

The Man Among the Myrtles

Paradise by the Deep

- ⁷ On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying,
- 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.'
- ¹² 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?'
- ¹³ And the LORD answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.

Zechariah 1:7-13

Monsters by the Sea

A VILE HORDE OF HIDEOUS MONSTERS, FIRST SWIMMING, then screeching, then ascending from the turbulent sea with their horns and their fangs and their claws to wage a violent, bloody war upon the unsuspecting masses of humanity. Something out of a horror movie, a dark fantasy book, an apocalyptic sci-fi thriller? No. It comes from the Bible. “And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast” (Rev 13:1-3).

It isn't just John who sees such things in his Apocalypse:

² “Daniel declared, ‘I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.’”

- ³ And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.
- ⁴ The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it.
- ⁵ And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.'
- ⁶ After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it.
- ⁷ After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.
- ⁸ I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots.

And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

(Daniel 7:2-8)

We could multiply these kinds of visions. But the purpose in my telling you about them here is to point out some important facts about them. **First**, these scenes are **symbolic**. The images represent other things. The creatures represent both **human nations** (such as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome) and **supernatural entities** that are behind them (such as the prince of Persia, the Prince of Rome, the Antichrist or a satanic world-system). This is common is the genre of literature we call *apocalyptic*.

Second, the imagery of the **sea and these nations** go together quite often, as the **sea** or the **deep** becomes a **symbol of death** and evil and even hell itself, as when God drowns Pharaoh: “**The depths have covered them, they went down to the bottom like a stone**” (Ex 15:5 NET), or when David is crying for his life: “**Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me**” (Ps 69:15). Who is David’s prayer to? Who cast Pharaoh into the sea?

Great monsters known as Leviathan and Rahab are sometimes equated with these nations and their doom in the sea. Leviathan is the chaos monster. God asks Job, “Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls” (Job 41:5)? “His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth” (41:21). “He makes the deep boil like a pot; he makes the sea like a pot of ointment” (41:31). “Lay your hand on him; Remember the battle; you will not do it again!” (Job 41:8).

Rahab is kind of like Leviathan’s mother. Again in Job, “By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab, by his breath the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent” (26:12-13). Leviathan again, “Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea” (Isa 27:1). Do you hear where Leviathan and Rahab—both “fleeing serpents”—live? They live in the sea, in the deep.

Now think about Exodus and the Red Sea again. The Psalmist says, “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for

the creatures of the wilderness” (Ps 74:13-14). Now the prophet, “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over” (Isa 51:9-10)? Rahab and Leviathan are likened to Egypt.

In Genesis 1:2 the Spirit of God is hovering over the face of the deep. This is the primordial chaos, the formless void, the *tohu wavohu* that God quickly overcomes in the space of a mere week. In the Greek, the “deep” is translated as the abyss. And so at the other end of the Bible in Revelation, Satan is called a dragon and a serpent (Rev 12:9; 20:2), and very soon he would be thrown into the abyss, the deep from whence he came (20:3).

So let me summarize. Great monsters in the Bible often represent satanic forces and their human evil counterparts—especially the nations that rage against God’s people. These monsters reside in the deep, a symbol of chaos, death, and hell itself. This is the kind of

background you need to begin to understand the strange imagery of Zechariah's first apocalyptic "night vision."

The Night Visions

It is February 15, 519 B.C., some four months after Zechariah first had the Word of the LORD come to him. "On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the Word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo" (Zech 1:7). In this way, the first vision begins very much like the first verse begins, giving the date and the setting that is quite similar to what we looked at last time.

What is curious here is to compare the last word of vs. 7 with the first words of vs. 8. "... saying, I saw in the night." The Word of the LORD says something, and what he says comes in a vision. This kind of language has its roots in the man Abram. "After these things the Word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision" (Gen 15:1). The Word comes in a vision. For Abram, this is because the Word became visible; he could be seen. The vision also contained symbols and actual words from the Word. How? Because the Word is a person—the Second Person of the

Holy Trinity. But how does this all take place in Zechariah?

In answer to that question, all we are going to do today is figure out the setting and actors of our vision. Thus, our focus will be mostly on vv. 7-9 with a little bit from the next few verses too. You might think this an easy thing, but you would be mistaken. Just read the commentaries. As I said last week, this book is cryptic and difficult to discern. Zechariah's vision is a “night vision” (vs. 8) and this is itself a kind of metaphor for us. Like walking around on a dark night, it is hard to see exactly what is in front of us here. As one commentary, “The ambience of the scene is rather dark and obscure, contrasting the Lord's omniscience and plans for his people with human ability to perceive fully what God is doing.”¹

You might also think that just looking at a setting and the actors in a vision would be too little information, especially for a sermon which is supposed to bring comfort and exhortation to God's people. Again, this would be a mistake. Simply seeing the picture before us is enough to

¹ George L. Klein, *Zechariah*, vol. 21B, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 95.

cause us to bow in wonder at the God who we will try to discern, though we see through a dark glass.

Vs. 8 verse begins the first of what will be eight night visions:

1. The vision of the red-horse rider among the myrtles (1:7–17)
2. The vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen (1:18–21)
3. The vision of the surveyor with the measuring line (2:1–13)
4. The vision of the cleansing and crowning of Joshua (3:1–10)
5. The vision of the gold lampstand and the two olive trees (4:1–14)
6. The vision of the flying scroll (5:1–4)
7. The vision of the woman in the ephah (5:5–11)
8. The vision of the four chariots (6:1–8)

Since **vs. 8** is the only introductory statement in any of them, they probably all take place on the same amazing night. Imagine being shown not one, but eight incredible

visions in one night. It would be enough to cause you to prostrate yourself before God and never rise again.

Actor's: Take Your Places

The Prophet

So let's try to get a grasp on what is before us. Who are the actors? Where are they positioned? Why does this matter? Zechariah was just as curious as we are and sums this up at the beginning of vs. 9, "Then I said, 'What are these, my lord?'" A great a vital question.

In vs. 8 we have 1. Zechariah seeing a vision. 2. A man riding on a red horse. 3. He is standing among myrtle trees. 4. These myrtle trees are next to what the ESV calls "a glen." 5. Behind the main rider there are many horses or various colors: red, sorrel, and white. In vs. 9 Zechariah talks to someone who is called an "angel" and this angel talks back to him.

Zechariah would seem to be the easiest to identify, although one pastor I was discussing this with is of the opinion that even the person speaking at the beginning of vs. 8 is difficult to discern. Vs. 8 begins with quotations. In other words, someone is speaking the words, "I saw in the night and behold..." The ESV begins the next verse with a

new parenthesis saying, “Then I said...” The verse begins with the Hebrew *vuv* which can be translated with “and” or “then.” “And” would connect it with what came before, giving you one speaker. “Then” might not, thus you possibly have one or two speakers. Zechariah is obviously in view in vs. 9. But is he responding to what another speaker was describing, or was he seeing it himself?

I think the answer is pretty obviously, but why might my pastor friend think that the person in vs. 8 is not Zechariah? Because of vs. 7: “The Word came ... saying.” The idea here would be that the Word is introducing the scene to Zechariah who is with him in vs. 8. So the Word saw something and conveyed it to Zechariah. I don’t think this is right, because it is usually the prophet who sees. So the “saying” of the Word would be the whole vision, not the introductory quotations of vs. 8. Therefore, even though the Word is “saying,” I think that Zechariah is “seeing” in the night, and then Zechariah is asking someone in the next verse what it is that he is seeing. This is the standard way to read both verses. But as we are going to see, even if we take it the standard way, the Word is going to end up speaking throughout Zechariah’s night

visions, because the Word of God is present with Zechariah. But how?

The Red Rider

The first way, and all that we will say about this today, is by looking at the next person in the vision.² This is “a man riding on a red horse.” The color here is *adom*, and it is related to the word Edom, which can mean “red.” We find red horses later in Zechariah 6, and only one other red horse in the Bible.³ It is in Revelation where we find a bunch of other horses as well. “And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword” (Rev 6:4). You can see here that the red is a symbol of war. This all caused me to think about the Red Warrior of Isaiah, “Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? ‘It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.’ Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his

² The Second way is by looking at the content of the vision: its meaning.

³ I did think it was interesting in doing a search for “red” and “horse(s)” that these two terms come up again together only in the horses of Egypt being thrown into the Red Sea (Deut 11:4; Josh 24:6).

who treads in the winepress?” (Isa 63:1-2). This person is God himself.

Not coincidentally, it is the same person that Zechariah sees. How do I know? We can identify him more clearly from the text. Notice that vs. 8 continues, “He was standing among the myrtle trees...” Now vs. 10, “So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered...” And now vs. 11, “And they answered the Angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees.” So we have “man,” “man,” and “The Angel of the LORD.” It is all the same person.

Zech 1:8	A man	...	was standing among the myrtle trees.
Zech 1:10	The man	who	was standing among the myrtle trees.
Zech 1:11	The angel of the LORD	who	was standing among the myrtle trees.

But who is this Angel of the LORD? One author, reflecting the thoughts of many Christians says:

Throughout the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord is a somewhat enigmatic “character.” A common popular interpretation is that he is the pre-incarnate Christ, *though it seems unlikely*. It is worth noting that in some places the

angel of the Lord seems to be identified with the Lord himself (Gen. 16:7–14; Ex. 3:1–8; Judg. 2:1–5; 6:11–18; 13:21–23), while in other places the angel of the Lord seems to be distinct (2 Sam. 24:15–16; 1 Chron. 21:15–30). The safest interpretation is that he has a unique closeness to YHWH with a special mediating role between the Lord and people [emphasis mine].⁴

The title “The Angel of the LORD” goes all the way back to Genesis and appears many times throughout the OT for a particular individual, an individual who **bears the very name of God** in his Person. What kind of a being could possibly have a unique closeness to YHWH and also be a mediator between the Lord and his people and not also be God himself? To answer the question, it is the Second

⁴ Bryan R. Gregory, *Longing for God in an Age of Discouragement: The Gospel according to Zechariah*, ed. Tremper Longman III, *The Gospel according to the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010). Curiously, as I was typing this, literally, a thread came up on my Facebook feed that reads, “Listening to a debate between Dr. White and Greg Stafford (JW). Dr. White just blew my mind. He said that the One that people saw in the OT (visions, personal encounters) was actually Jesus. Because none have seen the Father but Christ. This news to anyone else??” Thus, as I said, I believe this honest question is a reflection of a great many Christian. (Quentin Soli Deo Gloria, in group *The Reformed Pub*, 6-16-2015).

Person of the Trinity. In light of this most basic of all doctrines of the Christian Faith, the comment above seems extremely strange to me, given that it comes from a very thoughtful Christian who has written a wonderful commentary on Zechariah.

But I have observed first hand how this quote is representative of many today who just can't bring themselves to say that the Angel of the LORD is Christ. It's like they want to, but something is keeping them from just coming out and admitting it. This was not a problem for many older Christians. But something he says here might be helpful for us. He notices that sometimes the Angel seems to be identified with the Lord and other times he seems distinct. Strangely, this observation—which keeps him from seeing—is the very thing I should think would *help* him to see that this is exactly what we would expect of Jesus. Jesus is God and yet not the Father. If “LORD” (Yahweh) can be understood as speaking both of the Essence of God and a Person or Persons, then we would expect to find some places where the Angel is Yahweh, and others where he is a distinct from the Person of the Father.

Even without having a full-blown Trinitarian theology, many Second Temple Jews nevertheless were able to call someone Second or Lesser Yahweh, while simultaneously maintaining that there is only “One God” (**Deut 6:4**). We actually have a commentary on this very passage from a first century Rabbi, perhaps a contemporary of both Jesus and Paul. “R. Johanan said: ... ‘A man riding.’ ‘Man’ can refer to none but the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written, *The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name* (**Ex 15:3**).”⁵

The word for a “man” here is the Hebrew is *ish*. I want to point out that it is **not the word *adam***, which is used exclusively of human beings in the Bible. Sometimes human beings are called *ish*, but sometimes *other* beings are called them as well. Jacob wrestled with a man (*ish*), but he was clearly not human. Two men (*ish*) went into Sodom to destroy it. The text calls them “angels,” and they are clearly not human. It is incredible to me that a Rabbi living in the days of Jesus who never converted to Christ could

⁵ Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. 16 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 493–494. Cited as *Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sanhedrin: Folio 93a* at: http://www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_93.html#93a_7, last accessed 6-16-2015. **Going Deeper:**

say something like this, but a Christian writing a commentary on our passage can't even go this far. But of course Christians have long understood that the Angel of the LORD is Christ as well. As Calvin says right here, "If we regard this angel to be Christ, the idea is consistent with the common usage of Scripture."⁶ There is nothing new here at all.

Thus, if the Word of the LORD is Christ, and the Angel of the LORD is Christ, then the Word of the LORD is showing Zechariah a vision *of himself*. But what is he doing here? We already have a hint that he is acting in his capacity as the LORD of Hosts, the Warrior of Israel, Moses' man of war, Joshua's Commander of the Armies of the LORD. In fact, notice how the Angel of the LORD speaking to Moses from the burning bush (Ex 3:2) tells him, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex 3:5), and then the commander of the armies of God tells Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the

⁶ Comments on Zech 1:7-11. In John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 5 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 33.

place where you are standing is holy” (Josh 5:15). It is the same thing, because it is the same person.

The Other Horsemen

This is brought out more clearly by the other horses. In Zech 1:8 it tells us that “behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.” But it isn’t just horses, as if all Zechariah is being led to is some kind of meadow or stable with horses and no riders. No, there are riders, and they speak in vs. 11, “We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.” We will look more at this verse next time. All I want to show you here is that there are riders on these horses. Their positioning therefore shows that the man-angel has the authority as their Captain. They bow to what he tells them.

Their colors are interesting. They are all natural colors that we find in horses, if “red” is more like a chestnut red than a pure red like you would see in *My Little Ponies* or something. In Revelation, the colors of the horses represent things. The red horse goes out for war. The black horse goes out for death. The white horse, which Christ himself rides, is the color of splendor and light. There is no

discernible meaning here of these legions of riders going out for different tasks like this.

However, one scholar has speculated that the colors may be designed to give us the impression of flames of light, since reds and tans and whites are the colors of flame. One writes, “A desire to produce such a bright, fiery image would then explain why black horses, which are found in the seventh vision, are absent from this first one. Also, the second color-term, *šēruqqîm*, evidently derives from a verbal root that is used for the shining of the sun ... [this] would highlight the fiery, brightly luminous appearance of these horses. This imagery would thus be an equivalent in prophetic vision for the fiery horses with the chariots of fire which were seen in ... Elijah’s ascent into heaven (2 Kgs 2:11) and again later by Elisha and his servant when the forces of the king of Aram menaced Dothan (2 Kgs 6:17).”⁷ I have just mentioned another flame (the burning bush) and the imagery definitely helps to begin to grasp the supernatural things that are before us.

The Myrtles Introduced

⁷ Meredith Kline, *Glory in our Midst*, 5.

Let's turn our attention now to the **myrtles**. To help us grasp what he is looking at in the dark, what is a myrtle? Myrtles are leafy evergreen trees that grow throughout the Mediterranean. They would have stayed green even in February. They also tried to import them to Babylon, where Israel had just come from. In fact, **Esther**, who was living in Persia, was named **Hadassah** (**Est 2:7**), which is the Hebrew word for a myrtle. Her name was changed to Esther which means "star." Curiously, the myrtle tree has a **delicate starry white flower** with white, long stemmed, yellow tipped stamen's that could almost give the impression in full bloom that the tree is on fire: A kind of figurative burning bush!



Myrtle "star" with yellow tipped stamens



Myrtle "fiery" appearance



Full Grown Myrtle Tree

On the bare hillsides it is a low bush, but under favorable conditions of moisture (and this is important for

more than one reason) it attains a considerable height.⁸ Why is that important? First, because the myrtle here is giving **cover** to the horsemen. This is a recognizance mission. Hence Kline says, “**Myrtles grow to some nine feet and as seen here probably stood at the height of the mounted horseman.**”⁹ If they are that big, then where they are growing to get that **big** becomes the second reason. Before we can identify what the myrtles represent, we need to therefore look at where they are growing.

Returning to the Deep

The ESV tells us that it is “**by the glen.**” A **glen** is a long, deep valley with a watercourse running through it. The problem is, this word (*mtslh*) is translated in many ways: **ravine** (NAS), **shade** (YLT), the **bottom** (JPS), the **valley** (CJB), the **shady mountains** (LXX), the **shadows** (NAB), and even as “**Babylon**” in the Targum. Babylon isn’t a literal translation of the word, but it is trying to explain to the hearer what is meant.

⁸ E. W. G. Masterman, “Myrtle,” ed. James Orr et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2103.

⁹ Kline, 15.

The idea is that the myrtles are in an evil land. Babylon is the land of captivity, but worse, a land of demons and unclean things (**Rev 18:2**; cf. **Isa 13:21-22**; **34:13-14**).¹⁰ What we therefore need is a word that gives us plenty of water and is related to bad things. A “valley” simply won’t do. A glen and a ravine get closer. But interestingly, one word is sometimes used to translate it. It is *the deep* (TNK).¹¹

We are back to where we started. We’ve seen how the deep is associated with monsters and evil nations and death

¹⁰ See my book *Giants: Sons of the Gods*.

¹¹ Kline helps us wade through the problems. “If we follow the Masoretic tradition for the vocalization of the noun *mšlb* in Zech 1:8, there is no reason to translate it ‘ravine’ or otherwise to depart from the regular meaning of *mēšûlâ* or *mēšôlâ* (cf. *šûlâ* Isa 44:27), namely, the depths of the sea, the watery deep. This is the meaning it has, for example, later in the Book of Zechariah itself (see 10:11, where the plural *mēšûlôt* is used) and Ps 68:22 (23), the context of which is similar to Zechariah 1 in that it portrays the Lord as a riding figure (v. 5 [6]) accompanied by a myriad of forces (v. 17 [18]) For the rendering of the preposition (*beth*) as ‘by’ in connection with a body of water, see, e.g., 1 Sam 29:1 (“by the spring”) and Ezek 10:15, 20 (“by the river”), the latter being of special interest because there too we find the motif of a Glory-theophany by the waters. The LXX rendering of *mšlb*, ‘(the mountains) of the shadows,’ would reflect a reading *mēšillâ* from a root meaning “be dark”. If this reading were being considered, one might note the Accadian term *mašallu*, used for the canopied area of a royal garden, a baldachin, and translate ‘the myrtles which serve as [*beth essentiae*] a canopy-shade.’ But the clearly attested *mēšûlâ* of the Masoretic tradition is to be preferred over other possibilities not attested elsewhere in biblical Hebrew. Zechariah saw the Lord of the angels of heaven standing between (or among) the myrtles by the deep. God’s message of comfort and hope for his faithful was distilled in that cryptic, symbolic scene.”

itself. This is how you begin to discover what cryptic imagery is teaching. You go back to prior revelation in Scripture and see how it is used there. Psalm 68, which is a completely Christ centered Psalm and also full of fantastical supernatural and Exodus imagery throughout says, “I will bring them back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea” (Psa 68:22). “Depths of the sea” is the deep. God will bring them up from the deep.

The deep goes all the way back to creation. The Spirit of God is hovering over the deep (Gen 1:2). God sits enthroned over the deep (Ps 29:1; Gen 2:3). God throws Pharaoh into the deep of the Red Sea (Ex 15:1). God leads Joshua through a parallel Red Sea crossing in the Jordan just before coming to him as the Commander of the Armies of the LORD. David wants God to rescue him from the deep (Ps 69:2). Jonah descends for three days into the heart of the deep (Jon 2:4) just before ascending back to life as a type of Christ. In Revelation, God throws Satan into the deep (Rev 20:2). When Christians are baptized, they plunge down into the deep before coming up again alive (Rom 6:3-4). In all of these things it is God who shows forth his wonders in the deep (Ps 107:24).

The Myrtles Identified

Do not wonder then at where these myrtles are growing. They are growing very near to the deep. And what is the deep one more time? One commentary sums it up, “The word translated “ravine” (*metsulah*) hints at a supernatural locale, a point of contact between heavenly and earthly realms.”¹² This is exactly right. A contact point between heaven and earth, known as an *axis mundi*, is something like a sacred mountain (manmade towers like Babel) or a sacred garden. Hence, his comments actually begin, “It was a shadowed and secret location. The evergreen myrtle trees may suggest the king’s garden, which was located near a gate through which King Zedekiah and the survivors of his army had been able to escape from the Babylonians who surrounded the city (2 Kgs 25:4).” The location here, like Babylon earlier, is speculative. The image of the garden by the deep is not. In fact, the vision is a right in line with that most ancient symbol of the Bible: The Garden of Eden.

¹² John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise, *Minor Prophets II*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 200–201.

The **Garden** was created when God made dry land spring forth from the deep. And what is the Garden of Eden filled with? Trees! This Garden was later recreated in the life of Israel in the form of a **tabernacle**. From its water basin (**Gen 2:10-14**) to its altar of sacrifice (**3:21; 4:3-7**), to its golden lampstand as a tree of life to the multiple trees they were to carve into the outer curtains, this was a replica of the Garden.

This tabernacle had a special feast wherein Israel was called to take various trees and make booths out of them. This was called the **Feast of Tabernacles**. But in Zechariah's day, Nehemiah specified that one of these trees was to be the myrtle tree (**Neh 8:15**). They obviously had to be sturdy, but they were also chosen for their "beauty" (**Lev 23:40**). Haggai's visions began on the last Feast of Tabernacles day (**Hag 2:1**) and that Zechariah's own book ends in this same feast (**Zech 14:16**). Thus, this symbolism would not have been missed by a Jew reading this first vision.

This is all the more clear when we know that the word used of these special trees of "beauty" (*hadar*) is a synonym of glory (*kavod*). **God is clothed in glory (*kavod*) and majesty**

(*hadar*; Ps 104:1 CJB). Two verses later in the Psalm, God is riding in a chariot (104:3). Sound familiar to Zechariah? Being evergreens, the myrtles were a natural symbol of everlasting life. Their starry flaming blossoms are a symbol of the glory of God covering them. Hence, the myrtle represents the glory of God, just like the fire in the bush represents the glory of God. God's glory in the midst of his people will become *the main theme* of Zechariah. It is pictured right here.

While there is much more we could look at, the point is the imagery is not at all what the words like “ravine” or “shadow” or other such things convey. Zechariah is seeing an image of *paradise* by the deep. This is God in the midst of the myrtles being a glory-covering, protecting them from the deep as her Warrior. To use another figure it is as Luther says, “Prince Michael himself intercedes for the people that the Lord might have compassion on Jerusalem.”¹³

¹³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 20: Minor Prophets III: Zechariah*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 20 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 18.

Therefore, **what are the myrtles?** The same Rabbi we saw earlier got it right, sort of. “*The myrtle trees that were in the deep.* Now ‘*hadasim*’ refers but to the righteous, as it is written, And he brought up Hadassah [Esther]; and ‘*deep*’ refers to Babylon, as it is said, that sayeth to the deep, *Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers.*” What’s wrong with that? It isn’t what he says, but what he would not believe in his own day. That is, the “righteous” today are not those who just return from Babylon and are Jewish. They are all God’s people according to faith in Christ, even as they are in Zechariah’s vision. For it is Christ by the myrtle-righteous.

But today, the promises are more sure as Christ has come as man, not an angel. The LORD himself will say, “**I will be the glory in her midst**” (**Zech 2:5**). Future tense. This is a different sense than the Rabbi would come to believe. For it is the sense of God becoming man and dying for our sins in the midst of sinners, surrounded by the evil forces of the deep. Therefore, as he thinks about the future of his own people, the God who was so full of wrath in the first six verses, is, for the moment, calmed as he stands in the midst of his people. Today, his wrath is fully appeased

in the death of Word of God made flesh, God's only begotten Son.

It is scarcely possible to think of anything more important and relevant to wrap our minds around than this. For this is a theme that goes from Genesis to Revelation using the same kinds of symbols all along as if to remind us again and again through repetition that God loves his people. If it appears that much, don't you suppose it is probably pretty important God that you understand it?

But the problem is, life gets in the way. We sin. God's displeasure is often felt upon individuals, families, churches, and nations. Terrible things happen: disasters, wars, famines, and death. We feel as if he leaves those who have faith in him. He can't possibly be appeased. He can't possibly forgive. He can't possible care about me. For Zechariah's people, having just come out of Babylon and now with no temple, it was easy to think that God had abandoned them. We are not different.

But Israel stands as a type of the elect at all times, and therefore the thought that **God is in the midst of his people** surrounding them with his glory is the most comforting news imaginable. It is the Good News. It is the gospel, or as

it says later in this very vision, “gracious and comforting words” (Zech 1:13). What can stop him from being there? He has already endured the worst we have to offer. We put the Son of God to death. But he was raised from the dead in proof of his own worth.

It is why the Scripture ends on this very note, with the Lamb of God in the center of the city, crying out for people to stop sinning, to repent (as Zechariah himself began), and to come to his Healing Tree of Life. Therefore, can you possibly see such a vision as you sit here with God’s people, being lifted up into heaven itself by the proclamation of the word, and be unmoved? See the man in the midst of the myrtles by the deep. See the mighty angelic armies at his command. Know of his power. Know of his protecting love. The vision itself, just the scene sets the tone and that tone is the tone of worship.