

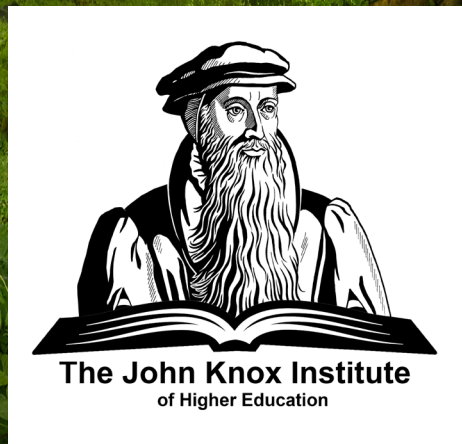
# *The Visions of Zechariah*

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

*by Rev. William Macleod*

Lecture #2

## The Man on the Red Horse



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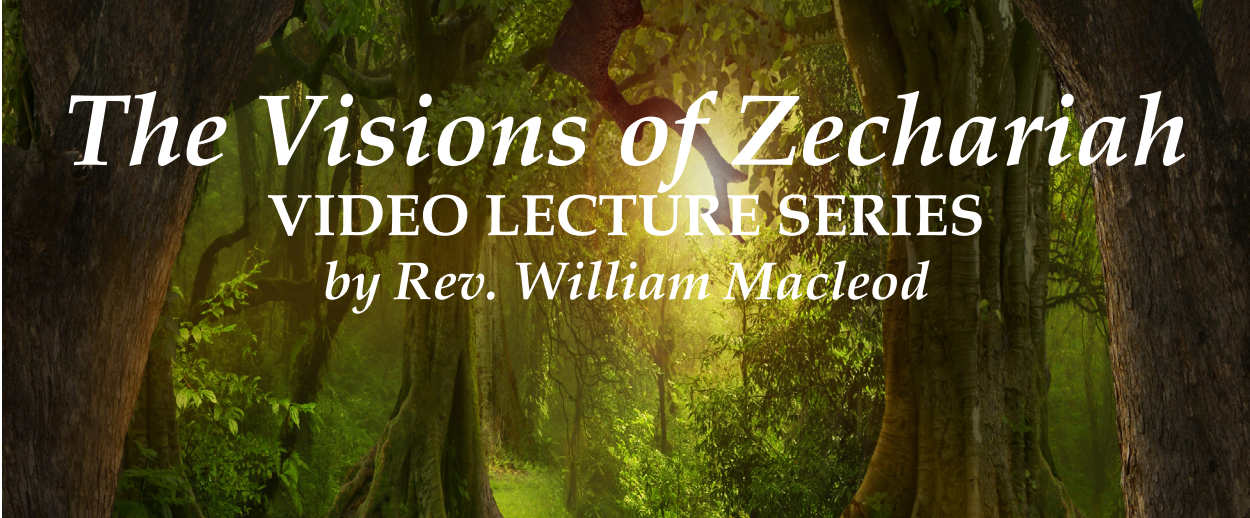
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Rev. William Macleod is a retired minister in the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

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# *The Visions of Zechariah*

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### Lecture #2 – Zechariah 1:7-17

## The Man on the Red Horse

We come now to our second lecture, “The Man on the Red Horse.” We find this in Zechariah chapter 1, verses 7 to 17. So here we are dealing with the first of Zechariah’s visions.

These are discouraging times for the church in Britain and in the West generally. Congregations tend to be small and elderly. We see little success in evangelism. There are few conversions. Secularism has taken over our culture. At one time the Bible, the Ten Commandments, and the gospel were taught in our schools, but that is no longer the case. Now every false religion is given priority over the truth. Sexual immorality is promoted through sex education. Gender confusion is encouraged and the divine institution of marriage is undermined. The theory of evolution is promoted as scientific fact. In society generally the Sabbath, as God’s holy day of rest, is disregarded. Unborn children are murdered in their millions in their mothers’ wombs and it is regarded as the mothers right to choose to kill. God’s name is blasphemed and used as a swear word. Christian values are despised in the media. There is no fear of God in society. Few, even in the churches, believe in the wrath of God and hell. Most people are spiritually apathetic and give no thought to God, death, judgment, and eternity. The only growing churches are charismatic ones where there is worldly music, fake miracles, excitement, and entertainment, and little reverence for God. It seems as if God has forsaken us. There is little real, serious, felt Christianity. But here in the prophecy of Zechariah, we find great encouragement. This prophet also lived in dark days. God gave him these eight visions to strengthen his faith and that of his fellow countrymen. Instead of focusing on Jerusalem in ruins, he is encouraged to look up! And we too must lift up our eyes from the spiritual desolations around us and realise that God is on the throne. He is reigning and working out his purposes. Look and see the man on the red horse.

So in verses 7 to 8, we have, The Man in the Myrtle Trees—“Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white.”

Some three months after the first revelation with which we dealt in the first lecture, a new

revelation is now given to the prophet. This time the Lord uses a vision rather than simply words. Zechariah sees myrtle trees in the bottom of the valley. Cyrus, the emperor, had allowed the Jews to return from their exile in Babylon. They came to Jerusalem and set up the altar of the Lord and begun building the temple. But they became discouraged, and a further twenty years passed with no progress. Then the word of the Lord came to Haggai, and he began prophesying on the first day of the sixth month of the second year of the emperor Darius, i.e., two months before the first revelation to Zechariah. Haggai challenged the Jews to start working again on the temple and they responded by returning again to the work. Shortly after that Zechariah joined Haggai in encouraging the builders in their work on the temple. We noticed in our previous lecture the promise he gave from the Lord, “Turn ye unto me saith the LORD of hosts and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts”—Zechariah 1, verse 3. Now, exactly five months after the work began, Zechariah is given a new encouraging vision, on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the second year of Darius.

The prophet sees a man on a red horse among the myrtle trees in the valley. These trees are a picture of the church. They are not tall cedars nor are they mighty oaks. Myrtle trees reach only a maximum height of three meters. They are mere bushy trees and nothing special to look at. God’s people are not impressive to look at. Their leaves are a dark, and shiny, and green, and when crushed, give a pleasant fragrance. God’s people, when bruised, turn to the Lord in prayer, and their prayers are as sweet incense poured forth—fragrance to the Lord. Notice also that the trees are not on the mountain top but in the valley, in a low place. Often God’s people are in a low condition. But in the middle of them is the man on the red horse. Who is he? Verse 11 makes plain that he is the angel of the LORD. Always in the Old Testament, the angel of the LORD is the Lord himself. It is the Son of God appearing in human form. For example, when God required Abraham to offer up Isaac, and he had bound his son upon the altar, and had raised the knife to kill his son, the angel of the Lord who is identified as God himself called to him from heaven to stop him—Genesis 22:11. Similarly, the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife, in Judges 13, and they recognized him as God. The church is poor, weak and afflicted, yet wonderfully, the Lord himself is in the midst.

We find something similar when God appears to Moses in the desert, calling him to lead Israel out of the land of Egypt. We are told that Moses saw a bush burning with fire and yet the bush was not consumed. When he drew near to observe this strange phenomenon, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God”—Exodus 3, verses 5 to 6. The bush that was not consumed represents the church of God, and God himself dwells in the bush. Because God’s people are sinful you would expect the bush to be burnt but miraculously the bush is spared. God’s people are afflicted, yet are precious to him, and so they are spared. They have a great Savior who atoned for their sins. Christ’s blood cleanses from all sin. The burning bush, which is an emblem of the Presbyterian churches, encourages us to trust in our God who dwells in his church, and although they are sinners, he does not consume them. He loves his blood-bought people and cares deeply for them. Behind the man riding upon the red horse the prophet sees others, “red horses, speckled, and white”—verse 8.

The Lord Is in Control, verses 9 to 10—“Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these be. And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro

through the earth.

Zechariah asks, “What are these?” It is explained: “And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth”—verse 10. The Persian emperors had messengers or inspectors whom they sent out to the various provinces under their rule, to keep them informed, and to bring them back word of the state of affairs in these various provinces. They would inform the emperor of unrest or signs of rebellion or any problems developing. What we have here are angels sent out to report back to heaven how things were going on the earth. Of course God knows everything that is happening on the earth but it is told in this human way for our benefit. We find something like this in the book of Job: “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it”—Job chapter 1, and verses 6 and 7. The sons of God here are obviously the angels. Satan is among them, as he was originally an angel. He and the angels had been going to and fro though the earth seeing what was going on. God asked him, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?”—Job 1, verse 8.

The Angels Report, verse 11—“And they answered the angel of the Lord that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.”

So we have here the angels reporting back to the Lord. They have surveyed the earth. They have gone into even the remotest nations. They know exactly what is going on in the earth, and they report that, “All the earth sitteth still, and is at rest,” they say. At this time there was peace and prosperity in the Persian empire. The earth sat still and there was no war. People were prospering materially. Yet the Lord’s people were afflicted, downtrodden, and depressed. The color of the horses, as in Revelation chapter 6, point to war, famine, disease, and death. Is it not the same in our world today? Many people are prosperous. They are eating and drinking and making merry. They have their entertainments, their pleasures and their holidays. Most of the world is enjoying peace. Life is easy. They have no cares or worries. People talk of inflation, the increased cost of the weekly shopping, the rise in the price of fuel and transport, yet the roads are full of cars and the airports crowded with holiday makers. But what about the God’s people? They are everywhere despised, mocked and ridiculed. In many countries, they are actively persecuted. Many Christians are in prison for their faith. Others live in constant fear. Thousands die as martyrs every year in countries like North Korea, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. Yet God is over all and in control.

That brings us then to verse 12, Powerful Intercession—“Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?”

Again we remember that the angel of the LORD is the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity appearing in human form. As one of the Puritans said, he appeared in the Old Testament trying on as it were the clothes of human nature which he would later assume forever at his incarnation. Notice the strong intercession of our Mediator: “Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?”—verse 12. Christ is praying for his church. It is seventy years since the temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and his Chaldean army. Surely it is time for God’s wrath to cease. Has he not punished his beloved

people enough?

But if the one speaking here is God, the second person, how can he pray to God? Surely God cannot pray to himself. True, God does not and cannot pray to himself because God is one and there is only one divine will in God. But as a man, Christ could pray and certainly did pray. God cannot suffer and die. Yet he became a man in order to suffer and to die for us. He could not be our Savior without his incarnation. He became a man, a true and real man, to pray and to intercede for us. He is our Prophet, Priest, and King, as a man. As a man, he is our Mediator. While it is true that he only became a man five hundred years after Zechariah, yet his saving work and his mediatorial work stretched back into Old Testament times. Also in this same sense he is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”—Revelation 13, verse 8. The Lamb did not die till two thousand years ago, but it was so sure that Christ would die that it is put this way. Old Testament believers trusted in the finished work of Christ, and were saved by it, though in their day the work was not yet begun. Further, we must remember that God is eternal and not subject to time as we are. He is above time. He has no past nor future.

So here we have Christ praying for his church in the days of Zechariah. Who can pray as effectively as our Lord? We are encouraged when someone says they are praying for us, but surely there is no one who could pray for us more effectively than our Savior. Christ loves us and pleads for us. Even when we sin, he still cares and prays for us: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”—1 John 2, verses 1 and 2. Christ is praying for you and me.

The Jews were sad because of these seventy years during which the temple was in ruins but now there is a mighty One praying for them. The past seventy years in the UK and in the West has seen a catastrophic decline in the church. There has been no general revival of the church since 1860, and in the recent past there has been a wholesale forsaking of the church. Secularism has taken over. Immorality has reached new levels never before seen in the history of the world. The grossest filthiness is practiced and boasted of in “Gay Pride” marches. Man generally believes that the world came into existence by means of “The Big Bang” and the theory of evolution. There is, in their eyes, no God nor need for God. There is no afterlife. Man has made a god of himself and zealously worships that god. Is there a future for the church? How long O Lord? But it is wonderfully encouraging to know that the Son of God is interceding for the church. Join the Lord Jesus in praying the prayer we have here which the Father will certainly answer.

And now, in verse 13, A Comforting Message—“And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words.” We notice here the response God gives to the Angel’s intercession. The Lord answered with good and comfortable words. They were dark days, yet there is this encouraging message. No matter how discouraging the situation, God is in control. He is working out his purposes. God loves his people and cares for them. He will ensure that none of them is lost. His church has a great future.

God is Jealous for His People, verses 14 and 15—“So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.”

The prophet is given instructions that he should cry out and tell the Jews that the LORD of hosts is jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy—verse 14. We generally take the word “jealous” in a negative sense. We rightly see it as a sin to be jealous of someone else. But

here, it is used in a good sense. It refers to the very strong love of a faithful husband for his wife. God has a deep concern for his bride, the church. He has a deep personal interest in her and a terrible anger towards those who would abuse his wife. Zion is precious to him, and he will fight those who hurt her.

Now God says that he is “very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease.” They show no concern for the suffering church of God. Further, God states that he “was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction”—verse 15. Yes, God was angry with his people because of their idolatry, but it was a little anger. He was but a little displeased. But when he chastised his people the heathen jumped in, as it were, and added to the pain inflicted on Zion. They kicked Israel when she was down. So God now feels sorry for his people. He will indeed unleash his full anger against the heathen. The instrument which he used to chastise his chosen, will now be punished with his full wrath.

In verse 11, we had noted the report of the angels that said, “all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.” The Persians and the other nations are at ease. This cannot be allowed. God will now punish them. God had said through Haggai, “Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts”—Haggai 2, verses 6 and 7. God shook the nations, and he raised up the Greeks led by Alexander the Great to conquer the Persians. And then, God again shook the nations again, raising up the Empire of Rome. Eventually the Christ came, “the desire of all nations.” Later, Antichrist will arise, but he will be destroyed. The author of Hebrews writes: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.” That’s Hebrews 12, verses 25 to 29.

The wicked despise and mock the people of God. They are allowed for a time to trample upon the saints, but then God will arise in his wrath and destroy these enemies of his beloved people. Atheists, heretics, followers of false religion, and all the ungodly will experience his indignation. Notice how this is stated in the Psalms. We think of Psalm 2, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.” That’s Psalm 2, verses, 1 to 5. Make sure you are not an enemy of God’s people! What hope is there for you if God will turn upon you in his infinite wrath?

But then we have, in verses 16 and 17, A Wonderful Promise—“Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.”

Verse 16 tells us that God loves his people and will return to them. The work of building the temple will be completed. God had turned his back on the Jews because he was displeased and



grieved at their sins, but now he returns to them and assures them of his help. They had many enemies trying to stop the work. Though they had limited resources, and they were few in number, yet the house of the Lord would be built again. It took another four years, but the word of the Lord was fulfilled.

Furthermore, there were to be better days ahead. A line, a surveyor's line, would be stretched over Jerusalem. Houses, many houses would be built. The next verse explains more fully: "Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem"—verse 17. The prophet is urged to cry aloud. Here is a wonderful encouraging message for the builders of the temple. It comes from the LORD of hosts. He is the God of the armies of heaven. He is Almighty. With him all things are possible. Not just Jerusalem will expand, but also the other cities of Judah will increase and grow. Through prosperity, they shall spread abroad. God is comforting his people. He shall yet choose Jerusalem and cause his name to be there. Shout out this encouragement!

God did indeed cause Jerusalem to be built. It happened literally for the Jews. The temple was completed. Seventy years later, in the days of Nehemiah, the walls of Jerusalem were built again. The Jews multiplied and prospered. Many thousands came to live in the city. God chose Jerusalem. The Son of God became man, born in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem. Later, he entered the temple and taught there. Rejected by the chief priests and elders, he was handed over to the Romans, and crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. But then, on the third day, he rose again. He ascended up to heaven from the Mount of Olives, and sat on the right hand of God. He sent his Spirit to his people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. On that day, three thousand Jews were converted. The numbers in his church quickly multiplied. Later, Gentiles also were born again by the Spirit of God. And from this beginning, the New Jerusalem grew. It expanded rapidly across the known world. Today, millions from every nation are to be found in this church of God.

To Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, it had been revealed that God's kingdom would be like a little stone cut without hands out of a mountain. It would strike the image which represents the earthly empires, and would destroy them, and would then grow till it became a mountain which filled the earth—Daniel, chapter 2. Jesus told many parables which described the growth of his kingdom and church. For example, he spoke of the little mustard seed, "Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof"—Matthew 13, verse 32. Then he told of the leaven, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened"—verse 33. These parables make plain that God's church will spread though the whole world and become a mighty kingdom. Further we are told, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved"—John 3:17. This verse implies that in a very real sense, the world shall be saved. It is not simply a remnant that will be saved, plucked as it were from a perishing world. Rather, so many will be saved that it can be said that the world will be saved. Christ's work will be eminently successful. In all things he shall have the preeminence—Colossians 1, verse 18.

There was, and will be, setbacks. There will be dark days, but the future prosperity of the church is guaranteed. She shall spread abroad. The Lord has chosen Jerusalem. Do not let the devil discourage you, if you are on the side of Christ, you are on the winning side. And even the literal Jerusalem shall yet be chosen by God. For years it was a deserted city. It is now the capital again of a Jewish state. But Paul assures us that the Jews, who have for so long been rejected by God, will yet again be grafted in to their own olive tree, "For the gifts and calling of God are without

repentance”—Romans 11, verse 29. The psalmist foretells concerning the Messiah, “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him”—Psalm 72, verses 8 to 11. Amen, so let it be.