

SESSION TWENTY-NINE

ZECHARIAH

Chapters 9–11

IV. TWO PROPHETIC ORACLES: THE GREAT MESSIANIC FUTURE AND THE FULL REALIZATION OF THE THEOCRACY (9–14)

The first section of the book called for Israel to repent. The section of the night visions presented encouragement and warnings to stimulate Israel to repent and move forward in God's program for the nation. The third section (ch 7–8) revealed that Israel's response was inadequate, and further encouragement was given of what the faithful remnant could expect. In this final major section, the prophet elucidates the details of the remnant that shall obtain the blessings. Furthermore the blessings will be connected with the Messiah following a refining of the nation by God's discipline and His wrath on the ungodly nations.

A. The First Oracle: The Advent and Rejection of the Messiah (9:1–11:17)

"In the first (chaps. 9-11), the judgement through which Gentile world-power over Israel is finally destroyed, and Israel is endowed with strength to overcome all their enemies, forms the fundamental thought and centre of gravity of the prophetic description."¹ Yet in contrast, Zechariah also depicts that when the messianic king comes, He will be rejected. The distressing future that awaits the nation (ch 12–14) follows her rejection of the "good shepherd."

1. The Lord's Coming to Defend Israel and Bring Peace to the Nations (9:1-17)

a. The Destruction of Nations and Preservation of Zion (9:1-8)

This chapter is very difficult to understand, with most of it elaborating the Lord's defense of Israel and His judgment against other nations. Some scholars think that vv 1-8 are written in light of Alexander the Great's march southward after defeating the Persians in the plain of Issus in 333 BC. However, it could just as well be describing future events (especially vv 11-17; note 16a!). In either case, a divine promise is given that the Lord will defend Jerusalem against a foreign invader: "I will camp around My house because of an army" (9:8).

b. The Advent of Israel's King of Peace (9:9-10)

A sudden ray of good news breaks forth in vv 9-10, calling for rejoicing. These are two verses of "direct" messianic prophecy: "Behold, your King is coming to you. . . and He will speak peace to the nations." Though Israel's Messiah-king would come in humility, He will achieve peace among all nations. Israel's glorious future

¹David Baron, *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1918), 285.

was bound up in the Messiah, and the Messiah would bring deliverance not only for Israel but for all the nations of the earth. What a stimulus for Israel to turn fully to God and trust Him! Notice that this couplet contains glimpses of both the 1st and 2nd Comings of Christ. Vs 9 looks at the 1st Coming, whereas vs 10 looks at the 2nd Coming. The thought of the Lord's coming to His people at Jerusalem had already been mentioned in Zech 2:10. What was not clear from the Old Testament perspective was that the Lord would actually come twice. He comes twice, because in His 1st Coming He is rejected as being the shepherd of His people (though God's purposes are not defeated—He also purposed Messiah to atone for the sins of all people).

According to vs 9, the Lord would come on a donkey (cf. Jn 12:12-16; Mt 21:1-11), a fitting token of His humility. Dan 9:24-25 had revealed the *time* of Messiah's coming; Zech 9:9 reveals the *manner* of His coming. God's intention in sending the Messiah was to establish *peace* and *righteousness* among the nations as He took up His kingly reign (cf. Isa 2:1-4). Hence, Zech 9:10 looks forward to the time when "He will speak peace to the nations, and His dominion will be from sea to sea" (cf. Ps 72:8-11). Unfortunately for Israel, such a time of peace would not attend Messiah's 1st Coming because of their rejection of Him. In her spiritual blindness, Israel did not recognize her Messiah when He came.

Rather than responding with bitter anger at such rejection, however, the Lord Jesus responded with deep emotional compassion as recorded in Lk 19:41-44,

"And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.'"

In the future, however, Israel will eventually turn in faith to Messiah Jesus and welcome Him back with the words "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mt 23:37-39).

c. The Promise of Messiah's Deliverance (9:11-17)

This section depicts God as a warrior who will come down to fight for and deliver His people. This probably anticipates the Messianic victory recorded in ch 14 (though some see an allusion to the Maccabean struggle of the 2nd century BC). Such a deliverance must precede the *peace* that was foretold in Zech 9:10. Nevertheless, victory is assured: "And the LORD their God will save them in that day" (v 16). Vs 16 finds its fulfillment in ch 14, and vs 17 reflects the blessing which follows Israel's deliverance.

2. God's Future Restoration of the Nation (10:1-12)

This chapter will introduce the *shepherd motif* . . . a theme that will surface repeatedly in the remainder of the book. The leaders of the nation are *shepherds* over God's flock (His people), and the Lord is the *Great Shepherd*. The chapter begins with an invitation to ask Yahweh for the spring rain. This rain is both literal and indicative of the spiritual and

physical blessings for the nation (cf. Lev 26:3-4; Deut 11:13-15; 28:1-12). This is set in contrast to trusting in idols (which bring sorrow—v 2), a situation which unfortunately some of the nation's leaders were thrusting upon the people. The second advent (vv 5-6) will demonstrate to His people that He alone is the source of Israel's help. "He will demonstrate that in their past experience their disaster has been the result of their turning to idols and their implication in pagan occultism."²

a. The Lord's Displeasure with the Nation's Leaders (10:1-3a)

The leaders of Israel were likened unto *shepherds*. Their responsibility was to guide the people and look over their welfare. The most important thing they could do would be to direct the hearts of the people to the true God. Instead, they were tolerating and even participating in idolatry and occultic practices.

(1) A Rebuke for Turning to Pagan Deities (1)

In the Canaanite religion, Baal was worshipped as the Semitic storm-god of the Ancient Near East. In some places, he was also known as Hadad. Baal was responsible for sending the rains which were desperately needed for the agricultural harvests. Instead of turning to the pagan god Baal to provide the blessing of the rains, the people needed to turn to the Lord.

(2) A Rebuke for Seeking Supernatural Guidance Through Occultism (2a)

The leaders of the people turned to *false prophets* and *occultists* to gain guidance in making decisions. The *teraphim* refer to household idols (cf. Gen 31:19), whereas the *diviners* refer to those who foretold the future. The idea that they "comfort in vain" means that they give false hopes. The point is that the leaders of the nation ought to trust in the revelation of God's Word and obey the Lord, not turn to other sources of guidance (cf. Deut 18:9-14).

(3) The Results (2b-3a)

When the Scripture says, "Therefore the people wander like sheep, they are afflicted, because there is no shepherd," it means that the people of the land were suffering, because the leaders were not directing them in the way of the Lord (2b). How the people needed a *good shepherd*! Hence, God promised to punish these unworthy leaders of the nation (3a).



The storm god Hadad stands on the back of a bull. The pronged forks in the hands represent lightning.

b. The Lord will Ultimately Defend His People and Lead Them to Victory (10:3b-7)

²Unger, 174.

Although the present generation(s) may suffer from unfit rulers over them, God will ultimately lead His people in triumph over those who will seek to destroy them. The ultimate fulfillment of this shall come at the Second Coming of Christ (note vs 6—these terms look at Israel's eschatological deliverance; cf. Ezek 37:15-23). This seems to anticipate Messiah's defense of the nation that will be depicted in ch 14 (see especially 14:3).

c. The Eschatological Regathering of Israel (10:8-12)

Assyria and Egypt were ancient oppressors of God's chosen people who evoked memories of slavery and exile. Yet, God has long had a plan of restoration for the nation which He had revealed in Deut 30:1-10. Following a national repentance on the part of Israel (Deut 30:1-2), the Lord promises to regather them and "circumcise their hearts" (Deut 30:3-6). The latter looks at the effecting of the New Covenant with Israel. In light of other passages from the Old Testament, this regathering of Israel will take place at the Second Coming of Christ. It will also involve a cleansing of the people and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon them (cf. Ezek 36:22-28; 39:25-29).

Comparing all the Old Testament revelation, we learn that before the nation can be regathered, they must first turn in complete repentance to the Lord. This will include their confession that Jesus really is the Messiah! Once this happens, the Lord will regather the Jews that remain from all over the world and bring them back to the land. They will enter into the *New Covenant* (the Holy Spirit will be poured upon them and they will be cleansed and receive a new heart).

3. The Rejection of the Messianic Shepherd-king (11:1-17)

The chapter begins with a marked contrast to that of the preceding two chapters. The blessing and prosperity of ch 9–10 is suddenly offset by a sad picture of sin and punishment. "Preceding the fulfilment of the prophecies of blessing are the apostasy of Israel and their rejection of the Good Shepherd, their Messiah, with the consequent visitation of God upon them in dire punishment."³ In contrast to Israel's unrighteous "shepherds" (rulers), God will one day raise up a "good shepherd-ruler" for the nation. Astonishingly, however, He will be rejected by the nation. This explains the reason for the nation's terrible suffering.

a. A Lament (11:1-3)

Lebanon and Bashan were famous for their forests of cedars and oaks. What a shame it would be to see them go up in smoke. Then "their glory would be ruined" (v 3). The point of this section is not clear, but perhaps it looks at the disaster that is coming upon God's people Israel. In the previous chapter, 10:3b-12 had looked forward to Israel's ultimate victory and regathering (a positive note). Before this will come about, however, Israel will suffer terribly because of her rejection of her "good shepherd." Consequently, the *flock* is going to be afflicted (see 11:11). The symbol of *fire* often speaks of judgment, and in Zech 13:9 this metaphor is used again of the affliction that Israel will go through during the Great Tribulation.

³Feinberg, 197.

b. The Prophecy of the Rejection of the "Good Shepherd" (11:4-14)

In this section of the book, the prophet Zechariah is going to be asked to "play-act" a role as a good shepherd. As a shepherd of the nation, he will be rejected. This *play-acting*, however, is meant to portray what will happen to the Messiah when He comes. This will explain why the Messiah who comes on a donkey (9:9) does not immediately establish peace among the nations (9:10). The theme of Messiah's rejection had been foretold earlier by the prophet Isaiah in a series of "servant songs" in chapters 42, 49, 50 and 53 (see esp. Isa 49:5-7; 53:1-3).

(1) Zechariah's Commission (4)

(2) Denunciation of the Worthless Shepherds (5-6)

Earlier shepherd-rulers had neglected the flock and led them to the brink of disaster. The implied rejection of the Good Shepherd is followed by the somber announcement that the Lord will allow His people to be the object of abuse by other kings: "For I shall no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land" (v 6).

(3) Zechariah's Obedience to his Commission (7-8a)

Though Zechariah knew that the nation was headed for disaster (they were a "flock doomed to slaughter"), he was faithful to carry out his assignment from the Lord. The two staves will be used to symbolize God's judgment upon the nation in vv 8b-14.

(4) The Rejection of Zechariah, the "Good Shepherd" (8b-14)

(a) The Rejection by the Nation (8b)

The *NIV* translation of v 8b, "the flock detested me, and I grew weary of them," depicts the nation's rejection of her Messiah.

(b) The Consequences of Their Rejecting the "Good Shepherd" (9-11)

As a consequence of their rejection of Him, the Lord avows that He will not *shepherd* them, and His protecting hand will be removed (cf. Mt 23:13,33-39). This probably looks at the period following the crucifixion of Jesus when the Romans occupied Palestine. By AD 70, the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem and eventually destroyed the city and the Temple. Josephus even records that the siege was so severe that the people literally turned to eating one another's flesh.⁴

(c) Remuneration for the Prophet's Services (12-13)

Since Zechariah has served as a shepherd (despite his rejection), a price must be agreed as to what his services have been worth. The answer is thirty shekels of silver (this was the value price of a slave according to Ex 21:32). Yet the money is thrown to the potter in the house of the Lord (v 13). In the NT fulfillment of this model, Judas was given thirty pieces of silver (Mt 26:14-16) but subsequently threw

⁴Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* VI, iii.3-4.

it into the sanctuary of the temple (Mt 27:3-10).⁵ Notice that both passages have a common pattern of apostasy and rejection: (1) cheaply valued, (2) rejected by the people, and (3) money was returned in disgust.

- (d) Opportunity of National Unity is Forfeited (14)
- c. Zechariah's Second Commission as a Worthless Shepherd (11:15-17)

- (1) The Commission (15-16)

Once again Zechariah is asked to *play-act*, but this time as a foolish and worthless shepherd. He depicts a selfish, corrupt and greedy leader. Rejection of the Good Shepherd results in God's favor and union with His people being cut off and the eventual sufferings at the hand of the "worthless shepherd" whom Yahweh shall raise up (vs 16).

- (2) Woe Against the Worthless Shepherd (17)

This "worthless shepherd" who abuses the flock probably looks at the *Antichrist* who will arise in the end-times. Israel will enter into a covenant with him (Dan 9:27), but will be betrayed by him. For a period of three and a half years, he will afflict the Jewish people (cf. Dan 7:23-25; 11:36-39; 2 Thess 2:3-4).

SUMMARY

Chapters 9–10 look at the time of deliverance and restoration for Israel (a theme already familiar to us from the earlier chapters of the book). Before this can come about, however, Israel must first endure a time of suffering (11:6,9,15-17) on account of her rejection of God's "Good Shepherd." God's glorious future for Israel will be tarnished by her apostasy and resulting chastisement. This future "time of suffering" will be taken up in detail in chapters 12–14.

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

Zechariah cries out, "Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted, because there is no shepherd" (10:2). The leaders of the nation in Zechariah's day were unfaithful to the Lord, and they were neglecting their responsibilities to care for God's "sheep," i.e., His people. How the people needed a shepherd, but there was none to care for them! Caring for the "sheep" is an important matter in the eyes of God. He knows that His people need care and guidance, and He raises up *shepherds* who will provide this oversight. Has God called you to be a "shepherd" over His people? This task is

⁵There is a problem in Mt 27:9-10 in that Matthew attributes the prophecy to Jeremiah rather than Zechariah. The solution to this is found in recognizing that Jeremiah also deals with a potter's field. So, Matthew is quoting Zech 11:12-13 (i.e., his phraseology is drawn mostly from Zech) but apparently alluding to Jer 19:1-13. He attributes the OT reference to Jeremiah, however, since Jeremiah is the *major prophet*. Carson notes, "Nevertheless the central parallel is stunning: in both instances Yahweh's shepherd is rejected by the people of Israel and valued at the price of a slave. And in both instances the money is flung into the temple and ends up purchasing something that pollutes" ("Matthew" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 8:564).

not always easy, but it is so very very important. Without this, the body of Christ will suffer—there will be immaturity and a lack of equipping and mobilizing believers to serve the Lord. They will "wander," and the cause of Christ will also suffer. Perhaps you have become discouraged in this calling of trying to lead and shepherd others. This can easily happen. But faithfulness to this responsibility is worth the pain and challenges we might go through. Peter wrote,

". . . shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Pet 5:2-4).

Our Chief Shepherd promises to come again. Will He have "an unfading crown of glory" for you? Be faithful as a shepherd, and this crown will be given you!