

The Lord as Creator

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[0 : 0 0] Zechariah chapter 12, and we read from the beginning of the chapter. An oracle. This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel.

The Lord who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding nations reeling.

Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations.

All who try to move it will injure themselves. On that day I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness, declares the Lord. I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations.

Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God. On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a brazier in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves.

[1 : 1 6] They will consume right and left, all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place. The Lord will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honour of the house of David, and of Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah.

On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the Lord going before them.

On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a spirit of grace and supplication.

They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad-Rimon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves, the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives.

[2 : 4 4] Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We'll sing again to God's praise from Psalm 43.

Psalm 43. And we'll sing from verses, we'll sing from verses 3 to verse 5 of the Psalm.

We'll send thy light forth and thy truth, let them be guides to me, and bring me to thine holy hill, even where thy dwellings be. Then will I to God's altar go, to God my chiefest joy, yea God my God, thy name to praise, my heart by will employ.

Why art thou then cast down my soul? What should discourage thee, and why with vexing thoughts art thou disquieted in me? Still trust in God, for him to praise, good cause I yet shall have.

He of my countenance is the health, my God, that doth me save. These verses to God's praise. We'll stand to sing. Let them be guides to me, and bring me to thine holy hill, even where thy dwellings be.

[4 : 17] Then will I to God's altar go, to God my chiefest joy, yea God my God, thy name to praise, my heart by will employ.

Why art thou then cast down my soul? What should discourage thee, and why with vexing thoughts art thou disquieted in me?

Still trust in God for him to praise, good cause I yet shall have.

He of my countenance is the health, my God, that doth me save.

Just as we turn back now to Zechariah 12, again let's pray for a moment. Let's pray. Our heavenly Father, we thank you once more for your word, and we thank you for the fact that your word shines light into this world.

[6 : 09] We thank you that your word shines light into our dark hearts, and we thank you that as that light is shone in, we see our sin.

We see the need for us to confess our sin as we do so just now. And we see the need of us to have a savior.

We thank you that you are the God who saves us, even as we have sung in that psalm. Our sin causes us to look in and to feel discouraged, to feel fear.

But we thank you that we have a savior. And when we look in faith to him, we are promised the reality of our sin forgiven.

We are promised the reality of an eternal security that is found in no other place. And we thank you that even as we look forward in the Psalms, and even as we look forward and through the prophecy of Zechariah, we are carried further on in time to see Jesus.

[7 : 18] We thank you that he is our savior. He is the one who was pierced in order that we could be saved. And we ask that you would cause us to have our eyes turned away from ourselves and turned away from all that would preoccupy us in this world, that we would look upon Christ and that we would receive that healing, that salvation that he alone can bring to our souls.

So help us, Lord, we pray, as we look to you. We pray, Lord, that as we ask for your blessing upon the reading of your word and our meditations just now for ourselves here, we pray that you would be amongst those who are around us in the different denominations.

We pray for, Lord, the churches that are on our notice sheets here for the Free North Church in Inverness. In their vacancy, Lord, we ask that you would guide them and that you would lead them, that you would continue to be at work amongst them, both in the Free North Church and in the church plant in Merkinch.

We ask, Father, that you would be at work for your glory, that you would be seeking and saving the lost. We pray also, Lord, for the vacancy in Grace Church Montrose.

We know not a lot about that area. We may not feel overly connected with it, but we thank you that we have these details here that enable us to pray for that place.

[8 : 48] And we ask, Lord, that you would work in that place, that you would create a soul, thirst, and many hearts that would be quenched as they look to and taste the reality of the fact that the Lord Jesus is good.

And, Lord, we pray for the congregation in Leverborough, whom we do know and whom we are close by. We thank you, Lord, for the gospel witness in that place and in the different churches.

And we pray especially for the church there as Mark leads. We pray for the elders, for the office bearers, for those who attend Sunday by Sunday.

And we ask, Lord, that you would add your blessing as your word is preached. We pray for the Christianity Explored course that they are running at present. And we ask that many would come and those who do come would have their eyes opened to see Jesus.

And as they seek to work together as a congregation in that community, where there are many different sections of the Church of Christ, we pray, Lord, that indeed they would be given opportunity to do all they can in gospel partnerships.

[10 : 01] And we ask that the Lord Jesus would be lifted up in all that they seek to do. So hear our prayers for these congregations. Hear our prayers, Lord, for ourselves.

Help us, Lord, we ask as we look to you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I'm looking around here to see, first of all, how many are here who go to Connect, the club on Friday afternoon.

That got Alistair's head off the wall for a second. What games do you do at Connect? Tell us one or two of the games that you do at the club at Friday afternoon.

Mm-hmm. Alistair, what do you do? Table tennis. Tennis, yeah, over there. Uh-huh, what else? Bush, you've seen it. There's the dancing, yeah. We saw Gordon action this morning.

Some of us are trying to recover still. Yeah, what else do we do? There's table tennis. There's, what, Grace? There's football around the back, the side there, yeah?

[11 : 14] And what else do you do? I've noticed this every week. We've never organised this, but I've noticed that every week the club finishes with a game that we don't ask for, we don't organise, but it just seems to happen.

What is it? Hide and seek. Every week I see it. People charging about, hiding in places, and then jumping out at the unsuspecting moment.

Hide and seek's a game that's played. It's been played over the generations in all different places. I was walking shortest last night. I was heading back along the road about, I don't know, 10 o'clock or something, and there must have been something happening in the hotel over the road.

And there was, oh, I don't know, six or seven late teenage boys who were clearly involved in the game of hide and seek. So it's different ages, different stages, but we see this game happening all over the place.

When we say hide and seek, we know exactly what it's all about. But I want to say, to kind of lead us into this passage tonight, we may do this with each other, we may kind of withdraw and hide from each other and then jump out, but God is not one who plays hide and seek with us.

[12 : 30] God is not a God who hides himself from us. But he's a God who reveals himself to us. And where does God reveal himself to us? Well, the main place that he reveals himself to us most clearly is in the Bible.

And already in Zechariah, if we think about the span of the book, as we've studied it over these months, God has revealed himself through dreams and through visions and in oracles, as we've read tonight.

And sometimes through the direct word of the prophet Zechariah, there was the drama of the last two chapters. There are various means through which God does this, but he reveals himself to be one who is compassionate, who is patient, and who causes people to come to him, and who causes people who have drifted from him to return to him.

That's the recurring thrust in this book. Those who are at a distance from God, whether it be that they have never come to God in faith, or whether it be that they have once come and been caught by the current of this world and taken some distance away, God speaks to his people and he calls them, he calls us to return to him.

Why? Because he loves us. And so we have a God here who reveals himself to us, who calls us to come to him, and also, who we've seen in various chapters, reveals to us the dangers of not coming to him.

[14 : 09] And in this chapter again, God reveals himself to his people. He speaks. Repeatedly we hear in this section, this is the word of the Lord.

And I want to just say at the beginning of this message tonight, I hope that's what you're looking for when you come here tonight. I hope we're looking for and listening for the word of the Lord.

Not my thoughts. Not the conversations and the tip bits of information that we might get when we're speaking to each other. But I hope we come here and open God's word and ask that God will open our ears and our hearts that we may receive the word of God.

I hope that we come with the expectation that God will reveal something more of himself to us. That we would see Jesus. Jesus. So what do we hear God say in this chapter?

What does God reveal of himself to us here? Well there's three things you'll be encouraged to know, not seven this evening. First of all, the Lord reveals himself to us as the creator and the sustainer.

[15 : 33] The second thing is we see that God reveals himself to us as our protector. And the third thing is that God reveals himself to us as a savior.

So first of all, the Lord reveals himself to us as our creator and our sustainer. Look at verse one. This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth and who forms the spirit of man.

You know, every day that we walk out into creation, every day that we look up into the skies, we should be reminded of the fact that the Lord is our creator and he is our sustainer.

As we go for walks across this land, as we look out onto the sea, as we are struck by the drama of the landscape that we are privileged to live amongst, we should be constantly reminded that this is the handiwork of God.

Sometimes we see paintings. We go to galleries. Some of you go to galleries and you get to recognize the style of particular painters.

[16 : 59] They might even sign the bottom of these paintings. We see something and we think, oh, that looks like it might have been done by Margarita. And we go and check and right enough we see the little signature at the bottom of the picture.

And every sky that we see, every star in the heavens, the golden beaches on the east coast, the rocky bays on the west coast, every landscape that we look out on bears the signature of the creator.

And not just the creator, but the sustainer. not just the one who speaks and everything that we see and know comes into being, but this is the God who keeps everything going.

There's an old heresy going way back where people said that God was one who wound up this creation a bit like we wind up a clock and then he places it down and he walks away and he leaves it.

Very early in church history that was refuted as being wrong. God is not just the creator, he's the sustainer and we get a sense of that even in the verse before us here.

[18 : 23] Note the tense that God uses through Zechariah. He reveals himself to be the Lord who stretches out the heavens. Not who once long ago stretched out the heavens, but he's the Lord who stretches present tense out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth.

Not who laid it and who distanced himself from it, but who constantly lays and steadies out the foundations of this earth. The point that we're to see here is that God is not withdrawn from his creation.

He's ever present. He's holding all things together. Everything that we see on the horizon, he is holding it together.

Everything that we are, the breath that we are enabled to take is given to us by God.

He's holding us together. We may not recognize that, we may not thank him for that, but he is still the one who is holding us together.

[19 : 43] All creation is held together. We sang that, didn't we? In the lyric of the hymn. All creation holds together by the power of your voice.

Let the skies declare your glory. Let the land and seas rejoice. You are the author. creation. You know, the creation isn't being held together by the speeches and the plans of Greta Thunberg.

It's being held together by the Lord. And yes, we must care for this creation. Yes, we must do what we can to be good stewards of what God has placed us in amongst, but we must not be so arrogant as to think that we hold it together ourselves with our environmental schemes and policies.

blessings. It's the Lord who sustains it. It's the Lord who sustains us. And he's the one also who enables us to recognize that.

He's the creator. He's the sustainer. And he's the one who actually puts within us the capacity to be able to recognize that. When we look out in a field and we see a flock of sheep, what are they thinking about?

[21 : 12] What are they talking about? They're talking about nothing. They're thinking about nothing other than the grass that they're munching. They're not having discussions about where they've come from and where they're going and what is the meaning of all this because they have no spirit.

But we read here that God has formed the spirit of man. He's breathed spiritual life into us. He's given us a soul.

He has set eternity in our hearts. He has placed something within us that enables us to see that life is not just work. Life is not just leisure.

This is not all there is, but there is something beyond. There's something bigger. There is a meaning. There is a purpose. There is a reason that we're here.

It's God who has enabled us to grasp that. He has formed the spirit of man. He places within us that deep desire that is only satisfied when we come to know him.

[22 : 40] He reveals himself to us. He speaks to us. He calls us to himself.

He is the creator. He is the sustainer. We have so many devices these days that cause us to look down. You walk along the street in a city and everybody is walking along with their head pointing towards their boots.

They are not seeing their boots. They are seeing whatever it is they are pressing in front of them. We are constantly having our heads dragged down. The psalmist as we sang at the beginning he calls us as God leads him to look up.

Zechariah here as the Lord moves him in the power of the spirit causes us to look up to the heavens. To see, to recognize, to trust in the one who is our creator and sustainer.

So we see here first of all the Lord as our creator and our sustainer. And the second thing we see here, the second revelation of God in this chapter is that he is our protector.

[23 : 55] Look at verse 2 and the verses after that. I'm going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling.

Remember Jerusalem, remember God's people, they're so much under attack. They constantly are. We've seen that in Joshua, we see it in Zechariah. There's so much attack, there's so much opposition and yet God is saying in the big picture here, I will protect you.

Not that I'll remove you from this, not that I'll dissolve the opposition, but he says, I will protect you. I'm going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding nations reeling.

Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.

On that day, I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness, declares the Lord. And so, these verses go on and we'll look at verses 2 to verse 6 here as we think about how God protects.

[25 : 06] We're giving us various pictures that help us to see the way in which God protects his people. And the first image we're given here under this point is the image of a cup.

Verse 2. A cup that's filled with a powerful drink that sends all the surrounding people's reeling. And we know from Mark, our studies in Mark, I'm not going to go through it all again just now, but we know from Mark, even as we think about Gethsemane, that the cup, the cup symbolizes God's judgment.

And so we see here as the surrounding hostile nations launch their attack against God's people, God says they will taste the cup of his judgment and they will reel, they will fall back, they will stagger like a drunken man.

God's people, they will be protected. If somebody was to fly at us in a state of drunken stupor and they're not even able to stand up, never mind swing or move forward, they're no threat.

And that's the picture here. These surrounding nations, they come in, they attack God's people, but they taste this cup and this cup causes them to lose all their faculties and their power.

[26 : 48] God is protecting his nation, his people. The second image we see here as God protects his people is that image of a rock, verse 3. on that day when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations.

All who try to move it will injure themselves. And we have this image here of God making his people like a rock, this vast rock that's immovable and anyone who comes to try and move it inflicts injury upon themselves.

We've all probably been in that situation where we're trying to shift something that's just heavier than we can handle. We push and we pull and we try to use all kinds of leverage to move this thing but the more we expend our energy the more we hurt ourselves and that's the picture here.

God says I'll make my people so steady, so solid, so weighty that anybody who tries to move them does nothing but damage to themselves.

And we know in this image of the rock that the rock, the cornerstone, the capstone, the rock of salvation is a way of speaking about the Lord himself.

[28 : 13] And through this picture of the rock God is promising protection for his people. In verses 4 and 5 we have another image, another picture that God gives his people to show how he will protect them.

And it's the picture of madness and confusion that he can strike into those who seek to attack them. On that day he says I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness, declares the Lord.

I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations. Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts the people of Jerusalem are strong because the Lord Almighty is their God.

Now this reminds me of Exodus 14. Flick to Exodus 14 for a moment please. And in this passage we have a very familiar account where God's people are seeking to cross the Red Sea, but there's no way through.

They don't know how they're going to get across, but God says to his people through Moses in Exodus 14 and verse 13. Do not be afraid.

[29 : 39] Stand firm and you will see the deliverance of the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you.

You need only stay still. That was God's word to his people and they obeyed. They began to see the way open before them across this sea and they began to cross, but the Egyptian armies, they pursued them.

Verse 23, we pick back up, the Egyptians pursued them and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night, the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into, note, confusion.

He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving and the Egyptians said, let's get away from the Israelites. The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.

And this promise that God is making through Zechariah, I think, will be sending the minds of his people back to the Exodus, back to that account where they saw him moving in such a mighty way and strike confusion into the enemy, the enemy that seemed to be so formidable.

[31 : 02] God is able to confuse the enemy as he protects his people. He's able to blind the eyes of the enemy as he watches over his people. We've heard that from Adam.

Remember, some of us heard Adam speak here in the past. Boys and girls, you probably didn't hear about Adam, but Adam is somebody who is a Christian and he goes to dangerous places with the gospel.

he crosses borders, he goes into places where he knows that if he was caught with a Bible, he would be arrested, he would be thrown into prison, he might even be killed.

But over all these years where he sought to serve God and tell people about Jesus, he says it's like when the enemy gets close, the Lord makes him invisible.

the Lord seems to blind the eyes of those who would want to stop him telling other people about Jesus.

[32 : 10] And God is able to do that. He's done it in the past, he is doing it in the present. He's the God who protects us, he protects his people.

The final image that we have in this wee section is the image of fire. fire. And we have in verse 6 that image of how God protects his people through fire.

He says, on that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a fire pot in the wood pile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

If you think about that picture, if you take a fire pot, back in the day when this was written, you couldn't just take out a lighter or a box of matches and strike a match and you have fire.

Fire wasn't so easy to get going. So they would have a fire pot where the fire was constantly kept going. And they would create a bigger fryer from this wee fire pot.

[33 : 16] And we have this picture here, if you take a fire pot and you put it amongst a wood pile, a wood pile, what's going to happen? Well, you're going to have a blaze in seconds. Or if you take this fire pot, this flaming torch, and you put it amongst dry sheaves, in a second there'll be a blaze.

And we can think about the fact that in Deuteronomy 4 and Hebrews 12, our God is pictured as a consuming fire. And his people, when he is with them, are pictured here as being like a consuming fire against all those who would seek to attack her.

So there's lots of different pictures there. Lots of different pictures of how the Lord protects his people, his people Israel back then, and his people the new Israel, the church of Jesus Christ today.

So, if you and I are trusting Jesus, if we are Christians, if we have confessed our sin, if we have asked the Lord Jesus to be our Savior and our Lord, these pictures are not just for them, but they're for us.

the Lord is our protector. So we don't need to be afraid. And that's a message that runs all the way through the Bible.

[34 : 57] I meant to do a count before I came out here, but I forgot to do that. But I know there are many, many times in Scripture where we have these same words used of God, do not be afraid.

The Lord is our protector, so do not be afraid. It's the message that's on repeat. So for the children, boys and girls, are you listening?

when you're going to sleep, or when you're not going to sleep, and you get worried about stories that you're told, or a video that you've seen and you wish you'd never seen it, remember, you can take these words from this passage and you can say to yourself where God can speak to your heart as he takes the words of the Bible and says to you, the Lord is my protector.

I don't need to be afraid. Who's bigger than God? No one is. So boys and girls, remember that tonight and go to sleep.

Teenagers, when someone says to you in the course of your week, you don't go to church, do you? you're not one of them, are you?

[36 : 27] SU, you're going to SU on a Monday afternoon. Seriously, when people are looking, when people are watching, when we hear something like that, we go into a bit of a panic and we think about a reputation and we think, what are my friends going to say about me and what are the people who are not my friends who want to attack me, what are they going to say about me?

We feel the fear rising. But at that point we can be reminded of this chapter and we can say to ourselves, the Lord is my protector.

I don't need to be afraid. Adults, do we need this? We still have worries.

we have worries about the way this world is going. We have worries about the laws that are being passed. We have worries about the trajectory that we see for this country.

We have worries about what goes on in our business. We have worries about what goes on in our family. Sometimes it's more likely us that struggle to sleep than it is the children.

[37 : 43] But we need to remember, if we are trusting in Christ, the Lord is our protector. We don't need to be afraid.

I think that's where we need to leave things tonight. God speaks to us and he says, he is our creator. He is our sustainer. So as we look out on this creation, we remember that, we praise him for that.

God, we feel fear rising within us especially, we have all these pictures that we can flick back over, even when we are confronted with the things that disturb us and we can remember the Lord is our protector.

So we need not be afraid. We'll pray. our heavenly father, we thank you for your word and we thank you that this is the means through which you reveal yourself to us.

We thank you Lord that you do not hide yourself from us but as we come to the scriptures, you speak. We know that you speak through creation and we thank you Lord that you speak more clearly through your word and we pray that you would open our ears, that we would hear and that we would remember, that we would trust you, that we would take by faith hold of the promises that you give to us and that we would live by faith and not by sight.

[39 : 23] We thank you that most clearly you reveal yourself to us through the word made flesh, through Jesus. We thank you for the protection that he has won for us and going to the cross.

We thank you for the glory that we see as we look at Jesus and his perfection. So enable us we pray as we go from here to keep our eyes fixed upon Christ and to meditate further upon who you are and what you have done for us and what you continue to do for us as you sustain us day by day.

You have made us Lord, you have put your spirit within us and we pray that we would know the reality of peace with God, of this relationship with you which brings purpose and satisfaction to our lives and brings glory to your name.

And we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.