comfort and peace that follows did not come through conquering armies. It came through the meek, the humble, Messiah as he conquered the ultimate deep . . . death and separation from God. This is really the message of Zechariah. Let’s end with some applications for us today.

Application: Reminders of God’s sovereignty are ALWAYS timely. As God’s people we need to hear this truth often. This week, I listened to Trump’s speech at the RNC. I will not speak to his heart, for I do not know it. And I am not sure how much of God’s sovereignty over all things he really understands. But, he did say, *“I stand here today but by the grace of God.”* And I am not sure if he is speaking of the grace of God in Christ. But, at least in lip service, he gives credit to God in a general way that his life wasn’t taken on that day. And we don’t know if this is just to gain votes. But, we do know that he turned his head at just the right moment to avoid the bullet from striking his head. Brothers and sisters, I claim to know nothing here, except, in his case, it was not his time. His time may be tomorrow or next week or years from now. None of us know. But, God is in control of all things. And, God is in control over the affairs of the nations. And we need to be reminded of this. God is working all things in history to bring about his plan, and this includes the evil choices of men and women in this world. This truth keeps us from worrying too much over politics and the affairs of this world.

Application: God is the sovereign ruler of his people in a way that brings grace, comfort, and peace to his people. This is something we see in EVERY prophet of the OT. This is something we see with EVERY Book of the New Testament, the New Covenant. Judgment is coming to this

world! But, peace and the favor of God comes to the church through his Son. Remember, Jesus stands by the “deep.” And Yes, He has conquered death and separation from God. But, what about all the other difficulties in your life? Sickness, death in your family, anxiety, depression, financial stress, your fears of the unknown, etc. In John 14:27, Jesus says to us today, **“My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”** He says to us, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matt. 11:28). This was Zechariah’s message for his day. And now we see it’s fulfillment in Christ. What does Rom. 8:28 say to us? **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”**

One more comment in closing. Zechariah’s vision comes in the night. In his context, this may picture the fact that the Messiah was yet still future. Night was still upon them in that the Messianic Age was still in the future. I think of the picture of Narnia and the Voyage of the Dawn Treader. They come to an island where there lives a ruler, who is a sorcerer. And He lives in a mansion which is invisible. But, it is revealed to Lucy and when she enters, it is full of beauty and expensive things and beautiful furniture, etc. Well, This is the OT, the OC . . . It is still night. The Messiah had not yet come. But, when he comes, what happens. All the promises of God are illuminated; All the beauties of the OT come alive; All the promises of God find fulfillment. This is why the writer to Hebrews can say, **“You have come to the heavenly Jerusalem”** (Heb. 11:22). This is to come to Christ today as the mediator of a better . . . NEW covenant! This is to receive God’s blessings in Christ. All his promises come to his people. In the OT, it was Israel. In the NT, in the NC, it is the church as Jew and Gentile come together. if you have come to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Mansion and all its treasures have come alive.

Now, we are still pilgrims. There is a full revelation to come, a consummation to which we wait, at the coming of the Lord Jesus! We live in a sinful world. The kingdoms of this earth still rage, they stand against the King. There is still a devil, who in God’s providence is playing his role, seeking those he may devour. But, on our road to heaven, we know who is in charge. He rules over the nations! He rules over his people! And he rules all things through his sovereign King, the Lord Jesus Christ! Brothers and sisters, what do we have to fear!