

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 חַן, *ḥēn*) 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 (ʿel) would be better translated "to Me" (i.e., "they will look *to Me* whom they have pierced"). 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

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

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).

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).

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

This remnant will be brought through the "fire" and will be the ones who "call on His 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!