

Z E C H A R I A H

The Prophet



Notes and Insights

by

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Zechariah the Prophet:

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INTRODUCTION

The following notes (in four parts) are taken from volume III of my Old Testament notes used in my classroom teaching covering the entire book of Zechariah. Originally, these comprised sessions 27 through 30 of volume III, which explains why each part is so numbered at its beginning. The reader is encouraged to first examine the overview chart which appears on page ii of this booklet before reading the explanatory notes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview chart of Zechariah	ii
Notes for Zechariah 1-4	1-7
Notes for Zechariah 5-8	8-12
Notes for Zechariah 9-11	13-19
Notes for Zechariah 12-14	20-25

ZECHARIAH

MESSAGE: To encourage post-exilic Israel to repent and rebuild the Temple (1) by reminding her of God's covenant faithfulness, and (2) by providing a look at the nation's future in light of Messiah's coming.

PART 1 - PRESENT

Apocalyptic Visions & Contemporary Struggles

PART 2 - FUTURE

Two Prophetic Oracles

Intro. and Call To Repent 1:1-6									1st Oracle The Advent and Rejection of Messiah	2nd Oracle The Advent and Reception of Messiah	Chapters 9—11	Chapters 12—14								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13	14						
Horsemen Among The Myrtle Trees	Four Horns and Four Craftsmen	The Surveyor to Measure the City	Cleansing of Joshua the High Priest	Gold Lampstand and Two Olive Trees	Flying Scroll	Woman in a Basket to Shinar	Four Chariots to Appease Wrath	Symbolic Crowning of Joshua	A Series of Eight Night Visions	The Question of the Fasts During Exile	The Advent of the Messianic King	The Future Deliverance and Conversion of Israel	The Rejection of the Messianic Shepherd King	The Future Messiah's Return and His Kingdom	The Rejection of the Messianic Shepherd King					
1:7-17	1:18-21	2:1-13	3:1-10	4:1-14	5:1-4	5:5-11	6:1-8	6:9-15	7:1-14	8:1-23	9:1—10:12	11:1-17	12:1—13:9	14:1-21						
<i>Chapters 1:7—6:15</i>									<i>Chapters 7—8</i>				<i>Chapters 9—11</i>				<i>Chapters 12—14</i>			

1:1
Oct.-Nov
520BC

7:1
Dec
518BC

Designed by Dr. J. Paul Tanner

Encouragement

God's Program for Israel is Ultimately to Bless Her and Fulfill His Covenant Promises to Her

Exhortation

The Returnees From Exile Need to Repent

Confrontation

Israel is Not Presently Fit For Her Blessing

Realization

God Will Ultimately Bless Israel Through the Messiah, But He Must First Suffer Rejection and Israel Must Be Disciplined

SESSION TWENTY-SEVEN

ZECHARIAH

Overview and Chapters 1–4

God Remembers His Covenant People

INTRODUCTION

The book of Zechariah is one of the most unique books of the Old Testament.¹ Jerome (writing in the 5th century AD) called Zechariah "the obscurest and longest of the twelve prophets."² Despite the perplexing prophecies of the book, it is nevertheless quite important. George L. Robinson called Zechariah "the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological, of all the writings of the OT." Zechariah 9–14 is the most quoted section of the prophets in the passion narratives of the gospels. Furthermore, the book strongly influenced the author of Revelation.

The book of Zechariah was named after the Jewish prophet of the postexilic period who wrote it. He was born in Babylon and with his grandfather was in the company of exiles who returned to Palestine with Joshua and Zerubbabel (Neh 12:4).³ This was a time of great chaos for the Jews to whom being "in the land" meant everything. This was a time when men of courage and faith were needed to strengthen the fainthearted. Zechariah was such a man for the hour.

As a result of the decree of the Medo-Persian King Cyrus in 538 BC (Isa 44:28), 50,000 Jews were allowed to return to the "promised land" from Babylon (2 Chron 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5).⁴ They were under the civil leadership of Zerubbabel (the governor) and the religious leadership of Joshua (the high priest). At this time, their enthusiasm was high and their one thought was to rebuild the temple of God and resettle in the land. Upon returning, however, political turmoil was rampant. Though the altar of burnt offering had been erected and the temple foundation laid in 536 BC (Ezra 3:8-13), the work was halted before completion. Consequently, sixteen dreary years passed by in which no progress was made on the temple, the very heart of Israel's theocratic system of worship to YHWH. During this time, Israel remained under a governorship of the Medo-Persian empire.

Finally, in 522 BC, Darius I (Darius Hystaspes) of Persia gained the throne, and under his reign the obstacles were removed which had prevented the temple from being built (his wise administration quickly brought stability to the empire, and he personally promoted religious toleration). However, a new problem arose . . . a change had taken place in the hearts of the people, and they were no longer

¹On the history of interpretation, see Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 287-90; and Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentaries (Waco: Word Books, 1984), 169-73, 242-49.

² Smith, 166-67. He also reports the opinion of Rashi (d. 1105): "The prophecy is very abstruse, for it contains visions resembling dreams which want interpreting; and we shall never be able to discover the true interpretation until the teacher of righteousness arrives."

³Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1985), 597.

⁴Charles L. Feinberg, *God Remembers* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1965), 2.

desirous of completing the temple. Furthermore, they had become spiritually indifferent. But where the many lacked vision, there were a few men of God for whom the fulfillment of God's plans and covenant promises remained a grave concern. With the future of God's chosen people in view, and ultimately God's glory at stake, Zechariah and Haggai (whose ministries were contemporaneous) responded to the call of God in 520 BC to speak forth all that God commanded them.

It is very much in keeping with our Lord's character to feel compassion for His people when they are low and discouraged. Those of Zechariah's day were certainly that. In such a context, God abundantly poured forth new revelation concerning His divine intentions. These intentions were to center around the Messiah through whom God would bless the world. What privilege this was to the Jews through whom the Messiah would come! Indeed, what responsibilities this privilege would carry with it! Yet the focusing upon Israel's role in the plan of God was great encouragement from her compassionate God. For in such plans, Israel was to play a prominent role, being Yahweh's servant to usher in the Messiah.

This glorious note of the future was in stark contrast to the despair of the moment. Had God returned Israel to the land for nothing? Indeed not! Interestingly, Zechariah's name meant "the LORD remembers" (from Heb. זָכַר, *zākar*), a reminder that YHWH remembers His covenant promises with Israel to fulfill them. This is very appropriate, since the book bearing his name will depict how God will work through history to ultimately restore the nation, defend them and bless them under Messiah's rule. The whole episode of God's disciplinary action of sending His people into exile had purpose. If indeed it had been God's will to bring them back to the "promised land," then this must be indicative of His kind intention to "further the program" that would result in His glory. Hence, we understand Yahweh's beckoning call in the opening chapter, "Return to Me!"

PURPOSE STATEMENT FOR THE BOOK

To encourage post-exilic Israel to repent and rebuild the Temple by (1) reminding her of God's covenant faithfulness and (2) providing a look at the nation's future in light of Messiah's coming.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARGUMENT

I. INTRODUCTION: A CALL TO REPENT (1:1-6)

The book is dated in the eighth month of the second year of Darius (1:1). This would be approximately Oct/Nov of 520 BC, and thus shortly after the resumption of the temple project on Sept 20, 520 BC (Hag 1:14-15). The question is raised as to why the book is dated by a pagan king. At that time, Israel had no king of her own, but Darius (the king of Persia) was a suzerain over Judah. This is in keeping with Israel's subjection throughout the period known as "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk 21:24).

The opening verses form a significant part of the book. God initiates the interaction proclaiming to His chosen people "Return to Me . . . that I may return to you." This is a call to repentance (cf. Dt 30), and this call is followed by an explanation.⁵ Before the exile, God had sent forth His prophets who also had cried for repentance, and that the nation turn from her evil deeds and ways so as to be

⁵The same Hebrew word translated "return" (שׁוּב) in vv 3-4 is translated "repent" in vs 6. Notice the stress on the personal relationship with God: "Return to Me!"

rightly related to YHWH again. As a consequence of their refusal to do so, God disciplined them and removed them from the land. But now, in Zechariah's day, that stage is past. Israel, back in the land, has opportunity to seize hold of God's grace and prosper by obedience in the land. Spiritual revival and the rebuilding of the temple are appropriate at this time. Yet if the nation lingers in her spiritual lethargy, God shall discipline them as well (the words "and I will return to you" mean that God will not send divine discipline if they indeed repent).

The appropriate choice is to move forward in faith, beginning with repentance, that Yahweh's purposes might be fulfilled.⁶ They can be confident in Him, for he (as 'the LORD of Hosts') ". . . is the controller of history who musters all the powers of heaven and earth to accomplish his will."⁷ The rest of the book will substantiate the wisdom of a faithful response and serve to motivate the Jews to act accordingly. "The appropriation and enjoyment of God's promises of blessing must be prefaced by genuine repentance."⁸

II. THE EIGHT NIGHT VISIONS (1:7-6:15)

This section of the book, consisting of eight night visions of apocalyptic nature, has a basically positive note and is designed to instruct the nation that she has not been forgotten by God.⁹ Neither has she been cast out of God's plan. A basic framework of God's ultimate program with Israel is elucidated in these chapters, and served to encourage the Jews to overcome their spiritual lethargy. The overriding theme is the restoration of Judah (and its capital Jerusalem) and their future blessings.¹⁰ This encouragement is advanced by the fact that Israel shall be cleansed and the temple will be rebuilt. Yet the temple to be sought for ultimately shall come at the hand of "branch," the Priest-king (i.e., the Messiah).

A. Vision of the Red horse Rider Among the Myrtle Trees (1:7-17)

The first vision is given on the 24th of the eleventh month. This would be in Feb of 519 BC, about three months after the call to repentance and five months since the rebuilding of the temple had begun.

In the nation's depressed state, the first question that would naturally be asked is whether God was still concerned with Israel. This vision answers that question. The fact that it is a *vision*,

⁶A comparison with Haggai will indicate that the nation had already made a repentant response *to some degree*. In God's eyes, however, the repentance was not thorough-going enough. This is confirmed by the statement in 6:15b at the end of the first major section of the book: "And it will take place, if you completely obey the LORD your God." God wanted more than just the rebuilding of the temple. He wanted to see them living out His desires with a concern for social justice (note 7:8-10 and 8:16-17,19). The statement in 1:6 "Then they repented" probably refers to the response of the people while still in exile (cf. Dan 9), not the present audience.

⁷Barker, 607.

⁸Merill F. Unger, *Zechariah: Prophet of Messiah's Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1963), 20.

⁹Ralph H. Alexander defines *apocalyptic* as "symbolic visionary prophetic literature, composed during oppressive conditions, consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author and explained through a divine interpreter, and whose theological content is primarily eschatological" ("Hermeneutics of Old Testament Apocalyptic Literature" [Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968], 45).

¹⁰Other recurring themes include the judgment of the nations, the purification of the land, the rebuilding of the temple, and the centrality of Joshua and Zerubbabel in God's program.

by the way, implies that we might expect symbolic imagery. The prominent figure is the rider on the red horse, who is identified in vs 11 as the Angel of Yahweh. Since those *who patrol the earth* report back to the Angel of Yahweh, we can probably conclude that these are angelic beings (cf. 6:1-8).¹¹ "The myrtle because of its fragrance and lowliness typifies and symbolizes Israel; the deep place speaks of her degradation."¹² The report that the earth was peaceful and at rest (vs 11) may have been disappointing for God's chosen people.¹³ Barker comments,

The report . . . told of rest and peace among the nations, when, instead, they were expecting the 'shaking of all nations,' (Hag 2:6-9, 20-23) as the sign of returning favor and full blessing to Zion.¹⁴

Thus the question emerges in vs 12: where is the indication of God's compassion for His covenant people and chosen city? Was the 70 years of discipline in exile (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10) not enough? The main emphasis of the section comes out in vs 13 where encouragement is highlighted by "gracious words, comforting words." The reason for the encouragement is that God intends to restore His nation to prosperity, to insure the rebuilding of the temple (vs 16), and to "again choose Jerusalem" (possibly meaning as the place from which His glory shall dwell; cf. Deut 12:5,10-11). "Although God's covenant people are troubled while the oppressing nations are at ease, God is 'jealous' for his people and will restore them, their towns, and the temple."¹⁵ The latter chapters of the book will clarify how this shall come about, with the final fulfillment coming about under Messiah's reign. This first vision, then, serves as the general theme for the ones which follow, the others adding the details.

LESSON: Even when Israel was being disciplined, God could say that He was still "exceedingly jealous" for them. We must always be careful to keep God's discipline separate from His loving attitude for His own. God remains faithful and loyal to Israel and to us in the New Covenant today, even when we are being disciplined.

B. Vision of the 4 Horns and 4 Craftsmen (1:18-21)

Now that Israel had been given hope of her future, the next logical question that would arise would be "what about our oppressors?" Hence, this vision builds on the 1st vision and God's anger against the nations. The four horns represent four kingdoms (cf. Dan 7:24).¹⁶ Since they

¹¹The Persian monarchs used messengers on swift steeds to keep them informed on all matters concerning the empire. These divine messengers remind us that the LORD knew all about the countries of the earth.

¹²Feinberg, 27. "Myrtle trees" are associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, being used for the making of booths (see Neh 8:15; Palestinian Talmud *Sukkah* iii.4). Note that the book ends with the thought of the Feast of Tabernacles in the millennium (Zech 14:16).

¹³The "earth at rest" probably looks at the political calm of the Persian Empire, following the suppression of widespread revolts which accompanied the accession of Darius I (these were successfully dealt with by the 2nd year of Darius's reign).

¹⁴Barker, 612.

¹⁵Ibid., 610-11. He adds, "When one compares several other pertinent biblical references, it appears likely that the temple completed and dedicated in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15-16) was only the initial stage in the complete fulfillment (or in the 'filling to the full') of vv. 16-17 (note Isa 2:2-3; Jer 31:38-40; Ezek 40-42; Acts 15:14-18)" (613). [Note: Others use the date 515 BC for the completion of the temple (e.g., Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 496; and Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 434)].

¹⁶Barker notes, "When used figuratively, 'horn' usually symbolizes strength—either strength in general (Ps 18:2) or the strength of a country, i.e., its king (Ps 89:17; Dan 7:24; 8:20-21; Rev 17:12), or the power of a nation in general (here?)" (615). Chisholm adds, "The horn of a wild animal, which often symbolizes strength

are responsible for having already oppressed Israel and having "scattered Judah" by exile (1:19, 21), they may represent Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and Medo-Persia (contrast the list of nations in Dan 2 and 7). The craftsmen then are the powers that God raises up to throw down these nations that, in arrogant defiance of God, went beyond their proper bounds in punishing and scattering the covenant people.¹⁷ The point of the vision is that God will deal with Israel's enemies and remove their threat (even those that seem invincible), thus encouraging the covenant nation to continue the rebuilding of the temple and seek the blessings of being in the land. We should not miss the point that this is in keeping with God's plan of restoration in Dt 30.

C. Vision of the Man with the Measuring Line (2:1-13)

This vision is of a man who sets out to measure the walls of Jerusalem.¹⁸ He is quickly interrupted by an angel who instructs him that the city will be inhabited without walls due to the abundance of inhabitants. The point of the vision is that there will be no need for concern about protection, for the Lord's intention is to protect the city and be the glory in her midst (vs 5). One day Jesus will come again and enter Jerusalem as the "King of glory" (Ps 24:7-10; Mt 24:29-30).

The Jews should expect and hope for the time of their fullest blessing. This section anticipates full kingdom blessing in the messianic era, including the fulfillment of the OT covenants such as the Abrahamic covenant.¹⁹ Notice how vs 11 echoes the promises of Gen 12:3 concerning the nations of the world. In vv 10-13, God holds forth a picture of Israel's blessed time when the Messiah shall reign: "Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst." When compared with Zech 9:9, the figure anticipated here in ch 2 is Israel's King who is just and endowed with salvation. This early introduction of the Messiah in the book serves to create a hunger in the hearts of the Jews to hasten that day by responding faithfully to Zechariah's message.

The thought of rebuilding and restoring the city suggests hard work in which many *willing hands* would be needed. Unfortunately, only a small portion of the Jews returned with Zerubbabel in 538 BC, though God's will was for all of them to return (cf. Isa 48:20). Hence, a call is given to those who remained in the Babylonian regions of the exile: "Flee from the land of the north!" (vs 6; the "land of the north" being a reference to Babylon—cf. Jer 1:14). Zech 2:8-9 looks at the Lord's revenge of the plunderers, and vv 10-12 look forward to the time when the nations will be restored to the Lord after the Second Coming of Christ.

(Deut 33:17; 1 Sam 2:10; Pss. 75:10; 89:17,24; 92:10; 112:9; Jer. 48:25, Lam. 2:17; Ezek. 29:21) make an apt figure for the military power of these nations" (239).

¹⁷Craftsmen are those who work with metal and forge weapons (cf. Isa 54:16-17 for use of same word).

¹⁸The 'measuring line' is a symbol of preparation for rebuilding and restoring Jerusalem and the temple, ultimately in the messianic kingdom, as the following verses make plain. The restoration of the people, the temple, and the city immediately after the Babylonian exile was only the first stage in the progressive fulfillment of the promises that follow (see also Ezek 40:3,5)" (Barker, 616). [The connection with the messianic kingdom receives support from verses 2:5,10,11, which specify that the Lord will then dwell in their midst].

¹⁹This vision looks at the time in the Millennium after the Lord's return when Jerusalem will be the capital of the world, and the city will be greatly expanded. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the climax of the book depicts Jerusalem *in security after* the Second Coming of Christ (see Zech 14:9-11). Those who advocate some sort of *spiritualized interpretation* (this is looking at the "church" or the heavenly New Jerusalem) face a couple of problems: (1) vs 12 speaks of the Lord possessing Judah as His portion in the holy land; and (2) Jerusalem's security in the context of Zechariah is connected with the Second Coming.

D. The Cleansing of Joshua, The High Priest (3:1-10)

The first three visions dwelt on the themes of the deliverance of Israel from captivity and oppression, the consequent enlargement and expansion, and the subsequent prosperity and material blessing of the land. In this chapter, Israel is given a glimpse of the national cleansing that YHWH anticipates for them, with the characters (as symbols—vs 8) foreshadowing greater events in the future. Visions 4 and 5 are *paired together*, in that they focus on the two historic leaders of that day (Joshua and Zerubbabel) who are symbolized by the two olive trees (4:11-14). Chapter 3 emphasizes Joshua, whereas chapter 4 emphasizes Zerubbabel.

In this scene, Joshua depicts the sinful state of Israel, since by virtue of his position as high priest he is the nation's representative. Satan wants to accuse Israel of failure as God's covenant people (as witnessed by the recent exile), and thus see God reject them irrevocably. However, God cannot do that, since the divine promises and purposes of God are at stake (Rom 3:1-4; 11:1-2). Furthermore, if Israel is a "brand plucked from the fire" (i.e., delivered from the discipline of the exile; cf. Amos 4:11), then God must not reject His people (else, why would He have delivered them?). The change of garments represents the removal of iniquity (vs 5), and this is applied to the nation as well in vs 9: "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." This aspect will find fulfillment when the New Covenant is effected with Israel as a nation at the Second Coming (cf. Rom 11:26-27).²⁰

For Joshua and his fellow priests there was encouragement that Israel will be purged, cleansed, and reinstated into her priestly office and functions. Israel was called to a role of being a priestly nation (Ex 19:6), and one day will be restored to that function. Vs 8 indicates that this was to be accompanied by the work of "My Servant the Branch," a term for the Messiah (cf. Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 6:12). Hence, Israel's restoration as a priestly nation will be realized in the Messianic age.

As Feinberg summarizes this chapter,

. . . its first part deals with the past sins of Israel as forgiven of God through the then ministering high priest; its second division looks forward to that coming day when the High Priest, unexcelled and unparalleled, will take away all the sins of Israel forever.²¹

E. The Golden Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees (4:1-14)

The fifth vision explicitly mentions the symbolism of two olive trees and a golden lampstand (the common factor is that olive oil was used in the lampstand to keep it burning; cf. Ex 31:8; 39:37; Num 8:4). In light of vv 6 and 14, the two olive trees are identified as Zerubbabel, a member of the line of David, and Joshua. Thus, this vision is similar to the previous one in that contemporary figures are utilized (although the emphasis now shifts to the civil leadership under Zerubbabel).

Just as the light of the lampstand was dependent on the oil supply, so Zerubbabel's work on the temple and in the lives of the people was to be completed, not by human might or power, but by divine power. The inferred oil serves as a symbol of the fullness of God's power through His Spirit. Barker comments,

²⁰Substantiation for the view that the cleansing is connected with the Second Coming is provided by the similar phraseology of Zech 3:10 with Micah 4:4, the latter coming immediately after a passage which speaks of the Millennial Kingdom.

²¹Feinberg, 67.

The work was dependent on God; he would provide the oil or strength of his Spirit. Such enablement was sorely needed because of the opposition and apathy hindering the rebuilding (Hag 2:1-9).²²

The "great mountain" mentioned in vs 7 is a figurative reference to the challenges and opposition that stood in their way in the task of rebuilding (cf. Isa 40:4). In addition to the assurance of divine aid, Zerubbabel also had the divine promise of success (vs 9). Thus, the main purposes of the vision were (1) to encourage the two leaders, Joshua and Zerubbabel, in the work of rebuilding the temple by reminding them of their divine resources and (2) to vindicate them in the eyes of the community.²³ Zerubbabel had laid the foundation of the temple in 537-36 BC (see Ezra 3:8-11; 5:16), and (despite the 16 years of inactivity) his hands would finish the project in Zechariah's day, i.e., by 515 BC.

The close association of ruler and priest in this chapter may be intended to point ultimately to the messianic King-priest (cf. 6:13; Ps 110; Heb 7). He, too, will bear testimony as "the faithful and true witness" in the power of God's Spirit.

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

"What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain" (Zech 4:7). With these words, the prophet used figurative language to describe the seemingly impossible task of rebuilding the temple. The work was so complicated and there were so many challenges standing in the way that it seemed to them as difficult as trying to move a great mountain. Sometimes it seems to us as well that God has called us to a ministry that is impossible to achieve. We may face opposition from outsiders, we may face criticism from other believers, or we may struggle with limited resources. Yet, this passage also reminds us that God has not called us to face these challenges in our own strength or ability. We must constantly look to Him, for the true solution is to be found in what His Spirit will accomplish: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts" (Zech 4:6). This is a wonderful reminder to us that "great mountains" (obstacles) are not impossible to God when we are dependent upon God's Spirit.

²²Barker, 629.

²³Joyce Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972), 119.

SESSION TWENTY-EIGHT

ZECHARIAH

*Chapters 5–8***F. Vision of the Flying Scroll (5:1-4)**

In the 4th night vision, the cleansing of Joshua was a symbolic representation of the cleansing of the whole nation. This theme is elaborated in visions six and seven. The vision here (the 6th) is of a flying scroll which represents a curse that is going forth on the face of the whole land.¹ The writing on both sides bears judgment and foretells the purging that will occur on evil-doers of the land. The scroll was unrolled and available for all to see, on which the bold, clear pronouncement of punishment of sin should have spurred the people on to repentance and righteousness. The two sins of theft and swearing falsely in the name of the LORD are probably representative of the whole Law—being perhaps the most common ones at this time. Thus, God is going to continue holding the people accountable for covenant unfaithfulness.

The previous messages had been of a decidedly conciliatory character. Before they can be realized, there must be the righteous judgment of God upon all sinners and all transgression (cf. Deut 27:26)—in harmony with Zechariah's concern for the promotion of spiritual renewal. Since the 4th night vision has its fulfillment after the 2nd Coming, it is likely that visions 6 and 7 are also fulfilled at that time. The nation needed to be purged and cleansed for the LORD to dwell in their midst.

G. Vision of the Woman in the Ephah (5:5-11)

This vision is a continuation of the previous judgment associated with the flying scroll. The woman sitting inside the ephah is revealed in vs 8 to be "wickedness." Not only are sinners to be punished in the land, but wickedness itself must be removed from the land. Furthermore the removal is to the land of Shinar, where a temple is to be built for "wickedness" (as represented by the woman). Feinberg understands the passage "to speak of the heaping up of the full measure of Israel's sins prior to the time of God's separation of the wicked from the midst of the righteous remnant in the last days."² All wickedness, with idolatry particularly in mind, that will be existent in Israel at this time will go back forcibly to the place of its origin, Babylon, the great apostate religious system.³ Thus, the nation will be cleansed as Zech 3:9 had anticipated.

For the Jews of Zechariah's day, Babylon was the place of all evil as far as they were concerned. This message served to convey Israel's need for a clean break with all the evil that she had been

¹The same term for "curse" is used in Deut 29:20-21 for the curses of discipline that God warned the people about for covenant unfaithfulness. The fact that it was written "on two sides" is reminiscent of the two tablets containing the 10 commandments which were written on both sides (Ex 32:15).

²Feinberg, 89.

³In the OT, the stork was regarded as an unclean bird (Lev 11:19; Deut 14:18), and hence appropriate for removing wickedness. Babylon was also the *filthy place* where Israel had been sent into exile (stronghold of idolatry).

contaminated with while in the exile, and to turn fully to Yahweh and follow in His ways. Thus we see the connection with the call to repent in chapter one. The nation cleansed of wickedness paves the way for Messiah to rule in righteousness (Isa 11:4-5).

H. The Vision of the Four Chariots (6:1-8)

This vision completes the cycle begun in the first vision where the horses patrolled the earth (cf. 1:10, 11), although there are slight differences in detail between the two visions. The four chariots are pulled by different colored horses which have been sent out to patrol the earth (once again symbolic of angelic messengers—note vs 6:5). Their purpose is expressed in 6:8, "those who are going to the land of the north have appeased my wrath in the land of the north." "In the first prophetic disclosure horseriders were dispatched to reconnoitre among the nations of the earth to ascertain their condition relative to Israel's restoration and final blessing."⁴ As a result of their report, war chariots are now dispatched. The nations (with particular reference to the north) are now the objects of God's wrath as a preparation to Israel's final period of blessing. Note that the chariots also proceed from between two bronze mountains, bronze being symbolic in Scripture of righteous divine judgment (cf. Rev 1:15; 2:18). "Just as the Lord will judge His nation for their unfaithfulness and disobedience, so He will visit the godless nations of the world who have arrayed themselves against Israel."⁵ The "north" is singled out for particular attention, because this alludes to Babylon (recall 2:6-7 and compare 1:15). All of this would serve to comfort and encourage the returned remnant of Israel that had come from Babylon, with the news that God was checkmating every effort of Israel's enemies until the Messiah would come.

I. The Coronation of Joshua (6:12-13)

Following the completion of the night visions is the crowning of Joshua the high priest, which forms a fitting conclusion to the eight night visions. This is a symbolic act which is given its meaning in the text (6:12-13). Many of the night visions concerned the distant future of God's people Israel, which should have been an encouragement to those in Zechariah's day (since God had plans to eventually restore the nation and cleanse them from sin). But the bright future would be connected with the coming of her Messiah. Hence, this section highlights the Messiah, the one who would usher in the blessings for God's people.

Zechariah is instructed to have a party of the exiles prepare a costly crown and enact a ceremony in which the crown is placed on the head of Joshua, the high priest.⁶ Following this symbolic act, the significance is disclosed. God foretells of one called "Branch" (a Messianic term; cf. Isa 11:1; Jer 33:15) who will accomplish two tasks: (1) he will act as both king and priest, and (2) he will build the temple of the Lord. As the present temple was already in the initial stage of construction thanks to the efforts of Zerubbabel (4:9), an even greater temple was promised at the hand of the Messiah. In the present age, the Messiah is building a temple out of *living stones* (Eph 2:19-22; cf. 1 Cor 3:16 and 1 Pet 2:4-5); in the Messianic age He will actually cause a Millennial temple to be built (cf. Isa 2:2-4; Ezek 40–43; Hag 2:6-9). A glorious hope was also set before the people of the Messiah who would unite the kingship (2

⁴Unger, 100.

⁵Feinberg, 94.

⁶Barker (639) notes, "The Hebrew word for 'crown' is not *nēzer* (used for the high priest's crown or turban) but *ʿaṭārôt*, referring to an ornate crown with many diadems--a plural of extension (cf. Rev 19:12)." See Jer 13:18, where the term is used of a crown worn by a king (the LXX translates this term in Jer 13:18 as στέφανος).

Sam 7:16; Isa 9:7; Lk 1:32) and priesthood in Himself. In the OT these offices were always kept distinct, but they will be perfectly combined in the person of Messiah (see Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:1-3 for the priesthood that Messiah represents). Thus, Zechariah has made a panoramic sketch from the time of the restoration under Joshua and Zerubbabel to the day of restoration in the land in the millennial era.

Yet we must notice the important injunction in vs 15: "And it will take place, if you completely obey the Lord your God." Fulfillment of God's program necessitates obedience to God's program. Israel's glorious future demanded a positive response from the people for a hastening of that day. Those of Zechariah's day needed to move forward in faith in light of God's intentions.

III. QUESTION OF FASTING AND MOURNING (7:1–8:23)

In the series of night visions, the Jews were presented a sweeping foreview of the nation's prosperous future as culminated in the Messiah. Nearly two years have passed since this initial prophecy (cf. 1:7 and 7:1). What had happened? The people had made a somewhat positive response, and had given heed to the warnings and encouragements by resuming work on the temple which was now probably more than half completed. The city was looking prosperous once again and the question arose as to whether the solemn seasons of mourning in commemoration of the calamitous events of the past (namely, the burning of the city and temple by the Babylonians) were necessary any longer.⁷ Hence, the people inquired of Zechariah. The reply came basically in the form of a rebuke for their empty ritualism. This state of affairs caused the realization to surface that Israel was still unfit for her blessing as revealed in ch 1–6 (in which God takes opportunity to portray Israel's blessing and joy of the future that will replace their present mourning). "The purpose of chapters 7 and 8 is to impress on the people their need to live righteously in response to their past judgement and future glory."⁸

A. The Question of the Fasts (7:1-3)

In these three verses we are made aware that the people from a certain town called Bethel had taken the initiative to ask if it was still necessary for weeping and abstaining (see the discussion above). A four-fold response was given (note 7:4, 8; 8:1, 18).

B. God's Four-fold Response (7:4--8:23)

1. The Selfishness Exposed (7:4-7)

In response to the question, God replied by way of Zechariah with a rhetorical question. Yes, the people were "religious" and showing evidence of piety. Yet God asks, "Was it for Me?" The point is made that they had selfish motives in their actions and did not act out of true repentance from the heart. Self-pity dominated their thinking rather than genuine repentance.

2. The Call to Repentance (7:8-14)

The people are reminded that the Israelites of the past had been warned to express their true repentance in terms of godly actions rather than ritual alone. God says, "They refused to pay attention (7:11)." As a consequence they eventually came to experience

⁷A fast day(s) apparently had been initiated by the Jews in exile in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem. With the temple well on its way to being rebuilt, the necessity of such a fast began to seem obsolete.

⁸Barker, 643.

the wrath of God. What a lesson to those of Zechariah's day! The call to repentance was given in 1:3, but empty ritual was not the evidence that God accepted. Israel must probe deeper to find the repentance that God considered valid, and attempt to get back on course. The present attitude they were displaying was dangerous, for it smacked of the same hollowness that had led to the downfall experienced by the previous generations.

In these verses, the Lord provided four tests of what *true repentance* would result in:

- (a) "Dispense true justice" - This meant fair dealings with everyone at every level of society. One must have integrity and honesty in all he does and with everyone to whom he relates.
 - (b) "Practice kindness and compassion" to others - The word translated "kindness" really means to extend *loyal love* . . . to be faithful to those with whom you have a relationship. "Compassion" comes from the Hebrew word which means *the mother's womb*. Hence, compassion is to have *motherly feelings* for another . . . to deeply feel for the needs of others. God wants us to love, take care of, and be committed to others . . . not just thinking of our own needs.
 - (c) "Do not oppress" - The weakest and neediest members of society must not be taken advantage of.
 - (d) "Do not devise evil in your hearts against one another" - This would include a vindictive spirit against others and the desire to take revenge on others. Instead, forgiveness and the extending of blessing to others should be given.
3. The Restoration of Israel to God's Favor (8:1-17)

Whereas the negative answer to Israel's question was presented in ch seven, this chapter will deal with God's positive response. Zechariah now points to the glorious future God has in store for His people, and the exact manner in which He will ultimately remove all their fasts. All the encouraging aspects of the night visions are succinctly set forth in a mood of joy anticipating the time when YHWH shall return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Barker comments, "The purpose of both sections is essentially the same: In the preceding section Israel was to repent and live righteously after the punishment of her captivity; here she is to repent and live righteously because of the promise of her future restoration."⁹

Vs 11 elucidates the fact that God has a day of blessing for a particular remnant. The purpose of the blessing stems from the Abrahamic covenant and is expressed in 8:13: "So I will save you that you may become a blessing."

Following the declaration of God's ultimate blessing for His people, the announcement of "good" for the immediate audience is set forth. The fruits of repentance are then stated (vv 16-17). This is what He expected from His people in grateful response to the announcement of His ultimate blessings and His immediate blessings. Two positive examples are given (vs 16) followed by two negative examples (vs 17).

4. Kingdom Joy and Jewish Favor (8:18-23)

The first part of the book closes on a triumphal note. "The people's mourning (expressed in fasting) will be turned into joy, for their low position among the nations will be

⁹Ibid., 649-50.

changed. And they will be a source of blessing to Gentiles, for all the peoples of the earth will join them on pilgrimages to worship the Lord at Jerusalem."¹⁰ Yes, the time of fasting and weeping will come to an end, but the time of real joy will be in Messiah's day (cf. Jer 31:12-14). All, both Jew and Gentile, do have a wonderful future to look forward to in the Messianic kingdom, for "many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD" (vs 22).

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

Fasting can be an important spiritual discipline in the life of a Christian. Yet such a practice, as valuable as it may be, can also be done with a heart that is not really in tune with the Lord. We can be deceived into thinking that such things as fasting make us pleasing before the Lord, when in reality He may be grieved over sin in our life or our failure to properly act as God's people. This is just as true for us today as it was for those of Zechariah's generation. That is why God used the prophet to tell the people what was really important in His sight (Zech 7:9-10). One of the issues that God called to their attention was the matter of "dispensing true justice."

It is easy to begin thinking that we want others to deal justly with us, and forget that we ourselves have a responsibility to be fair and impartial in all our dealings with others. The world is in desperate need of people who are going to act with integrity and be entirely honest in everything they do. Sometimes we may be tempted to take "shortcuts" or do (what we think are) little things that we know are not entirely honest but which we do not think others will notice. When people think of you, do they think of someone who is entirely honest and treats everyone fairly? Is there anything that you have done to others that is not really fair? Do you need to go and make that right? Don't *fast* until you do!

¹⁰Ibid., 654.

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 not always easy, but it is so very very important. Without this, the body of Christ will suffer—there

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).

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!

SESSION THIRTY

ZECHARIAH

Chapters 12–14

B. THE SECOND ORACLE: THE ADVENT AND RECEPTION OF THE MESSIAH (12:1—14:21)

Now that the prophet has set forth the inevitable future of the nation so that a framework of the events is established, the remaining chapters will focus in on the matter of how the nation eventually emerges from her apostasy and initial rejection of the Messiah. Barker comments, "The oracle basically revolves around two scenes: the final siege of Jerusalem and the Messiah's return to defeat Israel's enemies and to establish his kingdom fully." The reoccurrence of the phrase "in that day" throughout ch 12–14 points to the unity of these chapters as one distinct period.¹ Most of the details of these chapters will come about in the Great Tribulation and at the Second Coming.

1. The Siege of Jerusalem and Israel's Deliverance (12:1-9)

The first chapter of this remaining section is the broadest and sets before the reader the major elements of the final deliverance. At this time, God will be dealing with both Israel and the nations of the earth relative to the city of the great King, Jerusalem (12:2, 3, 9). This will be a time of great terror for Israel, for "all the nations of the earth will be gathered against her." Yet, this is the precise moment when Yahweh will intervene to destroy Israel's opposition (12:9).

Notice that this section begins with a reminder of God's work at creation (v 1). Just as His *word* brought forth creation, His prophetic word is reliable. He is committed to Israel's future (hence, a word of comfort). In the time of the Great Tribulation, Judah and Jerusalem will experience their most desperate hour. Yet, God will intervene on their behalf, and fight against the attacking nations.

LESSON: In that critical hour when the Lord delivers Jerusalem, the text tells us that "the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David" (12:8). The principle here is that God can work through "feeble" people, because God is not limited by our weaknesses (cf. 2 Cor 4:7-10; 12:7-10). It isn't "weak" people that God has a hard time using; rather, it is those who think too highly of themselves.

2. Israel's Complete Deliverance from Sin (12:10—13:9)

Beginning with 12:10, the account shifts from reporting the physical deliverance to reporting the spiritual deliverance.

a. The Repentance of Israel Over the Rejection of the "Good Shepherd" (12:10-14)

This spiritual deliverance is highlighted by the most climactic event of the nation's history when God pours out the Spirit of grace and supplication, and Israel looks to the One whom they have pierced—in faith (acceptance of Messiah), with mourning and weeping over their previous folly of rejecting Him. This is their long awaited national conversion

¹Notice also the phrase "a day is coming" in 14:1 and reference to "a unique day" in 14:7. The mention in 14:4 that His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives confirms the eschatological nature of these chapters.

in conjunction with Christ's Second Coming (cf. Rom 11:25-29). Chronologically, the spiritual conversion *precedes* the physical deliverance mentioned in 12:1-9.

Israel's long-standing problem has been her hardness of heart against the Lord which resulted in *spiritual blindness*. This was made manifest in Isaiah's day (Isa 6:8-10), and contributed to the nation's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Mt 13:13-17; Jn 12:37-40). It even continues throughout the present age (Rom 11:7-8). Nevertheless, in God's plan of restoration for Israel (Deut 30:1-10), the key was specified in the condition "if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul" (30:10). Hence, *national repentance* was made to be a precondition for restoration, and the regathering actually follows (rather than precedes) the repentance.

Israel's restoration is directly related to the Great Tribulation. God will use this time of "distress" to motivate Israel to turn to the Lord (Deut 4:25-31). The Tribulation is a judgment upon Israel, though deliverance from the Tribulation will result in Messiah's kingdom (Jer 30:1-7,9,11; cf. Dan 12:1). During the Tribulation, Israel will be the special object of Satan's wrath (Rev 12), although God will raise up 144,000 Jewish believers to faithfully bear witness to Him (Rev 7:3-8; 14:1-5).

After much suffering in the Tribulation, Israel (as a nation) will finally turn in faith to Jesus. This is what is depicted in Zech 12:10a. God says that He "will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication." In the Hebrew, these two words are very closely related. "Grace" (Heb חֵן, *hēn*) is God's undeserved favor which He bestows as a gift. "Supplication" means the *requesting of grace*. Turning to the Lord's *grace* implies that the "hardening" has finally been lifted (cf. Rom 11:25-27). As a result of the bestowal of such grace, Israel will "look on Me whom they have pierced." Though both the *NIV* and *NASB* translate this as "on Me," the Hebrew preposition לְ (‘*el*) would be better translated "to Me" (i.e., "they will look *to Me* whom they have pierced"). So NET Bible. Yet the idea of looking *to Him* does not have to involve physical sight (e.g., Ps 34:5), but probably means a *look of faith* (Num 21:9; cf. Jn 3:14-15).² The point is that because of the working of God's Spirit, Israel will turn in faith to the Messiah (with God giving the grace).

Zech 12:10b-14 indicates that a time of immense mourning will follow this turning in faith to Messiah Jesus. After centuries of rejecting Jesus, Israel will finally realize how wrong she had been (this had been anticipated in Hos 3:5). Isa 53:1-9 probably represents the perspective that Israel will have at this moment of spiritual salvation. The mourning is so great that it is likened unto the "mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo" (12:11). This may refer to an event that happened in 609 BC, which the people of Zechariah's day would have still remembered. At that time, King Josiah was killed in the plain of Megiddo, and the nation greatly mourned his loss (2 Chron 35:20-27).³

²Zech 12:10 is quoted in Jn 19:37 as Jesus hung on the cross (and thus *seen* by the people). This, however, is not the full-fulfillment of Zech 12:10. See Rev 1:7 which associates the *thought* of Zech 12:10 with the Second Coming. The Greek text of Jn 19:37 differs radically from the Greek LXX translation of Zech 12:10!

³"Hadad-Rimmon" was probably a place name of a site near Megiddo (containing the homes of ancient Semitic fertility gods).

b. The Cleansing from Sin (13:1-6)

Following the national conversion of 12:10, the nation (as a nation) is cleansed and idolatry is exterminated (13:1-6). The details of this section reveal the effecting of the New Covenant with Israel as a nation (cf. Jer 31:31ff). Unbelieving rebels and those unfit for Messiah's Kingdom are first removed before Israel is blessed in the land. This section is the fulfillment of what was anticipated in the *Eight Night Visions* (see 3:9 and 5:1-11). The land must be cleansed in preparation for Messiah's kingdom rule.

As part of the external cleansing (vv 2-3), the country will be purged of idols (all false worship) and false prophets. Notice that the NT anticipates a rising problem with these (Mt 24:11,15,23-24; 2 Thess 2:2-4; Rev 9:20; 13:4-15). In vv 13:4-6, we see that some of the guilty will attempt to deny their participation as false prophets.

LESSON: The emphasis upon the judgment of false prophets raises a question about the prevalence of those who claim to be prophets today. Unfortunately, we live in a world that is filled with people who are *speaking falsely* in the name of the Lord. We must be careful not to be taken in by their deception. Here are some checks:

- (1) First Principle: check their teachings with Scripture (be wise—false teachers will also use the Scriptures to build their doctrines).
- (2) Common errors:
 - (a) Denial of the deity of Christ (e.g., Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses)
 - (b) Additional Scriptures (e.g., Book of Mormon)
 - (c) The way of salvation

The Scriptures teach that salvation is based entirely upon the grace of God, not on works or human merit. The only condition for salvation is faith in the person and work of Christ on the cross!
- (3) The claim to "speak in tongues" is not necessarily a validation of a true teacher (Mormons also make this claim).
- (4) Don't rely on claims to miracles as an authentication (Mt 24:24).
- (5) Beware of *emotional extremism*. True worship certainly involves our emotions, but this should be kept in balance [the goal is not to get some emotional high]. Let emotions come as a reaction to God's work in your heart; don't make them the goal of what you are seeking.
- (6) Observe the life-style of the teacher. Is this a person who is obviously wanting to be more like Jesus Christ?
- (7) Does the teacher promote holy living or experiencing *power*? There should be balance here—watch out for those who are extreme about the latter.
- (8) Be cautious about individuals or groups that claim *revelations* from God. Emphasis should always be put upon teaching the Bible (2 Tim 4:2-4). There are people who use claims to *receiving a word from God* in order to establish their authority before others. This can be a carnal way to get power. An immature zeal can give Satan an opportunity for deception.

Example: The Toronto Blessing movement / holy laughter

Some teachers involved with this "movement" are teaching heresy, including the denial of the Trinity.

- (9) Is the person using his ministry to promote the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, or to gain a following & power for himself?
 - (10) Is the group control-oriented or grace-oriented? Do they seek to legislate control over the lives of the participants or do they recognize that true obedience comes in response to God's grace and love?
 - (11) Do they use pressure tactics when it comes to money? All giving should be in response to grace, not coercion. It is O.K. for a ministry to inform others of financial needs, but this should not be the "driving force" of the ministry [watch out for those who make promises of God's blessing as a result of giving money to them, e.g., promises of physical healing].
- c. Israel's Faithful Remnant Emerging From the Tribulation (13:7-9)

Lest the story appear too rosy, we are brought back in time just prior to the great deliverance by the Messiah, so that the prophet may fill in some detail. We must bear in mind what precipitates this great episode in 12:10. The Jews must first face a time of their greatest trial: "I will turn My hand against the little ones (13:7)." The process is described as a refining furnace of affliction in which two-thirds of the land will perish.⁴ Yet out of this, the remnant shall come to the Messiah: "They will call on My name, and I will answer them" (13:9).

These verses help us see Israel's tragic hour and deliverance in relationship to the crucifixion of the Messiah (the reason why Israel has had to suffer). Zech 11:4-11 anticipated that the "Good Shepherd" would be rejected by the nation, following which the nation would experience the removal of God's protecting hand. The reality of this is seen in Zech 13:7-9. The statement "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd" is a figurative expression depicting God's permissive will calling for His Son to experience a violent death, i.e., the crucifixion (cf. Acts 2:23 and Isa 53:10).

As a consequence of striking the Shepherd, "the sheep may be scattered" (recall Zech 10:2 where the people of Israel had been likened unto a flock of sheep). This seems to have a partial fulfillment with the Lord's disciples who temporarily abandoned Him following the Last Supper (Mt 26:30-35). But the primary fulfillment is found in the dispersion of the nation from the land of Palestine by the Romans following the Bar Kochba revolt of AD 135. God also says "And I will turn My hand against the little ones." This is the fulfillment of Zech 11:9 where God had warned them, "I will not pasture you." Their rejection of the Good Shepherd resulted in God allowing them to suffer at the hands of Gentiles (cf. Lk 21:20-24).

Though Israel has suffered immensely throughout the ages since Jesus' crucifixion, her hour of greatest suffering is yet to come, namely, in the Great Tribulation. This is depicted in Zech 13:8-9. In that time, two-thirds of the Jewish people will perish. This will come about especially by the policies of the Antichrist who is motivated by Satan (Dan 7:21; Rev 12:13). Nevertheless, the Great Tribulation will be a *disciplining fire* to prepare a surviving remnant among the Jews: "the third will be left in it" (Zech 13:8). This remnant will be brought through the "fire" and will be the ones who "call on His

⁴The number of Jews in the land of Israel has grown from 650,000 in 1948 to 4.8 million by 1999.

name" (v 9). This "calling upon the Lord" is the same as what was seen in Zech 12:10 and looks at Israel's national salvation (cf. Joel 2:28-32). The affirmation "They are My people" reflects New Covenant terminology (cf. Jer 30:22; 31:1,33), thus signifying that the nation of Israel has finally been brought into the bond of the New Covenant (at the Second Coming).

3. The Consummation in Messiah's Return and Kingdom (14:1-21)

Throughout the book there have been scattered hints of the visitation of the Messiah and the dwelling of God in the midst of His people. This final chapter brings this into focus as to when it shall come about and what the outcome will be. This builds upon what had been revealed in 12:1-9 and shows specifically how the deliverance will come about. The earlier account in ch 12 showed how the attack led to Israel's repentance and subsequent cleansing. This one shows how the attack leads to the Second Coming of Christ and the subsequent establishment of His kingdom. If we were to find a NT correlation for Zech 12—14, it might be with the 6th and 7th bowls mentioned in Rev 16:12-21. Notice that in vv 13-16 of Rev 16 we have a demonic working to gather "the kings of the whole world" for war at Har-Magedon.

a. The Setting for Messiah's Return (14:1-3)

These verses present us with the context in which the Messiah shall return. This is clearly indicated to be at the time of the onslaught of the nations (cf. 12:1-9). This scene corresponds to Rev 19:11-21 in which the Antichrist leads a coalition of nations (cf. Dan 11:44-45).

b. Description of Messiah's Return (14:4-8)

In this "unique day," the Messiah shall return literally to the Mount of Olives, the very place from which He had ascended (cf. Acts 1:9-12). The mountain shall split, forming a valley for the escape of the remnant (a parallel to the Red Sea deliverance). Cosmic signs and topographical changes are mentioned elsewhere (Joel 2:30-31; 3:15; Mt 24:29-30). The day of Christ's return will indeed be a *unique day*!

c. Results of Messiah's Return (14:9-21)

This section is the grand finale to the book. This episode shall mark the time when Israel's King shall reign over all the earth as He establishes His Kingdom. As a result, Jerusalem shall finally dwell in security (14:11) and the time of her full blessing will be ushered in, including her service by the nations who unite with Israel to worship the King. The book closes in vv 20-21 with a depiction of the nature of the messianic kingdom: it will be characterized by holiness!

(1) The Establishment of Messiah's Kingdom (14:9-11)

This will be the final kingdom of the world, as had been predicted in Dan 7:13-14,27. This kingdom will exist on the earth, as anticipated in the Lord's prayer (Mt 6:9-10; cf. Rev 5:10). As the context shows, Messiah's kingdom will come after the Second Coming (cf. Mt 25:31-34; Lk 21:31). Christ will rule, and believers will have the opportunity to rule with Him (note: not all will receive this high a privilege; it is a reward for faithful endurance [cf. 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:25-27]). The Kingdom will have an earthly phase for 1000 years (Rev 20), but will continue on into the eternal phase thereafter with the New Jerusalem.

According to Zech 14:9, "in that day, the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one." The point is that other deities and idols will not be worshipped after

the Second Coming. Only Jesus Christ will be worshipped, because only "believers" will be left on the earth (all unbelievers will be removed). For His name to be "the only one," Satan will obviously have to be imprisoned (Rev 20). Satan is the "father of lies" (Jn 8:44), and his tactic throughout the ages has been to distort the truth by propagating false gods and false worship systems.

(2) The Punishment of Israel's Enemies (14:12-15)

Recall Isa 37:36 where the Lord struck 185,000 of Sennacherib's army.

(3) The Universal Worship of the King (14:16-19)

The mention of "any who are left" looks at the converted remnant of the nations who will make an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This is part of the fulfillment of Isa 2:2-4 (cf. Zech 8:20-23).

Each of the festivals of Israel had some sort of eschatological significance. The last in the series was the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles). This festival, coinciding with the fall harvest, was the last in the yearly cycle and was characterized as a time of rejoicing (Lev 23:39-44). It was meant to portray the blessings of Messiah's Kingdom, which makes it appropriate to celebrate after the Lord's return.

(4) The Holiness of the Kingdom (14:20-21)

One of the key characteristics of the Kingdom will be *holiness* (recall Zech 8:3). In the OT, the words "Holy to the Lord" were inscribed on a gold plate that was fixed to the front of the turban of the High Priest (Ex 28:36). This was a reminder of his consecration to the Lord (but was meant for all Israel).

SUMMARY

Zechariah's prophecy began with Israel in a state of desolation, terror, spiritual lethargy and with the Lord angered. The book closes with Israel in security, the Lord honored, and the nation reaping the full blessings under the Kingdom of the Messiah. In preparation for this is the national tribulation, repentance, and cleansing. As those of Zechariah's day looked upon these events, there would be the anxious contemplation of the role that this particular generation would play. Repentance was called for in order to secure the divine blessings. Obedience to her mission (including the completion of the temple) was called for in hope of progressing in the plan of God for Israel.

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

It is sad to think about all the blood that has been shed over the city of Jerusalem. Sadder still is the reality that the worst is yet to come. Zech 12:3 very clearly instructs us that "all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it." Though the Lord will ultimately come to the rescue of the Jews (after they turn in faith to Messiah Jesus), at least two-thirds of them will perish before the ordeal is over (13:8). Even as I write, the Middle East is filled with tension and a struggle for Jerusalem. There are many people who would willingly die for this *earthly Jerusalem*. The Lord Jesus, however, said "My kingdom is not of this world," i.e., it is not established in the normal earthly ways of fighting. Let's remember our calling—not to fight and kill, but to bring eternal life and the love of Christ to everyone in the Middle East. That is the only true peace they will ever be able to know! Let us also be awake and faithfully serving the Lord in these days, for the time is growing short! Maranatha!