

Notes on Zechariah

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INTRODUCTION

WHY STUDY ZECHARIAH?

That is probably a good starting question for a book that we are about to march through verse by verse over a period of about 23 weeks.

But the question "why study Zechariah" should really be phrased as "What are some *other* reasons for studying Zechariah" because, of course, the primary reason to study Zechariah is that it is part of the inspired word of God.

One other reason is that it is a fascinating book. It has some obscure visions that take careful study to unravel. It is deeply rooted in the history of the time and yet parts of the book prophecy events that would occur many years later. Zechariah has some of the most beautiful Messianic prophecies found anywhere in the Old Testament and is repeatedly referred to by the New Testament.

Here is how various commentators have described the book of Zechariah:

Few books of the Old Testament are as difficult of interpretation as the book of Zechariah; no other book is as Messianic ... The scope of Zechariah's vi-

sion and the profundity of his thought are almost without parallel.

Zechariah is the longest book of the Minor Prophets, and in many ways it is the most obscure. We are confronted with visions, and angels, with apocalyptic observations and a very strong reference to the Messiah, who is also introduced as the Branch, or Sprout of David.

Yes, I think all can agree that Zechariah is long, and can be difficult and obscure. And that likely explains why the book of Zechariah is something else as well – neglected! But few books of prophecy are more Messianic or are more important for the New Testament than is Zechariah, and so Zechariah is definitely *not* a book that should ever be neglected!

WHERE ARE WE AND HOW DID WE GET HERE?

We should always ask those questions when we begin to study a book in the Old Testament. Sometimes the answers to those questions are immediate, but for other books we need to do a little digging.

So our first topic will be to ask what is the historical setting of the book of Zechariah?

First, we should pause and ask ourselves why does this history matter? The answer to that question is found in the opening words of the very first verse of Zechariah – "In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius." The book itself is telling us that we need to understand the history in which the book was written.

If, as some suggest, Zechariah is pointing only to distantly future events far removed from the book's initial readers, why does it matter when the book was written? Why does the book begin as it does? The an-

swer is that it does matter, and Zechariah 1:1 tells us that it matters.

We should begin our historical overview today with two rulers who are not mentioned here: King Josiah of Judah and Pharaoh Neco of Egypt.

Soon after coming to power in Egypt, Pharaoh Neco led his army northward to help the Assyrians in their battles with the Babylonians, who had captured the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612.

Neco sent envoys to King Josiah, assuring him that his purpose was **not** to fight with Judah but rather with Babylon. Josiah, though, was worried and tried to stop the Egyptians at the pass of Megiddo (the world's most famous battlefield!), but Josiah was defeated and mortally wounded.

When Neco heard that the people of Judah had crowned Jehoahaz, an anti-Egyptian son of Josiah, he deposed Jehoahaz, and took him to Egypt as a prisoner for the rest of his life.

In his place, Neco put Jehoahaz's brother and Josiah's other son, Eliakim, and changed his name to Jehoiakim to show that he was an Egyptian vassal. Neco also placed Judah under heavy tribute.

In 605, King Nabopolassar of Babylon sent his son Nebuchadnezzar against Neco's army. The Babylonians defeated the Egyptians and drove them out of Palestine. Jeremiah 46 describes Babylon's defeat of Egypt.

King Jehoiakim of Judah then went from being a vassal of Egypt to being a vassal of Babylon, and it was at this time, in 605 BC, that some of the Judeans, including Daniel and his friends, were carried off in exile to Babylon. The year 605 is most likely the starting point for Jeremiah's prophecy of a 70 year captivity.

In 601, Nebuchadnezzar advanced against Egypt itself, but Neco withstood him in a bloody battle at Egypt's border. This battle may have encouraged Jehoiakim to revolt against Babylon in 601 despite Jeremiah's warnings. Nebuchadnezzar then decided to move against rebellious Judah.

Although the siege began with Jehoiakim on the throne, Jehoiakim was soon taken captive and died. Jehoiachin came to the throne next during the siege of Jerusalem, and Nebuchadnezzar took the city in 597 BC.

At some point during these events, *Crown Prince* Nebuchadnezzar became *King* Nebuchadnezzar with the death of his father, Nabopolassar.

Jehoiachin and his family were carried off to Babylon. Second Kings 25:27-30 tells us that Jehoiachin was later released from prison by the next king, Amel-Marduk.

The king that replaced Jehoiachin was his uncle, Mattaniah, whom Nebuchadnezzar renamed Zedekiah. Zedekiah ignored Jeremiah and rebelled against Babylon, hoping for help from Egypt.

In 586 BC, Jerusalem fell, the walls were torn down, and the temple was demolished. Some of the Jewish leaders were executed and others were deported. Zedekiah tried to escape, but was captured, blinded, and taken to Babylon. Only the poor were left to till the soil.

What sort of impact did that event have on the Jewish people? In a word, dramatic. We can't overstate the impact it had. We can see the impact of Jerusalem's fall from the very first verse of Zechariah. Look at the first verse of Zechariah again and compare it, for example, to the first verse of Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:1 - The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning

Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzzi-ah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Zechariah 1:1 - In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet.

Did you notice the difference? Isaiah gave his time frame using the reigns of the kings of *Judah*. Zechariah gave his time frame using the reign of a king of *Persia*.

By the time of Zechariah, there were no more kings of Judah - but God was telling them in this book that that would not be the case forever. Zechariah would tell the people about the great king who was to come and sit on the throne of David. By the time of Zechariah, God's city was in ruins - but Zechariah would tell them that that would also not be the case forever.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled until 562 BC and then was followed by a series of unsuccessful rulers from 562-556, including his son Amel-Marduk, his son-in-law Neriglissar, and finally Neriglissar's son Labashi-Marduk.

Nabonidus, a powerful general in the Babylonian army, was finally able to stabilize the empire in 556 BC. He ruled for awhile along side his son, Belshazzar. The last day of Belshazzar is described in Daniel 5.

In 539 BC, Cyrus crossed the Zagros mountains, forded the Tigris, and marched with little resistance into Babylonian territory before taking the city of Babylon. Cyrus gave permission for the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland, which we see in the opening chapters of the book of Ezra.

Cyrus' reign was cut short by his death in 530 BC in a battle on the eastern frontier of his empire. His son Cambyses ascended the throne and by 525 BC had succeeded in incorporating Egypt into the Persian Empire.

While he was at this western frontier of his empire, Cambyses' rule was challenged at home in 522 BC when an imposter (often called Pseudo-Smerdis) rebelled, claiming to be Cambyses' brother Smerdis. (Cambyses had eliminated his actual brother prior to his Egyptian campaign, so he knew this person was an imposter!)

The core of the empire supported the rebellion because the new ruler had promised tax relief. Cambyses, leading the main flank of the Persian army, began the journey back to Mesopotamia to quell the rebellion, but he died of an accidental self-inflicted wound along the way.

Darius, one of his generals, replaced Cambyses in 522 BC, claiming blood relation to the royal family and gaining the support of the army. Darius succeeded in eliminating Pseudo-Smerdis in September of 522 BC.

The death of Pseudo-Smerdis prompted rebellions across the empire, which Darius had to put down. In one case, Darius impaled the leader of the rebellion along with 2500 of his supporters in the city of Babylon.

Egypt revolted in 519 BC, leading to Darius' Egyptian expedition in 519 and 518 BC, during which he succeeded in reconquering Egypt for Persia.

Why is this important? Zechariah's visions in 520 BC are dated between the Babylonian revolts in 522-521 and the Egyptian revolt in 519, which explains Darius' concern for his western frontier in the preceding years and will also help us explain some of the visions we will soon study.

During Darius' rule, the Jews continued to return to their homeland. The restoration of the temple was

renewed, leading to a foundation-laying ceremony in 520 BC and a dedication in 515 BC.

While Darius successfully put down the Egyptian rebellion in 519–518 BC, it would be his western frontier that would eventually spell his demise. Darius' desire to extend his dominion over Europe met with strong resistance from the Greeks, who defeated him in the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC. This defeat emboldened the Egyptians, who rose in rebellion in 486 BC. In the midst of these setbacks, Darius died, passing the scepter to his son Xerxes (the husband of Queen Esther). Alexander the Great conquered Persia about 150 years later.

WHY WAS THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH WRITTEN?

The easiest and surest way to *misinterpret* a book of the Bible is to *not* ask this all-important question.

Why was the book written?

The historical overview we just discussed provides one very important reason why the book of Zechariah was written. With all that was then going on in the world – wars between great powers, political instability in Persia, the rise and fall of kings – where was God's attention focused? On his people – a small, seemingly powerless group of outcasts on the edge of the empire trying to rebuild their fallen city and temple.

Who at that time would have thought that group had any significance? Who at that time would have thought that it was that group who would eventually usher in a kingdom that would sweep aside all of the kingdoms of this earth?

Did that group of outcasts see any of that themselves? Did they see themselves as God saw them? Did they understand their vital importance in the plan of God?

A major goal of Zechariah is to open their eyes to those things and to the great King who was coming from among their own people. A great king was coming who would bless the entire world and establish an unshakable, immovable, eternal kingdom for the people of God.

And perhaps we, too, sometimes need our eyes opened. Do we see ourselves as God sees us? Do we understand our own importance and our own significance in God's plan? If not, perhaps Zechariah can open our eyes as well.

For another answer to the question of why the book was written, we should consider what Jerusalem was like at this time. Jerusalem at this time was a picture of utter gloom. The walls of the city were just a pile of rubble. The once magnificent temple of Solomon was devastated beyond recognition. The former exiles were surrounded by angry opponents who threatened them and ridiculed them at every move they made and were working behind their backs to frustrate all of their plans.

What did the people of Zechariah's day need to hear?

They needed encouragement. They needed to know that God had not forgotten them and would never forget his faithful people. They needed a glimpse of what was coming for the people of God. They needed to see Jesus. And Zechariah (more than any other prophet except Isaiah) lifts the spiritual curtain to show the people their coming Messiah.

They were rebuilding the temple. They must have known that this new temple could be destroyed just as easily as the prior temple had been destroyed. They must have thought, **why bother?** Zechariah answers that question. They needed to see the one who was greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6). They needed to see the one whose body was the true temple (John 2:21).

If our interpretation of Zechariah would not have provided such answers and such encouragement to its initial readers, then our interpretation is wrong. We will have turned left when we should have turned right. If our view of this book is that it speaks entirely about an age separated 2500 years (and counting) from its initial readers, then our view is wrong.

Zechariah was written for us, but it was *not* written only for us. In fact, it was not even written *primarily* for us. Its primary audience was its original audience. **And if we want to understand Zechariah's message for us, we first must understand Zechariah's message for them.**

Yes, Zechariah speaks to us, and yes Zechariah is a book of prophecy, but Zechariah is firmly anchored in history. And how do we know that? The very first verse of the book tells us that. If we can understand Zechariah apart from the history in which it was written, then why did the Holy Spirit begin the book by anchoring it firmly in history?

And, make no mistake, although firmly anchored in history, Zechariah does have a vital message for us today. We, too, can become discouraged, and when we do, we need to do what Zechariah told the ancients to do – we need to lift up our eyes to Jesus.

And *our* view of Jesus is infinitely more clear than their view. They were looking at Jesus from afar as a prophetic curtain was briefly lifted – but we see Jesus with great clarity in the full revelation of the New Testament.

We, like that ancient remnant, need to see where we fit in the plan of God. We, like them, need to look beyond the gloom and the confusion of this world and keep our eyes focused on Christ.

If we take nothing more away from our study of Zechariah, let's be sure we take that. Zechariah's

answer to the immense problems they faced was to point them to Jesus.

WHO WAS ZECHARIAH?

There are about forty Zechariah's in the Bible. Who was this one?

The first verse tells us that he was "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo" (meaning that Iddo was his grandfather). But that verse raises an immediate question. Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 refer to Zechariah simply the son of Iddo. Why? What doesn't Ezra mention Berechiah?

One possibility is that Berechiah died young, leaving Zechariah to be raised by his grandfather.

Another possibility, and the one that I favor, is that Iddo may have been a much more prominent figure than Berechiah. In Nehemiah 12:4, a priest named Iddo is named among those who returned from Babylon as part of the first return in 538 BC. Nehemiah 12:16 tells us that this Iddo had a son (which could mean grandson) named Zechariah.

If Nehemiah 12 is describing Zechariah the prophet, then we know that his grandfather was part of the initial return in 538 BC. And what does that tell us about his grandson, Zechariah?

It most likely means that Zechariah was a young man when he had the visions recorded in this book. It tells us that Zechariah was almost certainly born in Babylon.

And this is very different from Zechariah's contemporary prophet, the prophet Haggai. They both preached at the same time, but Haggai was an old man having seen the *original* temple with his own eyes many years earlier.

Zechariah began preaching in 520 BC, which means that only about 18 years had elapsed since the time his grandfather came to Jerusalem from Babylon.

Zechariah was likely in his twenties when the temple was completed in 515 BC, and in his sixties when Queen Esther came to power far away in Persia and when Xerxes I was defeated by the Greeks. Zechariah would have seen the Greeks rising on the horizon as a new enemy of God's people, and we will see a mention of that great threat in Chapter 9.

HOW DID ZECHARIAH DIE?

If you are flipping to the end of his book to answer that question, you can stop flipping. Zechariah's death is not recorded in his own book. But we may see the answer to that question somewhere else in the Bible.

There is a puzzling reference in the New Testament about the death of someone named Zechariah.

Matthew 23:35 – That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Is that verse describing the same Zechariah who wrote the book of Zechariah? It certainly seems so based on the name of his father, Berekiah, which is the same name we find in verse 1 of Zechariah. But most commentators believe that Jesus was speaking in Matthew 23 of another Zechariah from 2 Chronicles 24.

2 Chronicles 24:20-22 – And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus

saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord.

That Zechariah from 2 Chronicles 24 certainly seems to have died in the manner described in Matthew 23, but the name of his father (Jehoiada) does not match the father's name in Matthew 23 (Berekiah). How do we explain the difference?

Of course, one possibility, and perhaps the most straightforward, is that Jesus is in fact describing the death of the prophet Zechariah, and both Zechariah's just happened to meet similar fates, but there is no other indication anywhere that Zechariah the prophet died that way.

Another possibility is that the name Berekiah was added at some point by an over-zealous scribe. This is not my favorite explanation, but the manuscripts show that it did happen on rare occasion. (And before we act as if the issue of some scribe adding an explanatory phrase to the text is just an ancient problem, we should keep in mind that some modern versions of the Bible do the same thing all throughout the text of the Bible!) This view is supported by the parallel passage in Luke 11, which makes no mention of Berekiah.

Luke 11:51 – From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.

The short answer is that we don't know for sure. It is even possible that the Zechariah Jesus was speaking

about in Matthew 23 may have been a contemporary of those who were hearing Jesus at that time.

WHY IS THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH CONSIDERED SO DIFFICULT AND OBSCURE?

Although the book of Zechariah does contain some straightforward historical narrative, it also contains some visions that are definitely not straightforward.

The first eight chapters have caused some commentators to throw up their hands in frustration. One commentary I have is called *The Evasive Text: Zechariah 1-8 and the Frustrated Readers*. In the preface, the author of that commentary (if we can call it that!) confesses that he doesn't understand Zechariah! He writes:

"It is finally concluded that Zechariah lacks a concrete symbolic logic, defies grammatical conventions, and is unreadable as it stands – and always was this way."

That statement is, of course, completely wrong, but it does show the problems some have had with this book.

And the book doesn't get any easier after Chapter 8. Martin Luther began his commentary of Zechariah Chapter 14 by writing:

"In this chapter I surrender, for I am not certain of what the prophet treats."

The visions and the oracles in Zechariah have given the book its reputation, and these visions in Zechariah are often described using something called *apocalyptic language* – what is that?

The book of Revelation (not Revelations!) is called *Apokalupsis* in Greek, and it is from that word that we get the word *apocalyptic*, which means unveiled, uncov-

ered, or revealed. (It does *not* mean hidden! It means the opposite of hidden!)

Apocalyptic language is composed of symbols that are often lurid in color, violent in tone, and easily remembered. They strike the imagination and grab hold of the mind. In addition to Revelation, such language can be found in Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Isaiah, the minor prophets, and even sometimes in the gospels and epistles.

Apocalyptic language is almost always used to denote conflict and victory. Apocalyptic language is used when God judges and smites an oppressor and vindicates his people. Apocalyptic language is used to describe times of crisis and judgment.

Why Does God Use Apocalyptic Language?

Some think it was used in Revelation to shield the church from Roman retaliation. But that explanation has never appealed much to me. If we can understand the book 2000 years after it was written, then surely Rome could understand the symbols at the time it was written.

I think the reason apocalyptic language was used is simple – God wanted to use it! Apocalyptic language has been called an oil painting from God. Numbers 12:8 reminds us that God does not always speak clearly, but sometimes uses dark language, and perhaps such dark language is reserved for times of conflict and judgment.

Can we understand apocalyptic language? Absolutely we can. God intended his word to be understood, and we can understand it. But we need to proceed carefully, and we need to keep a few interpretative ground rules (or perhaps I should say guidelines) in mind.

Rule 1: We should use easily understood verses to help us understand verses that are harder to understand.

This rule always applies in Bible study. If we find some doctrinal position (such as a thousand year of reign of Christ on earth) in apocalyptic language, and if that doctrinal position is found nowhere else in the Bible and in fact contradicts very easy to understand statements found elsewhere in the Bible, then we can be certain that that doctrinal position is wrong and that those who hold it have misunderstood the apocalyptic language.

Rule 2: We should interpret apocalyptic language figuratively unless we are forced to do otherwise.

This is the opposite rule from how we understand most things in the Bible. Usually we take a verse literally unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise. What is an example of when we might be so compelled? Matthew 5:29 comes to mind - "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee."

Apocalyptic language is figurative language, and so the opposite rule applies - we understand apocalyptic language *figuratively* unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.

Rule 3: Similarity of speech does not imply identity of subjects. (The same image can be used to depict different subjects.)

This is a common pitfall. Often in the study of apocalyptic language you will hear someone say that such and such symbol could only apply to the end of the world. Really? What if that same symbol is used elsewhere in the Bible to apply to something other than the end of the world, as is most often the case. The same image can be used to depict different subjects.

Rule 4: Dissimilarity of speech does not imply distinctness of subjects. (Different images can be used to depict the same subject.)

As an example, many different symbols are used both in the Old Testament and the New Testament to describe the church. God shows us the eternal kingdom from many different angles and many different perspectives, and he uses many different symbols to do that. Different images can be used to depict the same subject.

Rule 5: We should always carefully study how the same symbols are used elsewhere in the Bible, while keeping Rules #3 and #4 in mind.

If we find the same symbol in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, that symbol may or may not have the same subject. We need to examine it carefully.

But if the subject in the Old Testament is something that has already occurred, then it would be very unlikely that the New Testament subject is the same – but the subjects are likely similar, such as Babylon in the Old Testament and Rome in the New Testament.

Rule 6: We must pay careful attention to context.

The surest way to go wrong with apocalyptic language is to atomize the text by looking at one verse at a time without any regard for the verses that precede it, the verses that follow it, the reason those verses were written, and the history in which those verses were written. The context is vital.

And we must do more than just say the context is important – we must actually pay close attention to the context! And that context includes *historical* context. Apocalyptic language **always** has historical significance, so we must study history to properly understand the symbols.

Rule 7: We should not add symbols to the text.

As an example, in the book of Daniel we see a giant image of a man. Daniel described the man's feet and toes in Daniel 2. Now, almost certainly, the giant man

had two feet and ten toes – but the number two and the number ten are never mentioned in Daniel 2.

Premillennialists split the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2 into two parts – and they rely heavily on the two feet and the ten toes in making that argument. If two and ten were that important to the meaning of the vision, then don't we think two and ten would have been mentioned?

We should not read symbols into the text. Let's stick with the symbols we already have!

Rule 8: We should pay careful attention to any explanations that are given in the inspired text.

In this book we will often see Zechariah asking an angel what a particular symbol means. We should, of course, listen carefully to that answer! We find the same thing in Revelation. Zechariah's questions and John's questions are most likely our own questions! We should pay close attention to the inspired answers.

Rule 9: Sometimes a *literal* person, place, or thing is used as a figure for a similar person, place, or thing.

For example, literal Babylon is used in the New Testament as a figure for Rome. Why? Because both are great enemies of God's people. Egypt, Assyria, and even Jerusalem are sometimes used in the same way.

Rule 10: Sometimes a *literal* number is also a *figurative* number.

For example, the 70 years of captivity was a literal 70 years, but the number 70 denotes perfection and completeness, and so 70 is also used figuratively to show that the period of captivity was the perfect length of time for God to teach his people the complete lesson he wanted them to learn.

And, of course, the number 70 was not just a coincidence. The literal 70 year period was determined by God, and most likely it was chosen by God because he wanted to teach a lesson based, in part, on the symbolic significance of that number.

WHAT DOES THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH SAY ABOUT JESUS?

Zechariah is a difficult book, but difficult or not, there is a very important reason why Zechariah should never be neglected. Zechariah is second only to Isaiah in the number of Messianic prophecies it contains.

It is wonderful to think about the returned exiles listening to Zechariah in 520 BC. They were focused on their current situation and the need to rebuild their earthly temple – and Zechariah was preaching Christ to them! It makes me think of Matthew 12:6 – "But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple."

Here are some of the key prophecies about Jesus in this short book, and, as I read them, think about the people who first heard them – who they were, where they were, and what they were doing. God lifted the spiritual curtain so that they could have a glimpse of the perfect priest-king who was to come – including glimpses of both his eternal glory and his perfect sacrificial death.

Pretend you are hearing them for the first time and that you know nothing about the New Testament because the New Testament has not been written yet. Pretend you are living in a ruined city and standing before a demolished temple, and you are asking, why bother? Why bother to rebuild it? Why bother to be faithful to God? And then you hear this:

Zechariah 3:8 – For, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.

Zechariah 6:12-13 – And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Zechariah 9:9 – Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Zechariah 11:12-13 – And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.

Zechariah 12:10 – And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

Zechariah 13:7 – Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is

my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Zechariah 14:8 – And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.

Zechariah proclaimed Christ to God's people 520 years before Christ came into this world – and some of the descendants of Zechariah's listeners were ready and waiting when that great day came.

Luke 2:25 – And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Why were there faithful Jews in the first century? Why were they in Jerusalem? Why was there a temple in Jerusalem? Because of the faithfulness of the people we are now studying about. Because they understood their place and their importance in the plan of God. And how did they know that? Because of God's prophets, such as Haggai and Zechariah – as well as because of Ezra, Nehemiah, and many others.

What they were doing was vital to the plan of God. Isaiah had already prophesied that the word would go out first from Jerusalem. Daniel had already prophesied that the temple would again be destroyed. For those prophecies to be fulfilled, faithful Jews had to be living in Jerusalem, and that temple had to be rebuilt.

Their place in the plan of God was vital – and yet the reason why it was vital would not be evident until long after their death. Our place in the plan of God

today is to plant the seed – and perhaps we, like them, will not live to see the outcome of that planting. But that should not make us discouraged. Only God can look down through time and see what he is preparing for tomorrow using our faithfulness today.

THE COMING KING!

I want to say a few more introductory words about two of the prophecies we just read. (We will have much more to say about them when we get to them later in our studies.)

Zechariah 6:13 – Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, **and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne:** and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Zechariah 9:9 – Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: **behold, thy King cometh unto thee:** he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Do you see a theme there? They both speak of a great king who was to come. Why was that so important? And particularly, why was that so important in Zechariah's day?

The first king of the southern half of the divided kingdom was Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. If you start with him in 1 Kings 14 and start counting, you will eventually end up 20 kings later with Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, in 2 Kings 24. In the next chapter, Zedekiah was blinded and carried off to Babylon.

And with that, the kings of Judah seemingly came to an end. The royal line continued, but the line of kings

did not. Why did that happen? A verse in 1 Kings answers that question. In this verse, King David is talking to his son, Solomon:

1 Kings 2:4 – that the LORD may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

In Zechariah's day, the people definitely lacked a man on the throne of Israel, which tells us what we already know – the previous kings had not walked before God in faithfulness.

But we also need to look at another important verse from Psalm 89:

Psalm 89:34–36 – I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

That promise was unconditional. In fact, in the previous verses of Psalm 89, God said that he would do this thing even if the people were faithless. How do we reconcile that with 1 Kings 2:4?

The answer is simple. If the people were faithless they would lack a king over Israel, but that lack would not last forever. At some point, God would restore the king to Israel, and of course that happened when Jesus sat on the throne of David.

Luke 1:32–33 – He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne

of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Now putting all of that together, it explains why these prophecies of a coming king would have meant so much to the people of Zechariah's day.

And that also explains something else - a puzzling verse in Acts 1.

Acts 1:6 - So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Why is that verse puzzling? Well, it is puzzling because of how we often explain it. We often say that the apostles were apparently still expecting an earthly physical kingdom, and so once again Jesus had to correct their misunderstanding. But a closer look at that verse, I think, shows that neither of those conclusions is correct.

First, Acts 1:6 says nothing about an earthly or physical kingdom, and second, Jesus never tells them they have a misunderstanding, only that they should leave the timing to God.

And there is another problem with what I will call the usual explanation - it seems to ignore what had happened to the apostles between the resurrection and the ascension here in Acts 1. Look first at the third verse of Acts 1.

Acts 1:3 - He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

The apostles asked their question in verse 6 after listening to Jesus speak about the kingdom for 40

days! I don't know about you, but that makes me think that they may have known exactly what they were asking in verse 6!

If they asked really about a physical kingdom in Acts 1:6 after 40 days of teaching about the kingdom, I think Jesus might have asked them in verse 7 if they had been listening to a single word he said! But he did not ask them that.

And also consider some things we learn in Luke.

Luke 24:27 - And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:45 - Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

I think we should very seriously consider the possibility that the apostles were *not* mistaken in any way with their question in Acts 1:6. That they were, in fact, asking about something Jesus had taught them, and they just wanted to know *when* it would happen.

If that is correct, then what does their question in Acts 1:6 mean? "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Don't we know the answer to that now? Didn't Jesus, in fact, restore the kingdom to Israel when he sat down on the throne of King David and became the first person to do that since King Zedekiah? And isn't that exactly what Peter said happened in Acts 2?

Acts 2:30-31 - Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned

to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

And remember the prophecy of Amos:

Amos 9:11 – In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.

And we also see that same prophecy later in the book of Acts.

Acts 15:15–17 – And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will **build again** the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will **build again** the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

We don't know what the apostles were thinking of in Acts 1, and who knows? Maybe they still did not understand the first thing about the kingdom even after having had their minds opened and having studied the kingdom with Jesus for 40 days. That is, maybe the usual explanation is the correct explanation, but I lean in the other direction on that issue. I think if we can interpret the apostles' question in Acts 1:6 so that it makes sense, we should do so, and I think we can.

HOW IS THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH RELATED TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

The book of Revelation quotes or alludes to Zechariah about thirty times, making Zechariah second only to Ezekiel in that regard.

For example, in Zechariah 1:8 we will read:

"I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white."

In Revelation 6 we will see what are often called the four horses of the apocalypse: the white horse in verse 2 of Revelation 6, the red horse in verse 4, the black horse in verse 5, and the pale horse in verse 8 on whom sat Death. So if the symbols are the same (multi-colored horses in this example), then Zechariah and Revelation must be pointing to the same things – right? Wrong!

Remember Rule 3 – similarity of speech does not imply identity of subjects. Just because we unravel a symbol in Zechariah does not mean we don't have to unravel the same symbol in Revelation. How the symbol was used in Zechariah (or elsewhere in the Old Testament) may certainly be helpful to us when we meet that same symbol in Revelation, but it is never dispositive. We will still have much work left to do.

One way in which Revelation and Zechariah are alike is that the initial readers of each were in great need of comfort and encouragement. The historical situation of God's people was different in Zechariah and Revelation, but the needs of God's people were very similar. That is why we today, in a very different historical situation from both Zechariah and Revelation, can

ourselves find comfort and encouragement from both of those books.

We will also see some other similarities between Zechariah and Revelation. Each book was written at a time of great dynastic change and uncertainty. With Zechariah, the dynastic family of Cyrus had just been replaced by the dynastic family of Darius. With Revelation, the dynasty of the Julio-Claudians (which ended with Nero) had just been replaced by the dynasty of the Flavians (which began with Vespasian).

Each book is an answer to the same question – how long?

Zechariah 1:12 – Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, **how long** wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?

Revelation 6:10 – And they cried with a loud voice, saying, **How long**, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

Each book involves a judgment that was not immediately apparent. Isaiah had made a prophecy about Babylon long before the time of Zechariah, and yet that prophecy did not seem to have occurred yet, at least not literally.

Isaiah 13:19-20 – And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there;

neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

Likewise, Revelation describes the judgment of the Roman empire – and yet the city of Rome did not fall until AD 476, and the Eastern Roman empire continued on for another 1000 years. How do we explain that? Stay tuned! We will spend a great deal of time looking at that question later.

Another similarity is that both Revelation and Zechariah show the people of God at a time when, in a sense, they were the most vulnerable. In Revelation, the church in its infancy was being persecuted by the mighty Roman empire. Who would ever have believed that the church would come out on top in that battle? And in Zechariah, the people of God are a ragtag remnant huddled together in their ruined city while the mighty powers of the earth are in motion all around them. Again, who would have placed their money on the people of God in that situation? If those two books teach us anything, it is this – you should never bet against God!

IS ZECHARIAH ONE BOOK OR MANY BOOKS?

Before we launch into Chapter 1, I want to consider one more introductory question: Is Zechariah one book or many books?

Since at least the seventeenth century, some commentators have argued that Zechariah is really two books – one book consisting of Chapters 1–8 and a second book consisting of Chapters 9–14. Some commentators create a third book by splitting Chapters 9–14 into two books, Chapters 9–11 and 12–14.

Some point to Matthew 27:9–10 in which Jesus attributes to Jeremiah some language that is similar to Zechariah 11:12–13, and they say that the second half of Zechariah was really written by Jeremiah. (We can't

rule that out entirely, but it is certainly not necessary to explain Matthew 27 as we will see later.)

Zechariah 9:13 seems to anticipate a conflict between Israel and Greece, which leads some (at least some who don't believe in predictive prophecy) to conclude that Chapter 9 was written later than either the time of Jeremiah or Zechariah.

Others point to the mention of Ephraim (the northern tribes), Assyria, and Egypt to argue that the second half of Zechariah was not written later but instead was written earlier, prior to the exile.

Why do so many argue for multiple books? They do so because of the numerous differences between the first and second halves of Zechariah.

Here is a brief outline of what we are about to study in the book of Zechariah:

- A call to repentance (1:1-6)
- Vision #1: The Rider Under the Myrtles (1:7-17)
- Vision #2: The Four Horns (1:18-21)
- Vision #3: The Measuring Line (2:1-13)
- Vision #4: Joshua (3:1-10)
- Vision #5: The Lampstand (4:1-14)
- Vision #6: The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)
- Vision #7: The Ephah (5:5-11)
- Vision #8: The Four Chariots (6:1-8)
- The crowning of Joshua (6:9-15)
- A question about fasting (7)

- Future blessings for Jerusalem (8)
- A burden on Hadrach (9–11)
- A burden on Israel (12–14)

There is no denying that a significant change in tone and structure occurs between Chapter 8 and Chapter 9.

- Chapters 1–8 contain prophetic visions, while Chapters 9–14 contain two poetic oracles.
- Vocabulary and syntax that we find in Chapters 1–8 are not found in Chapters 9–14.
- We frequently see personal names and dates in Chapters 1–8, but we do not in Chapters 9–14.

But none of that requires us to split the book into pieces or requires us to date the second half of the book differently than the first half.

For example, Isaiah and Hosea both refer to Assyria and Egypt as images for enemies of God's people even though they had ceased to be much of a threat by the sixth century. (Revelation does the same thing with both Babylon and Jerusalem, even though both Babylon and Jerusalem had ceased to be a persecutor by the time Revelation was written.)

But what about the reference to the Greeks in Chapter 9? First, Zechariah is a prophet, so we should not be shocked when a prophet describes something that had not yet occurred. That's what prophets do. Second, Greek traders and mercenaries had been active in the area for centuries prior to the time of Zechariah. (We see some Greek words in the book of Daniel.) The role of Greece was growing, and it did not take a prophet to see that they would soon be a serious threat to God's people.

What about all of the linguistic differences? The first and second halves of the book have different purposes and were written at different times. That alone could explain any differences in syntax. But we can go further than just explaining the differences – we can point out that there are numerous similarities and dependencies between Chapters 1–8 and 9–14.

- Both discuss the salvation of Jerusalem.
- Both discuss the return of the exiles
- Both discuss a cleansing from sin.
- Both discuss the salvation of the nations.
- Both refer to a promise of fertility.
- Both discuss a renewal of the covenant.
- Both discuss the outpouring of God's spirit.
- Both describe the coming of a triumphant Messiah.
- They have numerous themes in common.
- They also have words and phrases in common, including one word in 7:14 and 9:8 that appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Old Testament.

In my opinion, the book of Zechariah is one book, and Zechariah is the one author of every word in that one inspired book.

CHAPTER 1

ZECHARIAH 1:1-2

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah,

**the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, 2
The LORD hath been sore displeased with
your fathers.**

What is our time frame? The word of the Lord came to Zechariah in "the second year of Darius." Darius the Great began to reign in 522 BC, which means that this word from God to Zechariah came in the year 520 BC.

Who were Berechiah and Iddo? We met them earlier. They were Zechariah's father and grandfather. Why are they listed here by name?

One reason is that it was important to establish Zechariah's prophetic and priestly credentials. Iddo, it seems, was a very well known priest. It is not clear whether the phrase "the prophet" in verse 1 refers to Zechariah or to Iddo. If it refers to Iddo, then Iddo was both prophet and priest.

Another possible reason their names are listed here may be because those names give us the theme of the entire book!

- Zechariah's name means "God Remembers."
- The name of his father, Berechiah, means "God Blesses."
- His grandfather's name, Iddo, means "in time."

Put them together and we have the theme of Zechariah: *God remembers and blesses his people at his set time.* And Zechariah will tell these people about God's greatest blessings, which would not come until about 520 years later.

Why is God "sore displeased" in verse 2? The people had returned from their exile with permission by the decree of Cyrus. They had almost immediately begun to rebuild the temple. But their neighbors had caused all

sorts of problems for them, including sending false reports back to the Persians.

Even in the face of this opposition, the rebuilding project had continued – but by this time it seems that the rebuilding project had instead become projects directed at building large houses for themselves (Haggai 1:4). The work on God's house had come to a complete halt.

The people had returned to a land that was in ruins because of their disobedience – and the land remained in ruins. In fact, they could see that ruin all around them, and it should have reminded them of why that ruin had occurred in the first place. The ruin should have been a warning – but they seemed to have missed it.

Haggai was the first prophet to encourage the people to restart their work on the temple. His message came in the sixth month of 520 BC – two months before this word came to Zechariah. Both Zechariah and Haggai had the same message for the people – rebuild the temple! But the Holy Spirit caused the two prophets to convey that message in very different ways.

ZECHARIAH 1:3-6

3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. 4 Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD. 5 Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? 6 But my words and my statutes, which I com-

manded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

Verses 3–6 are a call to repentance. In verse 3, God says "turn ye unto me." The Hebrew simply means "return." Yes, they were being called upon to repent, but the first step to repent is to return.

One phrase is repeated three times in verse 3, which immediately tells us that it is a very important phrase – "saith the LORD of hosts." This word from the prophet is not the prophet's own word. We know that from 2 Peter 1:20–21, but we also know that from verse 3 right here.

This word is from the Lord of hosts! It is a word from God – from the eternal, universal king who has the heavenly army at his beck and call. Yes, they were a small seemingly insignificant group in a small backwater town – surely just a footnote, if even that, to the great historical events that were occurring all around them – but things were not what they seemed.

This little group had the attention of the Lord of hosts! Of all the people in the world, it was to this group that God sent his word by the mouths of Haggai and Zechariah. It was to this group that God lifted the curtain so that they could see the Messiah who would come in about 500 years to bless the entire world.

With the command to return comes a gracious promise in verse 3 – "I will turn unto you." The verb here is the same verb found in the earlier phrase "turn ye unto me." When we read verse 3, we see that the parable of the prodigal son is not just a description of God

under the new covenant. We see that same loving father here in verse 3 written under the old covenant.

Is the God of the New Testament different from the God of the Old Testament? Only to those who don't understand the Bible. Those who understand God's word know that God has *always* been a loving father.

In verse 4, the people are told not to be like their fathers who did not listen to or heed God's word. And what was the outcome of that failure? All these people had to do was open their eyes to see the outcome – a ruined city and a destroyed temple. It was all around them.

But, the people might have responded, that is all just ancient history. Our fathers and those prophets have all passed from the scene. We are different! Well, God has a response for that argument! In verse 6, God responds, "but my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?"

Literally, the verse asks, did not the word overtake the fathers? Their fathers also thought they could escape, but the word of God is inescapable. The word pursued them and caught them – as it will do to everyone. These people were no different from their fathers no matter how loudly they might proclaim otherwise.

But hadn't some of their fathers returned and recognized that what they were suffering was nothing more than what they deserved? Yes, but by then it was too late to save the city and the temple. The punishment had already occurred before the fathers finally understood what had caused it. Thus, the warning of verse 4 remained – be not as your fathers! Yes, they returned, but they did so too late.

And with that introduction Zechariah now recounts the first of his eight visions.

ZECHARIAH 1:7

7 Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,

Three months have passed since verse 1. The twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month in the second year of King Darius would have been February 15, 519 BC by our calendar. Haggai 2:18 tells us that the foundation of the temple had been laid in the interval between verse 1 and verse 7 of this chapter.

This vision also occurred in the wake of one of the most unsettled periods of Persian history. The monarchy had just shifted from the dynastic family of Cyrus to the family of Darius, who would establish his own dynasty. This transition was accompanied by numerous revolts and rebellions, including several in Babylon that were put down very harshly.

ZECHARIAH 1:7-8

8 I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white.

What does Zechariah see in verse 8? He sees a red horse in front with other horses behind. The other horses are red, speckled, and white.

So how many horses does he see in total? We aren't told. Maybe there are only four horses, but maybe there are more than four horses.

And how many different colors does he see? He sees three colors: red, speckled, and white. The Septuagint indicates four colors, with two different shades of red between the red horse in front and the red horse or horses in back, but the Hebrew text does not make that distinction.

Are these the four horses of the apocalypse from Revelation 6? I think we will see that the answer is no, but for now let's just say maybe, but not necessarily.

First, as we said, Zechariah may be seeing more than four horses.

Second, a similarity of symbols (horses in Zechariah 1 and horses in Revelation 6) does not mean the objects of those symbols must be the same thing. We need to look at the context of the symbols, along with any explanations in the text.

What do the horses depict? What do the colors depict? What do the myrtle trees depict? Who is the rider on the horse? In short, **what are these?** Fortunately for us, Zechariah asks that same question in verse 9.

And if we are confused with the very first vision in the book, then isn't it comforting that Zechariah was also confused with the very first vision in the book! Zechariah is about to ask the same question we are asking. **What are these?**

ZECHARIAH 1:9-11

9 Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these be. 10 And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. 11 And they answered the angel of

the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.

Here, in the text itself, we have an inspired explanation of the vision, and so, according to one of our ten interpretive rules, we should pay very close attention to what is said here in this explanation. (But, of course, I think we would have known that even without an interpretive rule!) And if our interpretation disagrees with this inspired explanation, then, of course, our interpretation is wrong.

But let's hold our horses and not get ahead of ourselves. Let's proceed carefully.

- In verse 8 we see a man riding a horse.
- In verse 9 we see an angel talking with Zechariah.
- In verse 10 we see a man standing among the myrtle trees.
- In verse 11 we see the angel of the Lord standing among the myrtle trees.

What do we have here? Two men and two angels? One man and one angel? Something else?

The commentaries go crazy over this question, but I think the best answer is that the man in verse 10 is the man on the red horse in verse 8 – both are described as standing among the myrtle trees.

The angel of the Lord in verse 11 is also said to be standing among the myrtle trees, but I think that angel is most likely the same angel who is speaking with Zechariah in verse 9 because "they" are "answering" this angel in verse 11, which suggests we have heard from him before.

Before we consider what the vision means, let's look first at a question that will face us several times in this book: **Who is the Angel of the Lord in verse 11?**

Some commentators suggest that the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. That is, an appearance of Jesus before the incarnation when he came into the world as a man in bodily form.

Some believe we see such an appearance in Daniel 3:25 when King Nebuchadnezzar sees a fourth person in that fiery furnace along with Daniel's three friends.

And others point to John 12:41 as evidence that Isaiah was seeing Christ on his throne in the great throne room vision of Isaiah 6.

And one thing we know with certainty is that Jesus is very concerned whenever his people are in danger. I think of the entire book of Revelation, for example, which shows Jesus' great love and concern for his church. And I think of one of my favorite verses in Acts, in which Stephen, who is just about to be stoned to death, sees Jesus:

Acts 7:56 – *And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*

Jesus was *sitting* on his throne in Acts 2:30, but when Stephen sees him in Acts 7, Jesus is *standing*. I love that picture of Jesus standing and looking down at Stephen, getting ready to greet him in the heavenly kingdom. We know that Jesus loves his people and is very concerned about their welfare.

We also know, of course, that Jesus is not an angel because, unlike Jesus, angels are created beings (Psalm 148). Jesus is not a created being; Jesus is God. But the word "angel" in Hebrew just means "messenger," so in the sense that we can call God the Son

a messenger from God the Father, we could refer to Jesus using the Hebrew word translated "angel." But, as we said, Jesus is most certainly not an angel in the way that word is ordinarily used.

Why do some think that this particular messenger of the Lord might be Jesus? Well, let's look at some other Old Testament verses that mention the Angel of the Lord.

Who appeared to Moses in the burning bush?

Exodus 3:2 – And **the angel of the Lord** appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.

And also note verse 4:

Exodus 3:4 – And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, **God called unto him** out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

What did the angel of the Lord say to Hagar in Genesis 16?

Genesis 16:10 – And the angel of the Lord said unto her, **I will multiply thy seed exceedingly**, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

And what did Hagar say in verse 13?

Genesis 16:13 – **Have I really seen God** and remained alive after seeing him?

Who stayed Abraham's hand in Genesis 22?

Genesis 22:11-12 – And **the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said,**

Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son **from me.**

The word "me" at the end of Genesis 22:12 is being spoken by the angel of the Lord in verse 11!

Another possibility is that this Angel of the Lord is just an ordinary angel (if any angel could ever be called ordinary!) who is acting as a spokesman for God. And so, whatever the angel is saying, it is as if God were there in person saying it himself, which would, for example, explain the pronoun "me" in Genesis 22:12.

So which view is correct? I don't think we can answer that question with certainty (at least not yet, and perhaps not ever in this life). We will see the Angel of the Lord again in Zechariah Chapter 3 and in Zechariah Chapter 12. So let's reconsider this question when we get to those verses, which I do think will provide some strong evidence for one of these two views.

Now back the vision. What do the multi-colored horses depict? Verse 10 tells us that they are those whom God has sent to patrol the earth.

What about the colors? What do they mean? We are not told, but the colors of the horses most likely depict the varied missions of their riders. That is what the colors depict in Revelation 6. Perhaps the red colors depict fire and blood, and the white color depicts glory and victory. We can't say for sure, and perhaps the failure of the inspired explanation in verse 10 to mention the colors means that the colors are just there to paint a more vivid picture.

What about the myrtle trees that were in the bottom? The myrtle tree is a small evergreen, never growing

taller than about eight feet. That they were in the bottom just means that they were in a hollow. The trees were short to begin with, and this just made them appear even shorter. If God had wanted to choose a tall, stately tree, he could have chosen a cedar or an oak, but he did not. He chose a myrtle. Remember how the great king Nebuchadnezzar was depicted in Daniel 4:11?

"The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth."

Why not choose a tree like that? Why choose a myrtle tree?

What we see with the choice of a myrtle tree is a theme that runs all throughout Zechariah, and in fact all throughout the Bible. God chooses people who appear small and insignificant from a worldly perspective, but God uses such people to accomplish his great and wonderful plans.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 – For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

I think what we are intended to see here in this opening vision are swift messengers of vengeance and victory going out to patrol the earth for the good of

God's people, who, though small and weak by earthly standards, have the power of God behind them working on their behalf.

If that theme is so important, why is it relayed with such an obscure symbol? If that were the only time that message had been relayed, then that might be a good question. But it is not the only time that message has been relayed. The Bible relays that same message a hundred times in a hundred different ways! It is all throughout the Bible! In fact, at this time, Haggai was relaying that message in a manner very different from Zechariah.

What does it mean in verse 11 that "the earth sitteth still and is at rest"? It could mean that this vision occurred during a lull in the rebellions against King Darius, and history, in fact, tells us that there was a brief lull in the fighting at this time after the initial rebellions and before the Egyptian rebellion. But I think the context argues *against* that interpretation.

The verses that follow suggest that this time of peace refers to the peace that the Babylonians were experiencing in contrast to the divine judgment that had been prophesied against them. Last week we looked at one such prophecy from Isaiah 13. If we flip one chapter ahead to Isaiah 14:7, we find the same phrase that we see here in verse 11 – the whole earth is at rest, and is quiet. And those are the only two places in the Bible where that exact phrase is found.

Recall what we read from Isaiah 13.

Isaiah 13:19-20 – And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: nei-

ther shall the Arabian pitch tent there;
neither shall the shepherds make their
fold there.

We see a similar prophecy in Jeremiah 51.

Jeremiah 51:42-43 – The sea is come up
upon Babylon: she is covered with the
multitude of the waves thereof. Her
cities are a desolation, a dry land, and
a wilderness, a land wherein no man
dwelleth, neither doth any son of man
pass thereby.

Those prophecies against Babylon had not yet occurred, at least not literally. Babylon received little to no punishment at the hands of Cyrus in 529 BC. It was a very peaceful takeover. The Jews may have hoped that the coming of Darius would mean that Babylon would finally get what it deserved, but that is not what happened. Darius put down the revolt and then Babylon just continued on as before.

The report about Babylon being still and at rest here in verse 11 is similar to Psalm 73:12 – "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches." Why? We ask that same question today, and the people of Zechariah's day asked that same question in 519 BC.

They were probably wondering how long it would be until God finally punished the Babylonians. And, in fact, that is the exact question we see next in verse 12. How long?

ZECHARIAH 1:12

12 Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou

**hast had indignation these threescore
and ten years?**

Revelation 6:10 would later ask that same question about another great enemy of God's people - Rome.

Revelation 6:10 - And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

That verse has rightly been called the theme of the book of Revelation. Notice, however, a big difference between the question in Revelation 6:10 and the question in Zechariah 1:12.

The question in Revelation 6:10 was asked by those who had been slain for the word of God. The question in Zechariah 1:12 was asked by the Angel of the Lord. If this Angel of the Lord is a preincarnate appearance of Christ, then the question in verse 12 is directed from God the Son to God the Father.

Whether or not this Angel of the Lord is the preincarnate Christ, we know that Jesus was caring for and loving his people long before he was born in that manger. Jesus was caring for us and loving us before the foundation of this world! Revelation 13:8 describes Jesus as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

We can't say for sure (at least not yet) whether this Angel of the Lord is the preincarnate Christ, but it certainly deepens the meaning here for me to think that it may have been Jesus standing among those myrtle trees.

So what is the answer to the question "how long?" God's people suffered for 70 years. How long until they are finally vindicated and Babylon meets its well-deserved fate?

ZECHARIAH 1:13

13 And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words.

God answers the angel with good words and comfortable words. The references to "good words" reminds us of Joshua 23.

Joshua 23:14 – Not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed. [NAS]

God is faithful to his word – if God says it will happen, then it will happen. And Zechariah is not the only person who can find comfort in that fact – we can take comfort in that fact as well.

The phrase "good word" appears twice in the book of Jeremiah, both times in connection with the restoration after the exile. Jeremiah 29:10 is especially important because it refers to the promise of the end of the "seventy years," which is explicitly mentioned here in verse 12.

Jeremiah 29:10 – For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform **my good word** toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

The phrase "good word" also appears in the important promise of restoration in Jeremiah 33:14, which points toward the restoration of both royal and priestly authority in Jerusalem, something we will also see in this book.

Jeremiah 33:14 – Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will perform **that**

good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah. [ASV]

So what were these good and comforting words? Let's keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 1:14-15

14 So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. 15 And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.

The Lord answered the angel in verse 13, and now it seems that the angel passes these same words on to Zechariah in verses 14–17. And Zechariah, in turn, is told to pass these good and comforting words on to the people.

God's good and comforting words focus first on his zealous passion for Jerusalem and for his people, and then on his great anger towards those responsible for Jerusalem's destruction and his people's exile. If the Jews thought that God had let Babylon off the hook for some reason, they were badly mistaken. God's anger against Babylon had not cooled.

By why was God angry with Babylon? Hadn't Babylon been doing what God wanted them to do? Hadn't God used Babylon to teach his people a lesson? Didn't God refer to Nebuchadnezzar as his servant in Jeremiah 27:6? Yes – but Babylon had gone too far. That is what verse 15 says.

God was a little displeased with his people, but Babylon went far beyond the level of discipline that God

had wanted them to inflict. Here is how the ESV translates the verse:

"And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster."

In short, Babylon took advantage of the situation, and that is why God was very displeased with them.

The good and comforting words continue in verse 16.

ZECHARIAH 1:16-17

16 Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. 17 Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

In verse 3, God said, "Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you." We see that promised return here in verse 16. "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies." The people had returned to God, God had returned to Jerusalem, and the foundation of the temple had been laid.

What blessings would accompany God's return?

- His house would be built (verse 16). At the moment all they could see was the foundation, but God is telling them that they will see the completed structure.

- A line would be stretched over the city (verse 16). Not only would the temple be restored, but the city would be restored and rebuilt. A surveyor's line would soon be used to plan the rebuilding of the city.
- God's cities would overflow with prosperity (verse 17). That is, God's blessings would spread beyond Jerusalem into the surrounding areas as well.
- God would comfort and choose Jerusalem (verse 17). Jerusalem had been chosen once before, but it had fallen from that position. God promises his people that the city will be chosen again. God's relation with Jerusalem will be renewed.

When would these blessing be realized? We will in this book, as in the other Old Testament books of prophecy, see some prophecies that would be fulfilled soon and other prophecies that would occur much later, sometimes hundreds of years later.

We know that Zechariah includes some distant prophecies because the New Testament frequently points to Zechariah as proclaiming the coming of Christ over 500 years later. Into which category do these prophecies fall? Soon or distant?

I think we are looking here at prophecies that would *soon* come to pass. Why?

First, we know that the temple was in the process of being rebuilt, and the first promised blessing is simply that it would in fact soon be finished. If that blessing would soon occur, it seems natural to understand the following three as likewise coming to pass soon.

Second, these prophecies are not out of proportion with what we would expect these people to experience. That is not the case with other prophecies both in this book as well as elsewhere, such as in Isaiah.

Elsewhere we find promised blessings that are so wonderful and so far-reaching that they could only be realized in Christ and in his eternal kingdom.

In fact, Zechariah seems to deal in this book with people who were expecting all of God's promises to occur all at once. Part of the goal of this book is to teach them patience. Yes, the promises will all occur, but they will occur according to God's timeframe - some now, some later.

And what about Babylon? How long until that evil city finally got what it deserved? God does not answer that question. It seems that event, too, was something that would occur in God's own time frame.

And, one more thing about Isaiah's promised destruction of Babylon. Not only would it occur in God's own chosen *time*, but it would occur in God's own chosen *manner*.

Isaiah described Babylon's falls using vivid, apocalyptic language, and we should not take such language literally unless we are forced to do so. With Isaiah 13 the force is in the opposite direction - that is, we are forced to take the prophecy as a *figurative* description of Babylon's fall. Why? Because verse Isaiah 13:20 says that the city would never be inhabited; that no Arab would pitch his tent there. That has not *literally* happened even to this very day.

A dispensationalist would tell you that the only thing that could keep people from pitching their tents in Babylon would be a nuclear bomb - and that is exactly what they say is being prophesied by Isaiah, and by reference here as well. But does that make any sense at all? Do we really think God answers the question "how long" by promising to nuke a completely different group of people living thousands of years later? A little common sense goes a long way in understanding the Bible.

I think what we have in Isaiah is a figurative description of the judgment of Babylon from God's perspective. Perhaps, some in Zechariah's day had misinterpreted Isaiah and expected Babylon's destruction to literally occur in that manner – but if so, then they had something in common with modern premillennialists; they had misinterpreted figurative language in the Bible.

Let's look next at Zechariah's second vision: the vision of the four horns.

ZECHARIAH 1:18-19

18 Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. 19 And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

The word "horn" can mean several things in Hebrew. It often refers to the horns of an animal, such as on a ram, goat, sheep, or ox. It can also refer to the tusks of an elephant. The word "horn" can also refer to things constructed from such animal horns, such as a trumpet or a container for liquids.

The horn is an animal's offensive weapon, and so horns in the Bible usually depict strength and power.

Amos 6:13 – Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?

Jeremiah 48:25 – The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith the LORD.

Daniel 8:3 – Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and

the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.

Those two horns in Daniel 8 were the kings of Media and Persia.

The difficulty with verses 18-19 is not determining the meaning of the horns. The difficulty is identifying four powers that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.

Another difficulty is determining what is meant by Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. On the surface that list sounds simple enough, but why is Jerusalem the city listed along with the nation (Judah) that contains it? And why is Israel mentioned long after it was carried off by Assyria in 722 BC?

One possibility is that we should look back over time for four powers that have harmed Judah (the southern tribes), Israel (the northern tribes), and Jerusalem (the royal city). If that is the case, then the four powers would likely be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. (Although Persia had been more of a friend than a foe.)

Another possibility is that Israel is being used here as a name of honor for Judah. It is used that way elsewhere in the Bible after the northern tribes were carried off.

2 Chronicles 23:2 – And they went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, **and the chief of the fathers of Israel**, and they came to Jerusalem.

This view also finds support in verse 21, which mentions only Judah as having been scattered. If that is the case, then the number four is most likely being

used here figuratively (which, you recall, should be our default position for apocalyptic language).

What is the symbolic meaning of the number four? Four is the symbolic number of the earth – four cardinal directions, four seasons, four elements. If that symbol is being used that way here, then these four horns represent all of the earthly powers that are arrayed against the people of God – and in my view that is the best option.

Some commentaries suggest we should be looking for **two** world powers rather than four world powers – why do they say that? They say that if we have four horns, that means we have two animals, and so we should look for two worldly powers. This does fit well historically – Babylon and Assyria scattered Judah and Israel. But there is a problem here, or two problems, actually.

The vision does not mention the number two, and the vision does not mention any animals connected to the horns. We should not take a vision involving four horns and turn it into a vision involving two animals. That would violate one of our interpretative rules – we should not add symbols to the text that are not present in the text.

ZECHARIAH 1:20-21

20 And the LORD shewed me four carpenters. 21 Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.

Verse 20 introduces four carpenters. The Hebrew word translated "carpenter" here means "smith," and it could include a worker in wood, stone, or iron. Those who favor wood suggest these carpenters have come to finish the paneling in the temple, but I think workers in stone or iron is perhaps the better view. These workers are about to confront some very powerful enemies.

That we see *four* carpenters gives us another reason why it would have been improper to change the four horns into two animals as we discussed last week. Zechariah sees four horns and four carpenters.

Recall also from last week that the number four is often used to figuratively denote the earth. Because we have four carpenters it seems that the focus is still on the earth. These four carpenters likely depict the mighty agents of God who carry out God's will on earth and punish the great earthly powers that are arrayed as enemies against his people.

These carpenters must have arrived with their tools because the next question is not "who are these people," but rather "what come these to do?" What have they come to do to these four horns?

And this is where I really love the KJV – verse 21 says that they have come to "fray" them and to cast them out. "Fray" is not a word we see that often, but it is the root word of the word "afraid." These carpenters are coming to frighten these horns and cast them out.

You mean there is something out there that can terrify the mighty empires of this world? Yes – in fact, terror is what ultimately awaits all who are outside of God's family. But that terror was even closer for the current mighty power, Persia.

A BRIEF SIDE TRIP

Alexander the Great would be born in less than 200 years, and he would turn mighty Persia upside down, and we will see him prophetically described later in this book.

How did he do it? How did Alexander create one of the largest empires in the ancient world by the age of 30 and be undefeated in battle? Alexander founded cities that remain to this very day. How?

It is forever a puzzle to anyone who has not studied the Bible, but we know the answer to that puzzle. God was using Alexander to punish Persia, and God was also using Alexander to create the perfect Greco-Roman setting into which God would later send his Son and spread his gospel.

It was no accident that Jesus came into this world when and where he did.

Galatians 4:4 – But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

God created the perfect setting for Jesus to come and establish his eternal kingdom, the church. How was it the perfect setting?

After the death of Alexander, his empire was divided up among his generals. Ptolemy and his successors established themselves in Egypt and at first controlled Palestine as well. The Seleucids controlled Mesopotamia and Syria. There was constant friction between these two groups, and as was often the case, Palestine became a battlefield.

The spread of the gospel would have been greatly hindered if this constant warfare had been allowed to

continue. The fourth kingdom, Rome, put an end to it and brought instead the famous *pax Romana*, the Roman peace. Here is how Wikipedia describes it:

Pax Romana (Latin for Roman peace) was the long period of relative peace and minimal expansion by military force experienced by the Roman Empire in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. ... Its span was approximately 206 years (27 BC to 180 AD). The *pax Romana* is said to be a "miracle" because prior to it there had never been peace for that many centuries in a given area of human history.

You don't need quotation marks around the word "miracle" in that last sentence!

The importance of the Roman peace, the *pax Romana*, cannot be overstated. The Greeks' hobby was war. The church would have had a much more difficult time reaching beyond Jerusalem had the Greeks still been in charge.

But the perfect cradle for Christ and his kingdom was not just Rome, but it was Greece and Rome, the Greco-Roman empire. The Greek language, which had been around since 800 BC and in which the New Testament was penned, had twice the vocabulary of Latin.

Those who believe that Christianity is anti-intellectual and irrational should note that Christianity began at a time of Greek intellectualism and rationality, and again that was no accident. It is no accident that the church was established, not in a time of superstition, but in a time of rational inquiry.

Greek thought is admired even to this very day. In fact, it has been said that the Greek contribution to western philosophy was western philosophy!

So you have the Greek language and Greek rationality combined with Roman peace across the known world. To this day, historians puzzle over how that all came to be, but Bible believers don't have to puzzle over it at all.

If you really want a faith-building experience, just pick up a secular history book describing the time from Persia through first century Rome. You will see the hand of God working on every page. Here's an example from the book *Rome and Her Enemies*:

Lying at its heart is a mystery as profound as any in the records of human civilization. How on earth did the Romans do it? How did a single city, one that began as a small community of castle-rustlers, camped out among marshes and hills, end up ruling an empire that stretched from the moors of Scotland to the deserts of Iraq?

How on earth, he asks? Those events was not caused by anyone on earth. God caused them to happen, and Daniel and Zechariah both prophesied about them in detail 500 years before the Roman empire began.

Now, back to the visions.

CHAPTER 2

ZECHARIAH 2:1-2

I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. 2 Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof.

This is Zechariah's third vision: the vision of the measuring line.

Zechariah sees a man with a measuring line in his hand, and he asks the man where he is going – that is, where are you going to measure?

The man answers that he is going out to measure Jerusalem. What does that mean?

Remember that we are at this time in the year 519 BC. The wall around the city is still just a pile of rubble. The wall would not be rebuilt until about 70 years later when Nehemiah arrived in 445 BC.

This lack of protection must have made the people very anxious, and must have caused them to wonder how long this new temple would last without any walls to protect it. Measuring the city would have been the first step in rebuilding the walls.

One of our interpretive guidelines is that we should carefully examine elsewhere in the Bible where a symbol we are studying is used. But we need to be careful in creating parallels where none exist.

Many commentaries go to great lengths to compare this vision in Zechariah 2 with the vision of the new temple in Ezekiel 40–48, but there are significant differences.

Ezekiel's vision is focused on the temple, while this vision is focused on the city as a whole. And the role of the wall in Ezekiel is to separate what is holy from what is common, while here the purpose of the wall is to provide protection.

I don't think we need to turn to Ezekiel to understand what is happening here in Zechariah 2. Let's keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 2:3-5

3 And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, 4 And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: 5 For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

Two angels join the scene in verse 3 – the one that had been talking to Zechariah (presumably in an earlier vision) and another angel who goes out to meet him. One of the angels tells the other angel to run (not walk!) and give "this young man" a message.

Before we look at the message, let's ask another question: who is this young man?

We really have only two choices – either the young man is the man with the measuring line or the young man is Zechariah.

If the young man is Zechariah, then we certainly have confirmation here of something we discussed in the introductory class – Zechariah was a young man.

But if the young man is Zechariah, then what about the man with the measuring line? Does he just step off the stage without playing any role? And why does Zechariah need the angel to run and tell him something that verse 4 suggests he was able to hear when the first angel said it? I think this young man is most likely not Zechariah, but is instead the man with the measuring line.

But why is he called a young man?

The Hebrew word used here for "young man" can also denote a servant in a household or an official in a court or temple. I think its use here is most likely in that latter sense because the context is focused on what he is doing rather than on his age – this man is an official of some sort tasked with measuring the city.

This official is going out to measure, but there is something very important he needs to hear first. So important that an angel is told to run and tell him. What is that message?

Verses 4-5: *Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.*

This important message is an unexpected message – he is told that Jerusalem doesn't need any walls! In fact, he is told that Jerusalem will be a city without walls. Why? Because God will be their wall, and God will be their glory.

Why the mention of fire in verse 5? That seems surprising because fire was usually associated with the destruction of walls. Perhaps it is a reminder of who has the true fire and the true power to destroy. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). That explanation fits well with what we are about to see in this vision.

I said that this message was unexpected. Why? Because the people were worried about their lack of protection and wanted a wall, but here the one who is about to build that wall is told that no wall is needed.

But it is an unexpected message for another reason, and particularly for those of us who have read ahead in the Bible. Why? Because here the people are told that they don't need a man-made wall, but Nehemiah

will soon build a man-made wall anyway. How do we explain that?

The point of this vision is **not** to tell the people that they don't need to build a wall to protect themselves. I know that on the surface that sounds exactly like the point of this vision – but it is not. How do we know that? Because Nehemiah tells us in Nehemiah 6:16 that the wall was the work of God.

So what then is the point of this vision?

The problem is not whether the people needed a physical wall. The problem was that this man with a measuring line thought he could measure the city of God! He thought he could draw a circle around Jerusalem and contain God, the work of God, and the city of God within it.

But his conception of the city of God and the work of God was too small. He had failed to understand the far greater things that God had promised. This man with the measuring line needed to think of the Jerusalem of God in far grander terms.

With that thought in mind, listen again to the answer in verses 4-5:

Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

This man needed to see things as God saw them – and that is a theme that runs all throughout the Bible, and especially in this book. Zechariah will constantly be telling the people to lift up their eyes to see what God was preparing for his people.

When they looked around all they saw were ruins, but when they looked through the eyes of faith they could see much, much more. And Zechariah, perhaps more often than any other Old Testament prophet, lifts that prophetic curtain so that the people could see what was God was doing for them.

God's plan was not just to bless Jerusalem. God's plan, as he had promised Abraham long before, was to bless the entire world through the coming Messiah.

Verse 4 says that no walls would be able to contain all of the people and cattle living in the city. When would this happen?

Zechariah is about to do something here that he will do again and again in this book – Zechariah is about to look beyond the present situation to instead look far down the years of time to see what God was preparing for his people. And verses 6–13 describe that wonderful (then) future promise.

ZECHARIAH 2:6-9

6 Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. 7 Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. 8 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. 9 For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me.

The key word in verses 6–9 is the first word in verse 7 – **deliver**! These verses are a promise of deliverance.

God's people are told in verses 6 and 7 to get out of the way because God is about to punish Babylon! We see something very similar in Revelation. There God's people are told to get out of the way while Jesus defeats the entire Roman empire by himself!

Yes, we are to wear the whole armor of God, but here and later in Revelation we see, not us fighting for Jesus, but Jesus fighting for us!

Why the land of the **north** in verse 6? Babylon is more east than north from Jerusalem, but the road to and from Babylon is due north from Jerusalem. Anyone coming to Jerusalem from Babylon would come from the north as they bypassed the desert and followed the Euphrates River.

Verse 8 is beautiful. How much does God love and care for his faithful people? How does God see us? How does God feel about those who persecute us? "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

We are the apple of God's eye! Just think about that the next time you are tempted to feel discouraged or unloved. If we could only see ourselves as God sees us, I am convinced that we would be transformed. The church is beautiful and powerful beyond description. That's how God sees us. Is that how we see ourselves?

What does verse 8 mean when it says, "after the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you"? What is this glory? Who are "he" and "me"?

First, the "me" is the speaker, who is identified in verse 8 as the Lord of hosts. So who is the "he"? Who can send the Lord of hosts to do something?

I think the best way to understand verse 8 is to view the speaker here as the Angel of the Lord (while being called the Lord of hosts). Most commentaries agree:

From this point onward throughout the chapter there is a peculiar change of subject; sometimes the Lord speaks as the Lord; sometimes concerning the Lord. [Perhaps] this is for the purpose of indicating, on the one hand, the identity of this "Angel of the Lord" with the Lord and, on the other hand, a personal distinction from Him.

We will see this again in Zechariah 3:2, where "Lord" will be used to refer to the Angel of the Lord.

We earlier discussed the possibility that the Angel (or Messenger) of the Lord in these visions is the preincarnate Christ. If so, then God here is once again lifting the prophetic curtain to let them the people of Zechariah's day see something they should have already understood. The Messiah is God.

Isaiah 9:6 – For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, **The mighty God**, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

What about the glory in verse 8? What does it mean that "after the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you"? That is the reason why the Lord of hosts was sent to spoil these nations – for glory.

Isaiah 59:19 – So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, **and his glory from the rising of the sun**. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.

This vision reminds us of Jeremiah 50-51, which is a lengthy attack on Babylon for its treatment of Jerusalem and the temple.

- Here in verse 7 we see the daughter of Babylon, and we see the daughter of Babylon in Jeremiah 50:42 and 51:33.
- Here in verse 6 we see the land of the north, and in Jeremiah 50:9 we read: "For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country."

So if the people were wondering when the prophecies of Isaiah 13-14 and Jeremiah 50-51 would occur, the answer here is that they are yet future. The verb tenses are future - "I **will** shake mine hand upon them, and they **shall** be a spoil to their servants."

So **when** would it happen? Verses 10-13 will help us answer that question, but I think Daniel also helps us answer that question.

Daniel 2:44 - And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

A study of Daniel 2 shows us that "these kings" in Daniel 2:44 are the first century Roman emperors. And the powerful eternal kingdom of Daniel 2 is the church that was established in Acts 2.

The Babylonians may have worried about the Persians. The Persians may have worried about the Greeks. The Greeks may have worried about the Romans. The Romans may have worried about the Parthians and the Barbarians. But they all should instead have been worried

about the coming kingdom of Christ, which would sweep them all away!

ZECHARIAH 2:10-13

10 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. 11 And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee. 12 And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. 13 Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.

Before we study these verses, I think it would be helpful to briefly consider another question. The promises in this book are for the faithful people of God. At the time this book was written, the faithful people of God were the faithful Jews, many of whom had returned to Jerusalem and were rebuilding the temple. The immediate blessings in this book are directed to them. **But to whom are the future blessings directed? And a related question - who are the people of God today?**

In one way the answer to that question has never changed over the centuries, but in another way the answer is very different today. The answer has always been the same in the sense that God's people have always been the faithful remnant who love, trust, and obey him. That was true then, and it is true today. It has always been true.

But who are those people today? Look around. We in the church are those people today, and sadly (I will say, echoing Romans 9:2) the church today is primarily

composed of Gentiles. That's a very big change from the days of Zechariah, but the Bible is crystal clear on this point – we in the church are the people of God today.

1 Peter 2:9 – But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.

Romans 2:29 – But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Philippians 3:3 – For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Matthew 21:43 – Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Romans 11:5 – Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Galatians 3:7 – Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Ephesians 2:19–22 – Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom

ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Now back to verses 11-13. To whom are those verses directed? We just saw a big hint. Ephesians 2:22 described the church as a habitation of God – the dwelling place of God. Back to Zechariah 2:

- Look at verse 10: "I will **dwell** in the midst of thee."
- Look at verse 11: "I will **dwell** in the midst of thee."
- Look at verse 13: "for he is raised up out of his **holy habitation.**"

Let's turn to Isaiah for another big hint. First look here at verse 11: "And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people." Now look at Isaiah 2:2-3.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Those verses in Isaiah 2 were fulfilled when the church was established in Acts 2. How do we know that? Because Luke 24:47 and Acts 2 tell us so.

Luke 24:47 – And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

That verse from Luke 24 is a clear tie between Isaiah 2 and Acts 2. And Ephesians 2 gives us another such tie.

Ephesians 2:16-17 - And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

That is the peace that was prophesied in Isaiah 2 and that was preached in Acts 2.

These verses in Zechariah are saying the same thing as Isaiah 2 and pointing to the same great event - the establishment of the eternal, unshakable, immovable kingdom of Christ in Acts 2.

Psalms 2. Isaiah 2. Daniel 2. Joel 2. Zechariah 2. Acts 2. Ephesians 2. You can learn a great deal about the church just by sticking to the chapter two's of the Bible!

But how do we know that the focus of the vision has shifted from Zechariah's day to a future day? Most importantly we know it from our study of the rest of the Bible. We can see the same prophecies elsewhere (as in Isaiah 2), and we can see their fulfillment in Acts 2 (in the first century, 500 years later).

Also, we know that a shift in time has occurred from studying history. We know what did happen in Zechariah's day and what did not happen. We see God telling them that they won't need a wall, and then we see God telling them to build a wall. That also lets us know the time frame has shifted in this prophecy.

And we have an important textual indication - look at verse 11. "And many nations shall be joined to the LORD **in that day**, and shall be my people."

"In that day." That phrase occurs 22 times in Zechariah, and, as we will see, it usually indicates a significant shift forward in time. This is its first occurrence in the book.

The beautiful Messianic prophecy in Haggai 2 (that was being preached at this same time) also uses the phrase "in that day."

Haggai 2:23 - **In that day**, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.

So when did all of this happen?

- I will dwell in the midst of thee?
- Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people?
- The LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land?
- The LORD shall choose Jerusalem again?
- The LORD is raised up out of his holy habitation?

When did all of that happen? Don't we all know the answer to that question? Each of those promises was fulfilled in the first century when the promised Messiah came and established his promised eternal kingdom.

Ephesians 2:22 - In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Luke 2:30-32 - For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared

before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Romans 11:26-27 - And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Finally, notice that in this third vision we saw a part of the vision that was fulfilled in Zechariah's day and another part of the vision that was fulfilled when Jesus came and established his kingdom. Keep that in mind - we will see that type of dual fulfillment again.

CHAPTER 3

Zechariah 3 reminds me of Psalm 119:162 - "I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil." Once we go beneath the surface of this chapter, we will uncover wonderful lessons and assurances from God that explain why this is one of my most favorite chapters in the Bible.

ZECHARIAH 3:1

1 And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

This is Zechariah's fourth vision: the vision of Joshua.

"And he showed me Joshua." Who was Joshua?

First, this Joshua is not the famous Joshua. Instead, this Joshua was the current high priest, and this is not the only time we will see Joshua in this book.

Haggai mentions Joshua in the first verse of his book and also tells us that he was the high priest. As high priest, Joshua held the highest religious office among the returned exiles.

So we have answered our first question: who was Joshua? And that question was easy. The next question is more difficult - **why** did God show Joshua to Zechariah? And especially when Zechariah could have walked around and seen Joshua in person had he wanted to. Why did God show him Joshua in a vision?

We have two options. First, this may be a vision that is about Joshua himself. Second, Joshua may appear in this vision only as a figure for something else or someone else. So what is the answer?

I think we can rule out the first option. I think it is almost certain that this vision is not about Joshua the person, although some commentaries make valiant efforts to argue otherwise.

While the office of high priest was certainly significant, Joshua the person did not seem to have any particular significance apart from his office as far as we can tell from the text.

Also, we will later see Joshua receive a crown in Zechariah 6:11, which we know must be figurative of someone else because Joshua is from the tribe of Levi rather than the tribe of Judah. And that figurative appearance in Chapter 6 likely suggests that his appearance here in Chapter 3 is also figurative.

I think the context of this book and of this vision demands that we look beyond Joshua the man and instead look for something or someone who is being shown here using Joshua the High Priest as a figure.

So who or what is Joshua representing? We have two likely possibilities.

Either Joshua is representing the Jewish people or Joshua is representing Jesus, the perfect High Priest who was to come. Let's leave this question open for now until we have read more of the text.

But one thing we can say right now is that the high priest certainly acted as a representative for the people. He prayed for the people; he entered the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people; he bore the guilt of the people (Hebrews 9:7).

The high priest bore the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate, which showed that he represented the people of Israel before God.

Exodus 28:29 – And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually.

So we should not be surprised if Joshua is being shown here as a representative for the people.

Another thing we can say at this point is that Joshua's name may itself be a clue – his name means "God saves." But let's keep reading before we make up our mind.

Who else do we see in verse 1? We see the Angel of the Lord again – and again, it is possible that this is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus, in which case "angel" would just mean "messenger." We will have more to say on that point when we get to verse 2.

We also see Satan. What is Satan doing here?

The text says that Satan is "standing at his right hand to resist him," meaning that he is standing next to Joshua to accuse him.

Revelation 12:10 tells us that Satan accuses God's people before God day and night. And that description of Satan reminds us at once of the opening chapters of Job.

Whenever we sin, we should picture Satan rushing off to tell God what we just did! Satan is an accuser of God's people.

And Satan is the father of lies, and so there is no telling what lies Satan is telling God about us.

John 8:44 – Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

But we shouldn't be worried – God is an all-knowing, righteous judge. And we have another before him who is pleading our case.

1 Timothy 2:5 – For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

The scene here in verse 1 with Joshua and Satan reminds us of Psalm 109:6.

Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand.

How will God respond to Satan's accusations? Let's keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 3:2

2 And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?

Verse 1 told us that Joshua was standing before the Angel of the Lord, and verse 2 begins with a statement by the Lord directed at Satan.

This statement in verse 2 by the Lord creates another question - the **Lord** says, "the **Lord** rebuke thee." Is the Lord referring to himself there? And, if so, why doesn't he just rebuke Satan himself?

The most likely explanation is that "the Lord says" in verse 2 is an abbreviation for "the Angel of the Lord says." That makes sense from the context here, as well as the context of the previous verse in which the Angel of the Lord is introduced to the scene. Most commentaries agree:

Almost all expositors agree that the angel of Jehovah is the Speaker here who takes the name of Jehovah because of the intimate and mysterious relation he sustains to Him.

This would seem to be a strong indication that the Angel of the Lord here is divine, but I suppose it is possible that the phrase "the Lord said" in verse 2 is just shorthand for "the Lord said through his messenger." But I lean toward the view that we are seeing both God the Father and God the Son in these visions.

One reason I lean that way is because of another verse in the Old Testament where we see one Lord talking to another Lord, the first verse of Psalm 110, which is

the most often quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament.

Psalm 110:1 – The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

We know with certainty that those two Lords are God the Father and God the Son because of what Jesus said about that verse in Matthew 22:45 and Mark 12:37. And here in verse 2 we also see two Lord's. That is strong evidence!

In any event, the rebuke in verse 2 is a double rebuke from God, which means that it is a very harsh rebuke! God is not going to listen to anything Satan has to say about his people!

We have said already that a big reason Zechariah was written was to provide comfort and encouragement to the returned exiles. And they must have received tremendous comfort and encouragement from these verses. And I think we can, too.

In the previous chapter, God described his people as the apple of his eye. Here, God describes his people as having been chosen and as having been a brand plucked out of the fire.

They had been very close to total destruction, but God had chosen them and saved them like someone would pluck a burning brand out of the fire to keep it from being consumed. And now when Satan shows up to accuse their high priest, God makes it very clear that he is not going to listen to any of it.

That is how God responds to Satan's accusations, but God's response in support of Joshua here must have seemed very surprising. Why? Let's keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 3:3-4

3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. 4 And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

Verse 3 tells us something very unexpected about Joshua – he was clothed with filthy garments. And that was very unexpected for at least two reasons.

First, the high priest was supposed to be the very essence of purity. Under no circumstances was he to ever become defiled or unclean.

Leviticus 21:10–12 – And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes; Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother; Neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the Lord.

As an aside, do you recall a situation where that command not to rend his clothes was violated by the high priest? At the trial of Jesus in Matthew 26:65.

Second, the English word "filthy" in verse 3 does not even come close to what is being described here. The Hebrew word suggests the most vile of conditions. It literally means "befouled with excrement and vomit."

One commentator described the situation this way:

"Few verses in the Old Testament portray a more graphic or repugnant scene than verse 3."

The high priest's garments were supposed to be most holy, but Joshua's garments are pictured here as being soiled and defiled beyond imagination. This vision would have been extremely shocking and disturbing to those who heard about it and to Zechariah who saw it.

But look at what happens in verse 4. In verse 4, we have the beautiful picture of Joshua having his filthy garments taken away so that he can put on a change of clothing. And we also see in verse 4 something that we likely already suspected – these filthy garments are figurative of sin. "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment."

The filthy garments being taken away is a figure for iniquity being taken away. And the word "filthy" that is used here graphically makes the point that these sins could hardly have been any worse – and yet they are taken away. Joshua receives a change of clothing.

And if we think our robes apart from Christ would look any better than Joshua's robes, then we don't understand anything about sin! We too are cleansed, and we too change our garments and put on something new.

Galatians 3:27 – For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Romans 13:14 – But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Satan was likely telling God that these sins were so bad that they could never be forgiven, that the people

could never be trusted, that they would fall away quickly – but God was having none of that.

ZECHARIAH 3:5

5 And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.

Verse 5 is interesting – Zechariah is not just watching the vision; Zechariah is participating in the vision! Zechariah is the speaker in verse 5.

Leupold: "This is eloquent testimony to the eagerness with which Zechariah shared in all that was being revealed and to the graciousness of God who does not rebuke such zealous participation. The prophet is not made to feel that he has become guilty of unwarranted and presumptuous interference."

Why does Zechariah suggest that a mitre be placed on Joshua's head? The priestly mitre that was normally worn by priests bore the inscription, "Holy to the Lord."

Exodus 28:36–37 – And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE Lord. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be.

Commentaries offer numerous and sometimes elaborate explanations for this mitre, but perhaps the best explanation is the simplest explanation: Zechariah was

concerned that the priest be fully outfitted from head to toe!

Zechariah had just witnessed a very shocking scene involving the high priest, and he wanted to see things put right as quickly as they could be!

Let's now go back to our earlier question – who is Joshua representing in this vision?

As we said, we really have only two choices – either Joshua is being used as a figure for the returned exiles or Joshua is being used here as a figure for Jesus, the perfect high priest who was yet to come.

We might think we can rule out Jesus immediately because of the filthy garments that represent iniquity.

Hebrews 4:15 – For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, **yet without sin.**

How could this figure of the filthy garments ever be used for the sinless Christ? Perhaps Paul answers that question.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – For **he hath made him to be sin** for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

That is, the filthy garments could depict **our** sin, which the sinless Son of God bore for us on that cross.

But there are two problems with the view that Joshua is being used as a figure for Christ – a first problem that we can already see and a second problem that we will see in the next two verses.

First, the problem we can already see is that if Joshua is depicting Christ, and if the Angel of the Lord is the preincarnate Christ – then we are hearing Jesus talk to himself in these verses, and that would seem odd.

But the second problem in saying that Joshua depicts Jesus is even harder to overcome (and in fact *impossible* to overcome) – Joshua is *admonished* in the next two verses.

ZECHARIAH 3:6-7

6 And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, 7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.

Joshua is admonished to walk in God's ways and to keep God's charge in verse 7. I think verse 7 answers the question of whom Joshua is representing.

The "if then" admonishing statement in verse 7 is certainly something that would be directed to the people of God, but that is not something that could ever be directed to the Son of God.

Joshua, a high priest for the people of God, is being used here in Chapter 3 as a figure for the people of God. Joshua, the high priest, was their representative in life, and Joshua, the high priest, is their representative in this vision.

If the people walk in the ways of God and keep the charge of God, then the people will continue to enjoy God's gracious favor, just as the high priest would continue in his office, unlike many of his failed

predecessors who had turned their back on God and on his people.

The final phrase in verse 6 ("I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by") likely refers to the special access that the high priest had in the temple when he officiated on behalf of the people.

So I think that Joshua in verses 1-7 represents the people of God – the people who had sinned horribly, the people who had been exiled and almost destroyed, the people who had been snatched out of that situation as a brand being plucked from the fire, and the people who now once again found themselves in Jerusalem.

They must have been filled with guilt and regret over what they had done. They were standing among the ruins of their city and their temple – ruins that had come about because of their disobedience. They must have wondered how such a sinful people could ever be used by God to bring about the wonderful blessings and promises that they were hearing about from Haggai and Zechariah.

This vision is an answer to that question. God had saved them, God had chosen them, and God had cleansed them. God had plucked them out of the fire and given them clean garments. All was as before; the relationship had been restored. The temple was being rebuilt and soon the city would be rebuilt as well.

The people needed a message of encouragement, and it would be difficult to imagine a more encouraging message than this one!

ZECHARIAH 3:8-10

**8 Hear now, O Joshua the high priest,
thou, and thy fellows that sit before
thee: for they are men wondered at: for,
behold, I will bring forth my servant**

the BRANCH. 9 For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. 10 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.

We see a big shift in verse 8 that is indicated by the phrase "hear now" that begins verse 8. We also see a clue to this shift in verse 10, which begins with the phrase "in that day." Earlier, we talked about the importance of that phrase in this book for letting us know when there has been a shift forward in time.

Verse 8 tells us that Zechariah has a message for Joshua and for the other priests ("the fellows that sit before thee"). Why did the priests need a special message?

To anyone (such as Haggai) who still remembered the old temple, it must have seemed that the glories of the priesthood were just a thing of the past. Could these priests ever again rise to the heights they had once enjoyed?

The situation was similar to that found in Isaiah 11, but there the focus was on the lowly house of David, whose glories seemed all but extinct. God through Isaiah assured them that that would not be true forever.

Isaiah 11:1 – And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

And the message here to Zechariah and his fellow priests about the priesthood is the same message that Isaiah received in Isaiah 11 about the house of David

- **a branch is coming!** "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH."

A branch is coming from the stem of Jesse in Isaiah 11:1, and a branch is coming out of the priesthood in Zechariah 3:8. We also see this same connection in Jeremiah 33.

Jeremiah 33:15 - In those days, and at that time, will I cause **the Branch of righteousness** to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

Jeremiah 33:20-21 - Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; **and with the Levites the priests, my ministers.**

When Jesus came he would revive the glory of the house of David when he sat upon the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords, and Jesus would revive the glories of the priesthood when he became our perfect high priest.

Hebrews 7:26 - For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Of this wonderful fact, Joshua and his fellow priests were continual reminders or "wonder-signs" as verse 8 calls them. Here is how the ASV translated verse 8.

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee;

for they are men that are a sign: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch.

Let's look now at verse 9, which is one of the most difficult and debated verses in the entire Bible.

"For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes."

What is the stone in verse 9? I have yet to find any two commentaries that agree on the answer to that question. Here are some answers that have been proposed.

- The stone is a foundation stone of the temple.
- The stone is a stone crowning the temple structure.
- The stone is a stone that took the place of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.
- The stone is a symbol of Zion.
- The stone is a precious stone in the crown worn by Zerubbabel. (We will meet Zerubbabel in Chapter 4, but for now just note that he was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, and thus he was in the royal line of King David, but he was not a king.)
- The stone is a precious stone that adorned one of Zerubbabel's royal garments.
- The stone is some sort of amulet.
- The stone is a signet in the ring of the Almighty himself.

- The stone is a stone of remembrance such as those found on the breastplate or shoulder of the high priest.

None of those suggestions really jumps out to me as the best answer.

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself, so let's put the commentaries aside and look at the clues the text itself provides: "upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." So what do we have?

- A stone.
- Seven eyes on the stone.
- An engraving on the stone engraved by God.
- The iniquity is removed in one day.
- And we have the time frame from verse 8: "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH."

Let's look first at the hardest of those clues – the seven eyes. We will see them again in Zechariah 4:10, when we meet Zerubbabel.

For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; **they are the eyes of the Lord**, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

We also see that same figure in Revelation 5:6.

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb

as it had been slain, having seven horns and **seven eyes**, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Eyes usually depict knowledge and the number seven depicts perfection, so perhaps the seven eyes depict the perfect knowledge of God – God knows everything that can be known.

If we recall that horns depict power, then the seven horns in Revelation 5:6 likely denote the perfect power of God. And so Revelation 5:6 is using the seven horns and the seven eyes to say that Christ the Lamb has perfect knowledge and perfect power.

The main thing to take away from Revelation 5:6 is that the seven eyes were there applied to Jesus – and we saw Jesus here in the prior verse of Zechariah 3 – "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH."

What about the engraving? Let me ask a related question: What do we do when we have something important that we don't want to lose? Don't we write our name on it?

I think that is what we are seeing here with this engraved stone. Where else do we see God writing his name on something?

2 Timothy 2:19 – Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this **seal**, The Lord knoweth them that are his.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 – Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also **sealed** us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

That seal is an indication of ownership. God deals us. Why? "The Lord knoweth them that are his." God sets his seal upon us to show that we are his.

You may already see where I am headed here, so let's cut to the chase – what does the stone mean here? I think Daniel answers that question for us.

Daniel 2:34 – Thou sawest till that a **stone** was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.

Daniel 2:44 – And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

So what is the stone? I think the stone in Zechariah 3 is the same as the stone in Daniel 2. I think this stone represents the body of Christ, the church of Christ, the eternal kingdom of Christ.

Why seven eyes on the stone? The seven eyes are a symbol for the perfect knowledge of Jesus, who is the head of the church. Remember that we just saw Satan standing by the people of God to accuse them. Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus has perfect knowledge?

Why is there an engraving on the stone engraved by God? We just talked about that. The church belongs to Christ; it is the church of Christ. (And that is not our name! It is our description! We are the Lord's church – the church built by Christ; the church bought by Christ; the church owned by Christ; the church of Christ.) God has placed his seal on us. We are God's people. We are not our own.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

If the seven eyes represent the Holy Spirit, which some suggest and which is certainly possible, then the seven eyes and the engraving show that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13 – In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.

The second half of verse 9 says, "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." What does it mean that the iniquity is removed in one day?

That one day must be the one day of the cross, when the new covenant came into effect.

Hebrews 9:16 – For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

Hebrews 9:26 – But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

And we have the all-important time frame from verse 8: "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH," which is the same first century time frame in which the kingdom was established in Acts 2.

I think this "one day" is a rare example where we should take a number literally – why? Because there is no apparent figurative significance, and because the context is pointing to the literal one day in which iniquity was removed at the cross.

So now that we have looked at all of the evidence (this week and last week), what is the stone of verse 9? I think it is the church of Christ.

This stone in Zechariah 3 is the stone in Daniel 2, which Daniel tells us is the kingdom made without hands that would sweep away all of the kingdoms of this earth!

God is telling these priests that they are more important than they could possibly imagine. Why? Because they are part of God's plan to bless the entire world through the Messiah and to establish an eternal kingdom that would sweep away all of the kingdoms of this world.

And history tells us that the priesthood served as a backstop against the Greek culture that would soon threaten to consume Judaism. The Maccabeans behind the Maccabean Revolt from 167 to 160 BC were priests. We will study that history when we get to Chapter 9.

What does verse 10 mean?

In that day, saith the LORD of hosts,
shall ye call every man his neighbour
under the vine and under the fig tree.

Verse 10 confirms that we are correct in concluding that verse 9 is pointing to the church. Why? Because verse 10 is painting a beautiful picture of peace, and that is what God brought to the world when he established his church.

Isaiah 2:4 – And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Ephesians 2:14-17 – For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken

down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

So what is the message of the fourth vision? The removal of the filthy clothes from Joshua was a message of comfort and encouragement to the people – God had not forgotten them. Instead, God had restored them to their former position, and God was prepared to bless them and protect them if they would walk in his ways.

The vision also includes a message of comfort and encouragement to Joshua and the other priests. They would play a vital role in the time between the testaments when Greek culture threatened to dilute and destroy Judaism. Their work was vital to the plan of God, and they were a sign of the perfect high priest who would soon come to bless the entire world.

CHAPTER 4

ZECHARIAH 4:1-3

And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, 2 And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: 3 And two olive trees by it, one upon the right

side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.

This is Zechariah's fifth vision: the vision of the lamp stand.

Zechariah is awakened by the angel in verse 1, but he is not being awakened from sleep. Instead, we are told he was awakened "as a man that is wakened out of his sleep." It was like he had been asleep, but we are not told he was actually asleep.

Leupold: "Actual sleep would not be described thus. The prophet remained awake throughout this memorable night. What the words do convey is that the state of mind essential to appropriating divine visions is so much above the ordinary waking state in a man's life as the waking state is above the state of sleep."

After Zechariah was spiritually awakened to the vision, the angel asks him in verse 2 what he is seeing. What Zechariah sees is a lampstand, or in Hebrew, a menorah. We are reminded at once of a similar lampstand in the Tabernacle.

Exodus 25:31 - And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same.

Ten lampstands had been created for the first temple (1 Kings 7:49), and they had been carried off to Babylon (Jeremiah 52:19).

But this lampstand includes some features that were not present in the Tabernacle lampstand.

- First, there is above it (literally, "over its head") a rounded bowl.
- Second, there are seven pipes running from this bowl to each of the seven lamps.
- Third, there are two olive trees, one on either side of the bowl.

Before we look at each of those features, let's look more closely at the seven pipes running to the seven lamps.

The KJV has the phrase "seven pipes to the seven lamps," which sounds like one pipe to one lamp. But the Hebrew better supports the view that there were seven pipes running to *each* of the seven lamps, meaning that there were a total of 49 pipes.

A literal translation would be "seven and seven pipes to the lamps." "Seven and seven pipes" is the Hebrew way of expressing the distributive idea of seven to each. We see that same usage elsewhere:

1 Chronicles 20:6 – And yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant.

Just as the Hebrew in our verse here uses "seven and seven," the description of that giant in Hebrew uses "six and six" to denote six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot.

So the better view is that each lamp had seven pipes running to it. Yes, that makes for an unusual looking lamp, but perhaps that unusual description is intended to convey an unusual thought.

What we should not do is rewrite the text to make it more like what we would expect to see, which is what most translations (including the KJV) do here.

The ASV correctly translates the verse:

And he said unto me, What seest thou?
And I said, I have seen, and, behold, a
candlestick all of gold, with its bowl
upon the top of it, and its seven lamps
thereon; there are seven pipes to **each**
of the lamps, which are upon the top
thereof.

So what is being conveyed by these distinctive features? The bowl, the pipes, and the olive trees? To understand what those features of the lampstand denote, we first need to understand what the lampstand itself denotes.

Have you ever found the perfect gift for someone far ahead of the event for which the gift will be given? You can't wait for them to open the gift and enjoy the gift, but wait you must. It's a Christmas gift, and you bought it in July! You give them a few hints – you found the perfect gift, they will love it, and the anticipation builds.

That is how God felt about the church in the Old Testament. God was longing for his people to see the wonderful kingdom that he was preparing for them. It was (so to speak) a present under our tree, but all we could see at the time were the outlines of the package. God showed us the package from different directions, but we could not open it yet. That great day did not come until Acts 2.

This lampstand is the church. What else could it be?

Even though it was modeled after the lampstand in the temple, we know the object of this figure was not something that existed under the old system. Why?

Because it is deliberately shown as having features that are different from what would have been seen under the old system. Plus we have the many New Testament descriptions of God's people to compare with this figure.

Matthew 5:14-15 – Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Luke 12:35 – Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.

Philippians 2:15 – That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.

Revelation 1:20 – The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

This lampstand is the church.

We haven't said too much about the false doctrine of premillennialism in our study of Zechariah, and I don't plan to say much. But we can say one thing now: premillennialism is an insult to God.

The premillennialist denies that the eternal kingdom of Daniel 2 is the church, and denies that any of these wonderful images in Zechariah are showing us the church. Why? Because they say that the church is not wonderful enough to match these images. They say that

these wonderful images must instead be pointing to something better than the church.

Remember my "gift in July" story? How would you feel when the great day finally came, the gift was opened at last, and the recipient said, "What a let down! I was expecting something much better than that! Did you keep the receipt?"

That is exactly what the premillennialist is saying to God! "Did you keep the receipt?" Of all the ungodly features of premillennialism – and there are many – that one may be the worst.

Romans 1:21 – Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.

If you're starting to think the answer to every question in this book is the church, you're not far from right!

God wanted his people to know that something wonderful was coming – and, of course, that something wonderful cannot be separated from the *someone* wonderful who was coming to establish it, to redeem it, to shed his blood for it, and to be the head of it. The church of Christ is the body of Christ – you cannot separate the church from Christ. Those who belittle the church are belittling Christ.

Back to the lampstand. How do the three distinctive features (the bowl, the pipes, and the olive trees) depict the church? Let's keep reading for answers to those questions.

ZECHARIAH 4:4-5

4 So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? 5 Then the angel that

talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

Zechariah has the same question that we have – what are these?

We know from verse 1, that this angel (or messenger) is the same angel who had been speaking to Zechariah before, which suggests we are once again hearing from the Angel of the Lord. As we have now said many times, this may be (and perhaps we can say now, most likely is) a preincarnate appearance of Jesus.

In verse 5, Zechariah is asked, "Knowest thou not what these be?" And Zechariah gives an honest and understandable response – No!

But that the question in verse 5 was asked tells us that Zechariah *could* have known, and perhaps even *should* have known, what these things were. Else, I don't think that question would have been asked.

But how could Zechariah have known? Because although the Old Testament was not yet complete, it was almost complete – and every page of the Old Testament was pointing to Christ and his coming kingdom. And if Zechariah was expected to understand it based only on a *partial* revelation, what must be expected of us?

ZECHARIAH 4:6

6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

I suspect that around this time Zechariah was thinking to himself, "How in the world could I have been expected to know that!"

And I suspect that most of us, after reading these verses, are left with the feeling that the answer in verse 6 does not really seem to fit with the question in verse 5. But, of course, that just means we need to look a little more closely!

The first thing we discern from the answer in verse 6 is that apparently this vision was intended to convey a message of some sort to someone named Zerubbabel. So let's start there: who was Zerubbabel?

Zerubbabel was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, who had been carried away as a captive by Nebuchadnezzar, imprisoned for 37 years, and later released to occupy a place in the Babylonian king's household. The crucial fact we need to know about Zerubbabel was that he was of the royal line of King David.

Why was that important? Because God has promised King David that one of his descendants would occupy the throne of David forever – and for that promise to come to pass, there had to be a line of David from which the Messiah could come into this world.

Psalm 89:3-4 – I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations.

It was vital that a lineal descendant of King David return to Jerusalem so that one day the King of kings could occupy the throne of David – which Luke 1:32 and Acts 2:30 tell us is what Jesus did in the first century when he established his eternal kingdom. Zerubbabel, the godly grandson of the wicked King Jehoiachin, was a vital link in God's plan of redemption.

But even Zerubbabel's name was a reminder of how far God's people had fallen – it means *seed of Babylon!*

And although Zerubbabel was from the royal line – Zerubbabel was **not** a king. There was no earthly Jewish king – their current king was a Persian monarch! One day a king from the line of David would again occupy the throne of David, but that day was about 500 years away.

Do we find Zerrubbabel anywhere in the genealogy of Christ? Yes. Luke traces the genealogy from King David through his son Nathan, while Matthew traces the genealogy through Solomon. But the two lines cross in Zerubbabel and his father, Shealtiel.

Matthew 1:12 – And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel.

Luke 3:27 – Which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri.

To say that those two verses raise some interesting questions is quite an understatement!

We find Shealtiel and his son Zerubbabel in both Matthew's genealogy of Jesus and Luke's genealogy of Jesus, and yet Shealtiel's father is different in each, as is Zerubbabel's son in each. How is that all explained?

One possible explanation is that the Zerubbabel and Shealtiel in Matthew and the Zerubbabel and Shealtiel in Luke are different father and son pairs. Yes, the names are the same between Matthew and Luke, but that is about where the similarity ends. As we just mentioned, they have different fathers and different sons. Also, they are descended from different sons of David, with Matthew going back to Solomon and Luke going back to Nathan. Also, if you count back from Jesus to Zerubbabel, you get eleven generations in

Matthew and twenty generations in Luke (although there may be some gaps in Matthew's genealogy).

But what if Zerubbabel and Shealtiel are the same people in both genealogies? Then how do we explain the different fathers of Shealtiel – Neri in Luke and Jechonias in Matthew? In that case, the most likely explanation is that Shealtiel was the product of a *levirate* marriage. (The word "levirate" does not come from the name Levi, but rather from the Latin word "*levir*" for a husband's brother.)

A levirate marriage occurred when a man died childless. Rather than have that man's line come to an end, his brother would father a child with his widow, and that child would then legally be the heir of the man who had died childless (Deuteronomy 25:5–10). In this case, Neri would have died childless, and his brother, Jechonias (who was King Jehoiachin) would have fathered a child with Neri's widow. In that case, either Neri or Jechonias could be referred to as the father of Shealtiel.

But that does not entirely solve the problem for us. If Neri and Jehoiachin were brothers, then why don't they have the same father? Matthew 1:11 tells us that Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin, and Luke 3:28 tells us that Melchi was the father of Neri.

The answer is simple – if this theory is correct, then they must have been half-brothers with the same mother but different fathers. That would also explain how Zerubbabel could appear in both genealogies of Christ even though one traces down through Nathan and the other traces down through Solomon.

Do we see a levirate marriage anywhere else in the Bible other than with Shealtiel? Yes – we see it with Zerubbabel!

In 1 Chronicles 3:19 we read that Zerubbabel's father was Pedaiah, and in Ezra 3:2 we read that Zerubbabel's

father was Shealtiel (as say Matthew and Luke). Again, the most likely explanation was a levirate marriage.

Should it surprise us to see so many levirate marriages in the royal line? Not really, for two reasons.

In a royal line, you would expect siblings to have a higher death rate than normal, and, in a royal line, you would expect an increased concern with maintaining family lines. Putting those two things together suggests that one might expect to see *more* levirate marriages in a royal line than elsewhere.

Another possible explanation for having two fathers is adoption, which is likewise something that one might expect to see more of than usual in royal families.

A king whose brother had died (perhaps with a little help from the king!) might be interested in keeping a close eye on his royal nephews. We see an example of adoption in the book of Esther.

Esther 2:7 – And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

We need to pause and consider one more question about this before we move on. Jehoiachin/Jeconiah was such an evil king that Jeremiah 22:30 said:

"thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah."

And yet right there in Matthew 1:12 we find King Jehoiachin listed among the ancestors of Jesus. How is that explained?

First, I think the phrase "in his days" in Jeremiah 22:30 is important – the focus of that verse was on the lifetime of Jehoiachin. He would not live to see any of his seed ruling from the throne of David – and we know that he did not.

Second, we should compare Jeremiah 22:30 with Jeremiah 36:30 –

"Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost."

That verse was written about Jehoiachin's father even though Jehoiachin did sit on David's throne for about three months! Yes, he sat on the throne, but he was a powerless puppet king. Again, the point of Jeremiah 36:30 is that Jehoiakim would not have a son who would "sit enthroned" where the Hebrew word used there denotes permanence and security. We see a similar pronouncement about Jehoiachin in Jeremiah 22:30.

Third, even if Jeremiah 22:30 was a curse on Jehoiachin and all his future descendants (as some suggest), that curse seems to have been lifted. Jeremiah 22:24 says,

"As I live, saith the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence."

And yet in Haggai 2:23 we read,

"In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet:

for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD
of hosts."

The ring came off, but the ring was put back on.

So now back to Zerubbabel in verse 6. He was of the Davidic line, and Ezra 3:2 tells us that he was the leader of the people after their return from exile along with Joshua the high priest, whom we have already met.

This vision was intended as a message for Zerubbabel – what was that message? It came in several parts. Here is the first part from verse 6:

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

This statement looks almost like a motto – and it would be a good motto for God's people at any time in history. If you ever spot a verse from Zechariah hanging on someone's wall, it will most likely be this verse – and it was a message for Zerubbabel!

Zerubbabel was the local political leader of the people, and he needed to know that if the people of God were going to be successful in what they needed to do, it would not be because of Zerubbabel, it would be because of God.

That's a good message for our current politicians or for any leader! There is always a temptation to say, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17). Previous kings had forgotten this lesson, and, although Zerubbabel was not a king, he was a leader, and he needed to hear this reminder.

But let's not forget our context. Verse 6 does not appear here all by itself; it is surrounded by a lot of other verses. And the verses surrounding it here are describing a lampstand that we have already deter-

mined is showing us the church. How is that statement in verse 6 an explanation of the vision of the lampstand? How is it related to the church? *Not by the might of man. Not by the power of man.* Once again we turn to Daniel for the answer.

Daniel 2:44-45 - And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone **was cut out of the mountain without hands**, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

The coming eternal kingdom would not come because of the might of man or the power of man. Instead, it would come from God.

Oh, but "*our church*" (as they tellingly refer to it) is a mega-church! We have buildings and campuses all over town. We have thousands of members. We have universities. We have hospitals. Our pastor flies around in a helicopter and sells his book on Oprah. Our TV show is seen by millions. *Look at what we have built!*

Not by the might of man. Not by the power of man. *If you have built it, then it is not the Lord's church.* If you have built it, it is not the eternal kingdom made without hands. The church is not man-made! That is the message here to Zechariah, and 2500 years later

it is still a message that the world desperately needs to hear and understand.

Acts 17:24-25 – God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

That was the first part of the message to Zerubbabel. The second part of the message to Zerubbabel is in verse 7.

ZECHARIAH 4:7

7 Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

Verse 6 told us that the power of man would not accomplish what needed to be done – and yet here in the very next verse we see Zerubbabel leveling a mountain! How do we explain that?

Simple. Just as Joshua was used earlier to depict someone else (the people of God), Zerubbabel is also being used here as a figure for someone else. Who?

Well, how many people do we know who can level mountains? How many people do we know who, although man, are also God – so that what they do is not by the power of man, but instead is by the power of God? I can think of only one because there is only one – Jesus. Jesus is the mountain leveler!

Zerubbabel, the descendant of King David, is being used here as a figure for the descendant of King David who was yet to come, but who would once again occupy the throne of David and who would reign as King of kings and Lord of lords!

But what does verse 7 mean? What is this great mountain? How will it become a plain? Turn to Daniel again:

Daniel 2:44 – And the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms.

This great mountain represents any world power that would try to prevent God from establishing his eternal kingdom. Babylon? Persia? Greece? Rome? All great mountains, but all turned into plains by Jesus. All broken into pieces and consumed by the church of Christ.

Do we believe it? If we don't, then that means we think Daniel was a false prophet! Daniel 2:44 said it would happen in the first century, and that is when it happened.

When did Babylon finally get what it deserved? When did Rome get what it deserved? "It shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms." You mean that happened to Rome in the first century? Rome didn't fall for centuries after that time. True – but God does not see things the way we do. We might have thought Rome looked pretty powerful, but God knew they were not. God knew that Rome had been judged and sentenced. God knew that Rome's fate was certain.

Need more evidence? We see a mountain here in Zechariah 4, and we see another great mountain in Revelation 8.

Revelation 8:8 – And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea.

That great burning mountain was Rome. Rome thought it could obliterate Christianity and destroy the church. And who would have thought otherwise? Rome was the greatest power the world had ever known – and the church was just a ragtag bunch of outcasts, many of whom were Roman slaves. Who would have bet on the church in that contest?

Daniel would have! Anyone who believed Daniel would have. Anyone who believed Zechariah would have. Anyone who wanted a sure bet would have. Rome never stood a chance! Rome's fate was sealed 500 years earlier!

Matthew 17:20 – And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Do we think that verse is an exaggeration? Just hyperbole? No. The casting of the mountain of Rome into the sea in Revelation 8:8 came about because of the prayers of the saints in Revelation 5:8 and 6:10.

Revelation is talking about Rome, but Jeremiah described **Babylon** the same way:

Jeremiah 51:25 – Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain.

And what if we are confronted by some great destroying mountain today? What should we do? That answer has never changed.

Matthew 17:20 – If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Back to verse 7 – what is the headstone in verse 7?

The word modifying stone appears only here in the Old Testament, so we can't be certain of the meaning, but this "headstone" is *not* a tombstone. One possible translation is "top stone." If so, it signifies the stone that marks the completion of a structure. It is the last stone to be fitted into place.

This top stone marks the completion of some great work – which here is the completion of the church when it was established in Acts 2. That view fits perfectly with the time frame in Daniel 2:44 as to when these mountains would be leveled – in the days of those (first century) kings!

But another possible translation is "beginning stone." The beginning stone was the corner stone, and, of course, that view also fits perfectly with our context.

Psalms 118:22 – The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

1 Peter 2:6 – Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

Ephesians 2:20 – And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

So whether it is the top stone or the beginning stone, both are descriptions of Christ and his church.

ZECHARIAH 4:8-9

8 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.

I think what we are seeing here is a prophecy with a dual fulfillment. One fulfillment that was near term and another fulfillment that was about 500 years away. Why?

Because the context of verse 7 suggests that verse 8 also has a fulfillment in Christ. The Zerubbabel in verse 7 cannot be the literal Zerubbabel – he was in no position to lay waste to any mountains! And so it seems natural to conclude that verse 8 is also pointing to Christ.

But verse 9 also says that God was giving a sign to the people of Zechariah's day so that they would know that Zechariah had been sent by God. That suggests we would also see a near term fulfillment. One far and one near. What then are the two fulfillments?

The first is simple – the people under the leadership of Zerubbabel had just laid the foundation of the temple. God is telling them here that they will finish the temple, also under the leadership of Zerubbabel. And we know that happened. The temple was completed a few years later in 515 BC.

But verse 7 and (in a moment) verse 10 tell us that this prophecy involves more than just the completion of a physical structure. It involves more than just the earthly man-made temple. It also involves the one who was greater than the temple, and it involves his eternal kingdom not made with human hands.

The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it.

Let's start with the second half of that verse – his hands shall also finish it. If that verse is talking about the church – and we know that it is because the focus of this vision is the lampstand representing the church – then whose hands can it be who finished it?

It can only be the hands of God, the hands of Christ, who finished "this house" in verse 9. What is "this house"? It is the household of God, which is the church (Ephesians 2:19), which we know was not made with human hands (Daniel 2:44–45).

What about the first half of the verse? "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house." Who is that?

It could apply to either the actual Zerubbabel or to Christ. The verse could be saying, Zerubbabel has laid this foundation you are looking at, but the one to come from the line of King David through Zerubbabel, that is Christ, will finish it. Hebrews 12:2 describes Jesus as the finisher.

But the verse could also be saying that Jesus both started the work and would finish the work – that he was behind everything that was being done, from start to finish. Revelation 13:8 tells us that Jesus was "slain from the foundation of the world." Ephesians 1:4 tells us that the church was part of God's plan "before the foundation of the world."

So which is it? It could be either (or both!), but if I had to choose I would lean toward the first option – that earthly Zerubbabel had started the project, but heavenly Zerubbabel would finish the project. That view has a nice parallel with what the New Testament says about Adam and Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:45 – And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Romans 5:17 – For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.

There is one other possibility for the phrase "his hands shall also finish it."

The word used here for "finish" is used elsewhere to refer to bringing an end to a life (Isaiah 38:12, Job 6:9, Ezekiel 22:12). Also, while every other time this verb appears in the Old Testament it has an object, here the object is missing.

Most translations assume the object is the house – that is, the house is being finished. But perhaps the omission of the object in the Hebrew is intended to focus our attention on the one who was greater than the temple – the one who would give his life as a sacrifice for his people.

If anyone has any doubts about whether Zerubbabel is a figure for Christ, those doubts should be dispelled by verse 10 – which, by the way, is one of my favorite verses in the entire Bible.

ZECHARIAH 4:10

10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

"Things today are nothing like what they used to be." ... "Remember the beautiful temple we used to have before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it? This new temple will be nothing like our old one." ... "Look at that foundation – look at how small it is. Is that the best we can do?" ... "We are never going to attract any new proselytes if that is all we have." ... "And we are out in the middle of nowhere! Can't we rebuild the temple back in Babylon?" ... "Fifty years ago there was a temple on every corner. Now look at what we have!"

It seems that some in Zechariah's day had that attitude. Some of the older people had seen the old temple prior to its destruction – and some of them must have been making comparisons with the new temple. And it seems that those comparisons had caused some of them to despise the new temple. It was so small and puny – nothing like what they had before! It was not even worth building! And to those people, God had a question: "For who hath despised the day of small things?" I love that question! Who indeed!

Do you wonder if we are still reading about the church? Listen to Jesus:

Matthew 13:31-32 – The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a

tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

We might ask who hath despised the mustard seed? Or, as Paul asked, "Despise ye the church of God?" (1 Corinthians 11:22).

We should never despise the small things because that is how God works in this world today, and that is how God has always worked in this world. God takes the small things of this world and turns them into great and wonderful things! God has always worked through a small faithful remnant – both then and today.

1 Corinthians 1:28 – And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.

God's eternal plan to bless the entire world came to fruition in the form of a small baby asleep in a manger. "For who hath despised the day of small things?" Let's make sure that question can never be directed to us!

"There is lasting comfort for the church in this thought. Small tasks faithfully performed in the church experience God's watchful care and are a source of joy to the Almighty. Then nothing in the kingdom is small, and the joy of standing in His service grows tremendously."

For those who were despising the small things, God had something else to say in verse 10.

For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

What does that mean? Simple – those who were despising the small things would rejoice when they finally understood the big things that would come from that small thing that some were despising. They would rejoice when they saw Christ holding the plummet.

Two questions – how do we know Zerubbabel here is prefiguring Christ, and what is a plummet?

Look at verse 10 for the first question – they would not just see Zerubbabel, but they would see "Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." **Those seven** are the seven we saw in 3:9.

"For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be **seven eyes**: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."

That verse followed a verse talking about the Branch, and that stone was the church. These seven in 4:10 are the seven eyes on the church in 3:9. That Zerubbabel has "these seven" means that he has that stone, which means that he has the church. This Zerubbabel is a figure for Christ.

Second question – what is a plummet? It is a plumb or a plumb line. Literally, it means a tin stone. It would have been used during the construction of the temple to make sure everything was straight and true. Jesus carries just such a plumb line!

Amos 7:7 – Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand.

And that Jesus is carrying a plumb line means that he is our plumb line. Jesus is our perfect example,

which is the function of a plumb line. Everything is measured against the plumb line.

1 John 2:6 – He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Jesus is our standard in all things. He is our plumb line.

Remember how this vision started? With a lampstand having a bowl, having 49 pipes, and having two olive trees. What did that mean?

Verses 11–14 finally give us the answer to that question. But before we look at the answer, let's look at another question. Are these verses out of order?

Wouldn't we expect verses 11–14 to come right after verse 5? Many commentators think so, and they proceed to shift sections of the book all around to match how they would have written it. But they did not write it. Zechariah wrote it by inspiration, which means that God wrote it. And what that means is that the order of these verses is perfect.

Perhaps the most important thing that Zechariah and Zerubbabel needed to hear was verse 6 – which is why it came first.

ZECHARIAH 4:11-14

11 Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? 12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? 13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be?

And I said, No, my lord. 14 Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

Zechariah asks what the two olive trees mean. And, apparently remembering another detail, he asks the question again, but adds in a question about "the two golden pipes" that empty oil out of themselves.

Zechariah might have thought the angel was going to explain this back in verse 6, but, as we discussed, the angel's answer jumped past the individual meanings of the items that made up the lampstand and instead focused on what the overall vision meant. Zechariah also wants a lower level explanation, and so he has asks these additional questions.

The two golden pipes apparently connect the olive trees or olive branches to the golden bowl so that the bowl can collect olive oil. These pipes are different from the 49 pipes mentioned in verses 1-3, which did not mention these two pipes at all. But Zechariah remembers them, and he asks about them here.

Interestingly, what Zechariah does *not* ask about are the 49 pipes from verses 1-3, but I think we can answer that question ourselves based on what we see here.

So let's begin with an easy one - what are the two olive trees? Why is that easy? Because verse 14 gives us the inspired answer: "These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

But what does the answer mean? That question is a little harder! Before we answer that, let's look at the other clues. The two olive trees provide oil that flows to the lamps first through two pipes and then through 49 pipes, with each of the seven lamps receiving oil from seven pipes.

That's a lot of sevens! Seven means divine perfection. When symbolic numbers are multiplied by themselves it denotes emphasis. For example, twelve depicts God's people and ten depicts completeness, so later in Revelation, the number 144000 (twelve times twelve times ten times ten time ten) will depict ALL of God's people - no one is left out.

What all of these sevens tell us is that we need to start looking for Christ in these verses, or perhaps the body of Christ, his church.

We often start seeing lots of sevens when God tells us about the kingdom of Christ. The book of Revelation, for example, is focused on the victory of Christ and his church, and that book is entirely structured around the number 7. It begins with seven letters to the churches, and then the vision consists of 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 bowls.

What about the lamps? Well, what does a lamp do? A lamp provides light. Does it provide light in and of itself? No, it needs fuel. In this case, the fuel is the oil. The seven lamps are not operating by their own power but by power supplied through the seven pipes running to each of the seven lamps - that is, by power supplied by God.

In the old covenant, olive oil was associated with the lampstands in two ways. It was used to anoint the items in the tabernacle (Exodus 30:25), and it was used as fuel for the lights on the lampstand (Exodus 27:20).

So far so good with what we said earlier - the lampstand is the church, and it shines the light of Christ into the world. We are not the source of that light. That light comes from Christ. We are to reflect that light from Christ.

John 8:12 - Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light of the**

world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

John 12:35-36 – Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. **While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.**

2 Corinthians 4:6 – For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, **hath shined in our hearts, to give the light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So what then are the two olive trees? What do we know about them?

- They "stand by the Lord of the whole earth."
- They provide the oil that creates the light.
- There are two of them.

What would we expect the two olive trees to be? Well, Jesus stands by the Lord of the whole earth by reigning at his right hand (Hebrews 8:1, 10:12, 12:2). And Jesus provides the oil, the power, that provides the light that shines from the church. (See the verses we just read.) And what does the word "Christ" mean? It means "anointed one."

Luke 4:17-21 – The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, **because he hath anointed me** to preach the gospel to the poor. (quoting Isaiah 61:1)

But if these olive trees represent Christ, then why are there *two* of them? One possibility is that the two olive trees represent Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Another possibility (and a much better view in my opinion) is that the combination of these two olive trees together represent Jesus.

Why two? What have we seen in this vision and the one before it? We saw two people – Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David. That is we saw priest and king – two offices that are perfectly combined in Christ – our perfect King and perfect High Priest.

These two olive trees are a vital link to all that Zechariah has seen, and what Zechariah is about to see with the crowning of Joshua in Chapter 6. In representing Christ, these two olive trees also represent the body of Christ, which is his eternal kingdom.

Revelation 1:5-6 – And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, **And hath made us kings and priests** unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 2:9 – But ye are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

We will see a very similar figure in Revelation.

Revelation 11:3-4 – And I will give power unto my **two witnesses**, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and

threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the **two olive trees**, and the **two candlesticks** standing before the God of the earth.

I think that the two witnesses in Revelation 11 (also called the two olive trees) represent the church of Christ – the royal priesthood of 1 Peter 2:9.

You mean here they represent Christ and later they represent the church of Christ? Yes – and does that surprise us? Can Christ be separated from the body of Christ?

The focus in Revelation is on persecution against the church of Christ. What did Jesus say to Saul about his persecution of Christians? "Saul, Saul, why persecutest **thou me**?" (Acts 9:4). Those who persecute the church are persecuting Christ! We should not be surprised when the same symbol represents both Christ and the body of Christ.

So in the fifth vision we saw a lampstand that was both beautiful and distinctive – and we saw that it represents the church, which would be finished by the perfect King who would come from the line of David through Zerubbabel.

The people may have thought that what they were doing was just a small thing that didn't really matter – but God is telling them here that just the opposite was true. What they were doing was a vital part of God's plan to bless the entire world.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 begins with Zechariah's sixth vision: the vision of the flying scroll.

This vision deals with a problem that Israel had faced throughout its entire history – a problem that was described by Paul in the book of Romans.

Romans 9:6 – For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.

Romans 2:28–29 – For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

In short, calling yourself a Jew did not make you a Jew anymore than calling yourself a Christian makes you a Christian.

God makes that determination. God knows who his faithful, obedient, trusting children are – both today and in the day of Zechariah.

2 Timothy 2:19 – The Lord knoweth them that are his.

Some of the exiles who had returned were prospering in their sin. They cared more about the things of man than about the things of God. They were heaping up treasures for themselves, and they were oppressing the poor. They were robbing others, and they were robbing God.

Would people like that be Israel's undoing, or would the work of God continue despite their efforts to corrupt the people? The next vision addresses that question.

Before we start with the sixth vision, let's pause and ask another question – are there two visions in Chapter 5 or only one vision?

I agree with most commentaries on this point – there are two visions in Chapter 5 – one that starts in verse 1 and another that starts in verse 5.

But some commentaries argue that there is only one vision in Chapter 5. Why?

Because they want the total number of visions to be seven rather than eight because of the importance and prevalence of the figurative number seven in the book.

I think they have missed the boat. Why? Because the number eight also has an important figurative significance, and it is a meaning that fits perfectly with the context of this book.

The number eight is a symbol for renewal. The number eight in the Bible depicts a new beginning. The eighth day denotes the start of a new week. Male children were circumcised on the eighth day to depict their new relationship with God. The eighth year following seven sabbatical years was the year of Jubilee when all things were renewed (Leviticus 25). In Revelation we see the number eight used to denote the renewal of persecution directed at God's people under the emperor Domitian.

What is being renewed in Zechariah? Everything! The city and the temple are being renewed. The people are being renewed. And these visions are pointing toward a renewal of the throne of David, a renewal of the priesthood, and a renewal of the household of God.

In short, the number eight is the perfect number of visions to have in this book! One might even say that this eight is a seven! Let's look now at the sixth vision.

ZECHARIAH 5:1-2

**Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes,
and looked, and behold a flying roll. 2
And he said unto me, What seest thou?
And I answered, I see a flying roll; the
length thereof is twenty cubits, and the
breadth thereof ten cubits.**

What Zechariah sees in verse 1 is a gigantic flying scroll. (The KJV calls it a flying roll.)

Typically, scrolls at this time measured eight to ten inches in height and up to twenty feet in length. Even the great Isaiah scroll discovered at Qumran, although produced a few centuries later, measured just twenty four feet in length.

At twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide, this flying scroll is approximately thirty feet by fifteen feet. It is closer in size to a modern billboard than to an actual ancient scroll.

These first two verses raise some immediate questions:

- What is written on the scroll?
- Why is the scroll flying?
- Why is the scroll so large?

We're about to see in the verses that follow that this scroll contains a divine curse. What can we discern about that curse from the fact that the scroll was flying and the fact that the scroll was large?

Perhaps the answer is simple: this curse was already in progress (the scroll was flying) and it was a prominent curse (the scroll was large). But let's look a little more closely.

The description suggests that this scroll has been unrolled. That means that the message it contains has been laid open for all to read; it has not been concealed or disclosed to only a select few. God wants everyone to hear and to heed the message in this giant flying billboard of a scroll.

That this scroll is flying may emphasize that it is a message from God. As with other things we have seen in this book, it seems that this scroll is not the work of man. This flying scroll reminds me of Isaiah 55:11.

Isaiah 55:11 – So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

But why these large dimensions? We can't say for sure. Some commentaries say that the dimensions are derived from the porch that Solomon built in 1 Kings 6:3 or from the altar of brass he built in 2 Chronicles 4:1. The numbers are the same, but there is no clear connection between those items and this scroll. Perhaps Solomon's porch is in view because it was the place where justice was administered.

Some commentaries make a point of the fact that this scroll is about forty times bigger than an actual scroll, and they argue that there is symbolic significance in the number forty. Perhaps, but that approach violates one of our interpretive guidelines – we should not introduce symbols into the vision that are not in the text.

Perhaps these dimensions are chosen only to show that this scroll was unusually large. Perhaps the scroll is unusual just to show that the threat was unusually large and dangerous.

As for what was written on the scroll, we need to keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 5:3-4

3 Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it. 4 I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof.

In verse 3 we have an answer to what is written on the large flying scroll – it contains a curse "that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth" and that curse was brought forth by God.

Should Zechariah and his listeners have been surprised to see a giant curse on a flying billboard? Not really. Why? Because they were in their present situation because of a curse. They were currently living under the effects of a curse in the Mosaic covenant.

Deuteronomy 28:15 – But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these **curses** shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.

So, the people were very familiar with a curse from God. They were living under a curse from God because of the disobedience of their ancestors.

The question was this: would that curse continue because of their own disobedience or would that curse be lifted?

Some commentaries try to link this flying curse with what they say was a common practice at the time. They say that it was common to curse your enemies using "curse-tablets" made of lead or "curse-slips" made of parchment. And they say that this flying curse is modeled after those other curses.

Perhaps, but I don't think they have completely made their case. But if there is such a relation here, I think Leupold correctly describes it. He says that God is, in effect, saying:

"As you set loose *futile* curses against your enemies, so I send forth *effective* curses that invariably accomplish their purpose; your efforts are hollow mockery, mine terrible reality."

In other words, your little curse-slips are meaningless, but my giant flying curse is not, as you are about to discover.

Two groups of people are particularly identified in verses 3 and 4 as the objects of this curse: thieves and perjurers. Why those two groups? There are several theories.

One theory for why we see theft and perjury is that those two sins were often connected. When someone was charged with theft in the absence of any witnesses, it was sometimes possible for that person to swear their innocence before God and avoid punishment. Of course, that means that if they were guilty of the theft, they were now also guilty of perjury.

Another theory for why we see theft and perjury is that those two sins were the most evident or easily identified sins among those who were not true to God. Yes, the thieves and the perjurers were almost certainly guilty of other sins, but perhaps their thievery and their perjury were their most evident sins.

Another theory for why we see theft and perjury is that each of those two sins represents a whole collection of sins. Some say that theft and perjury represent all of the commandments in each of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Why?

The first tablet focuses on commandments that involve man's relationship with God, while the second tablet governs man's relationships with each another. Swearing falsely in God's name would cover those sins that are directed at God, while theft would cover those sins that are directed at men.

Another theory is interesting because it fits well with the context in which the temple was being rebuilt.

As in building projects today, the building process often calls for raising support from some key donors before construction begins. They pledge donations that provide assurances for the project to proceed. In the ancient world, such pledges were supported by formal oaths, and such oaths transformed the pledged gifts into divine property. In this combination, anyone who pledged gifts to the temple initially but then reneged on their pledges would be guilty first of swearing falsely and then of theft, for they continued to possess that which now belonged to God.

Malachi 3:8 – Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

That verse would soon be directed to these very people by the prophet Malachi. Perhaps we are seeing the same

thing here in the book of Zechariah – people robbing God. Of all the various theories, this last one is my favorite. There is certainly a focus on building in Zechariah.

What is the curse in verse 3? Those who steal "shall be cut off as on this side according to it" and those that swear falsely "shall be cut off as on that side according to it." What does that mean?

"This side" and "that side" refer to the two sides of the scroll. One side cursed thieves, and the other side cursed liars.

The phrase "cut off" is better translated as "purged out" or "cleansed by purging." Does this mean that the thieves and the liars were literally transported away? No.

Remember that we are reading apocalyptic language. I think what we are seeing here is a figurative description of the verse we read earlier from 2 Timothy 2:19 – "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

The thieves likely thought that they were being very clever and would never be caught. The perjurers likely thought that their lies would never be found out. If so, they were wrong. There was a huge flying scroll headed their way with a curse from God written on it just for them! God knew exactly who was on his side and who was not on his side.

What does the end of verse 4 mean? "It shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof."

I think this statement confirms that the final option we considered for the identity of the thieves and perjurers was the correct option – they stole from God's house to instead build their own houses, and so this curse will target them in their homes.

It reminds us of Haggai 1:4, which was directed to these same people at this same time.

Haggai 1:4 - *Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?*

So that is the message of the sixth vision. The exiles needed to understand that they were still under the Mosaic covenant. They needed to understand that the conditional curses for those who disobeyed that covenant were still operative. If they violated the covenant, they could once again find themselves in exile.

Let's now look at Zechariah's seventh vision: the vision of the ephah.

ZECHARIAH 5:5-6

5 Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. 6 And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth.

First question: what is an ephah? An ephah is a unit of measurement that is close to a bushel. It is between five and ten gallons.

But the word ephah also has another meaning. It is also used (as it is here) to describe a measuring basket used for dry measure. The ephah was not the largest measure known at the time, but it was the largest in common use.

Just like the scroll we saw earlier was much larger than a typical scroll, so this ephah may have been

much larger than a typical ephah. Why? Because we will soon see that a woman is crouching within it.

The final phrase in verse 6 is difficult: "This is their **resemblance** through all the earth." What does that mean?

The ESV translates it as: "This is their **iniquity** in all the land." Another has: "This is their **eye** throughout all the earth." (NET)

So which is correct? "This is their eye," "this is their iniquity," or "this is their resemblance"? Some of the Hebrew texts have the Hebrew word for "eye," but others do not, which explains the differences in the English translations.

How do we decide? There is a rule of textual analysis that may be helpful. That rule says that when we have a situation such as this with a variety of possible readings, we should select the reading that is the most difficult to explain (which, in this case, would be "eye").

The use of the word "eye" is difficult to explain in this context, so why then would we select that most difficult option? Because the easier readings likely came from scribes trying to solve the problem they saw with the difficult reading. That is, they also did not see how the word "eye" fit into this context, so they tried to "fix" the text.

If "eye" is the correct reading, then what does the statement in verse 6 mean? "This is their 'eye' throughout all the earth."

Some suggest that it is the eye of God on the evildoers. Others suggest that it is the eyes of the evildoers who are always looking for opportunities to do evil. Of those two, I think the latter fits best with the context. Also, the phrase is "their eye" rather

than "his eye," so I don't think this is the eye of God.

If "eye" is not correct, then I think the best option is "this is their iniquity." That choice fits well with the context because in verse 8 we will see that this ephah contains wickedness.

To whom does the pronoun "their" refer? Most likely it is referring back to the ones who stole and the ones who swore falsely – is their eye looking to do evil, or it is their iniquity.

What about the third option that we saw in the KJV? "This is their **resemblance** through all the earth." If that is the correct translation, what does it mean?

We are about to see that this vision involves the removal of wickedness from the land, so most likely "their resemblance" or "their appearance" in verse 6 would refer to the appearance of the wicked. That is, as the ephah looks, so do the wicked look.

So what does the ephah look like? Keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 5:7-8

7 And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. 8 And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.

In verse 7, the lid of the ephah is lifted off so that we can see inside.

A better translation than "talent of lead" in verse 7 is "a round lid of lead." The Hebrew word means "round" but it is usually translated "talent" when

referring to gold or silver. But because the metal here is lead, the word "round" should be used instead of the word "talent," and "round" fits better with the context as we see this lead being used as a cover.

But this heavy metal lid is not a natural cover for a measuring basket – its use here as a lid must mean that there is something unusual inside this basket.

Having such a heavy metal lid suggests that the contents of this basket must be kept from escaping. Whatever is inside the basket must be kept separate from the people of God.

When the lid is lifted, Zechariah sees a woman sitting (literally, crouching) within the ephah. She is immediately identified in verse 8 – "This is wickedness."

Was this an actual woman? Perhaps, and if so, then this flying ephah must have been much larger than an actual ephah, just as the flying scroll was much larger than an actual scroll. But it is also possible that the woman within the ephah is smaller than an actual person.

Some commentaries suggest that this wicked woman is shown in the form of a female idol of the type that was often used for Canaanite goddesses. Or perhaps this woman depicts the Babylonian goddess who was called the "Queen of Heaven."

Why is wickedness depicted here as a woman? If the idol represents a specific false goddess, then that answers the question.

Idolatry was never the problem for Israel *after* the exile as it was *before* the exile. The Jews seemed to have learned their lesson in Babylon, but perhaps this vision tells us that the problem had not been eliminated completely. Perhaps some of those false gods had come back to Jerusalem along with the returning exiles.

But another possibility is that this vision is showing us a very common figure in the Old Testament – the people's faithlessness to God was often depicted as the people of God playing the harlot. Hosea does this, as does Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 16:15, 28, 32 – But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was. ... Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied. Thou hast moreover multiplied thy fornication in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea; and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman ... But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!

There may also be a lesson here about the problem of taking foreign wives, which we know was a problem at this time from what we see in the book of Ezra.

One last theory on why wickedness is shown here as a woman may be the simplest of all: the Hebrew word for "wickedness" is feminine, and so that alone may explain why the vision personifies wickedness as a woman. We see something similar in Proverbs 8 where wisdom (also a feminine noun in Hebrew) is personified as a woman.

It seems that the woman must have tried to escape her confinement because she is cast back into the ephah, and the lid of lead is placed back upon it.

The Hebrew verb used here suggests that the woman struggled with the angel, even though he prevailed. One translation (NJB) has: "And he rammed her back into the barrel and jammed its mouth shut with the mass of lead."

What happens next? Keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 5:9

9 Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven.

In verse 9 we see two more women. They have the wind in their wings, and their wings are like the wings of a stork. They lift up the ephah that has the wickedness trapped inside.

First question: why a stork?

Storks were frequently seen in Palestine, and during the migratory season they would appear in great numbers. They had very powerful wings, which may be why that bird is mentioned here – it could lift the heavy ephah, and it could fly very high up in the sky.

In addition to being propelled by powerful wings, these women are being propelled by a special wind, and so what we see here is a swift and powerful transportation of the wickedness inside the ephah.

Who are these two women? For starters, I don't think we should look for anything particularly symbolic here for the number two. It would have been natural to see two people carrying a heavy ephah with a lead cover.

But why women? Some commentaries suggest that all of the women here are wicked, and that what we see here is God punishing sin with sin. They point for evidence to the fact that the stork was an unclean animal (Leviticus 11:19), and they say that the stork's and the women's submission here shows God's power over false gods.

But no one here is eating a stork, and no one could doubt God's power over these false gods! Plus, as we have seen there are some good characteristics of storks that may explain why we see them mentioned here. I don't think that there is any particular reason to conclude that the two women in verse 9 are evil.

One last point about the stork – storks have a reputation for caring tenderly for their own young. (Even today stork's are pictured as delivering human children.) That view of storks is likely what caused the Hebrew word for "stork" to be almost the same as the Hebrew word for "faithful" or "loyal." (They differ by one letter.) That may explain why we see the stork mentioned here in a vision that is teaching a lesson about faithfulness and loyalty to God.

This wicked basket is lifted up between heaven and earth. It is evil, so it cannot come into God's presence – but neither should it be left on earth in man's presence. So we see this sin lifted up from the earth. That is a big clue! Let's keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 5:10

10 Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? 11 And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base.

Zechariah has the same question that we likely have at this point: where are these two women taking the ephah? The answer is in verse 11: "To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base." What does that mean?

Shinar is an old name for the land where Babylon was located. Other prophets use Shinar to refer to Babylon (Isaiah 11:1, Daniel 1:2).

But Shinar is also a reminder of what that word stood for when it was first used in the Bible in Genesis 10:10 and Genesis 11:2. In those verses, Shinar described an earthly kingdom that stood against God and that built the tower of Babel. In short, Shinar had long been a center for activity that was opposed to the plan of God. Shinar, or Babylon, was the epitome of an arrogant and rebellious people.

To the Jew, the land of Shinar was firmly associated with wickedness, and that had been true for many centuries. Shinar was the perfect place to send this wickedness, and the picture in verse 11 is that it will permanently reside there in a house where it will be established.

The word "house" in verse 11 can also refer to a temple, so we may be seeing the false idol returned to the very false temple in Babylon where it came from – even to the point of being placed on the same pedestal.

"What could be more appropriate than to banish all idolatry to Babylon, infamous for her own idolatries, as well as the site of Judah's punishment for her own idolatry?"

We can see what is happening in the vision, but what does the vision mean? And when would it be fulfilled?

The premillennialist thinks this is all yet future – and if it were to be taken literally, then it would have to be future. It is certainly not the case today, nor has it ever been the case, that wickedness has all been banished to one particular land. But, of course, we know that this vision was not meant to be interpreted literally.

So what does it mean? When was iniquity ever carried far away from the people of God?

Don't we all know the answer to that question? And don't we all know when it happened (past tense)?

Hebrews 9:26 – For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

When Jesus sacrificed himself, he put away our sin. The premillennialist says the fulfillment is yet future, but the Bible says that the fulfillment happened 2000 years ago.

We also see this idea in the great prophecy of the new covenant in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 – Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in

their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Did you hear that last part? "For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them." Is there a kingdom in which everyone in the kingdom knows God? In which everyone in the kingdom loves and obeys God? A kingdom in which nothing wicked is allowed to enter? Yes – and you are part of that kingdom if you have obeyed the gospel. That kingdom is the church.

God adds people to the church when they are saved, and there is no other way to gain entry. And those who are lost are not in the church. The church is the body of Christ; it is the body of the saved.

Colossians 1:13-14– Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

The people were worried about the wickedness in the land, and God is telling them here about the eternal unshakable kingdom that was to come in Acts 2, and in that kingdom there would be no wickedness. Wickedness would instead be carried far away, just as the wickedness in this ephah is shown being carried off to the land of Shinar.

CHAPTER 6

The book of Zechariah opens with eight visions, and we have now reached the final vision of those eight.

As we have seen, each vision has had a specific message for the people of Zechariah's day as well as a message for the people of God in any age.

With most of these messages, God lifted the spiritual curtain so that the downtrodden Jews of Zechariah's day could briefly glimpse the wonderful blessings that God was preparing for his people. The Messiah was coming, and he would establish an eternal kingdom that would sweep away all of the kingdoms of this world. God told them that those blessings were coming, and that their faithfulness was vital to God's plan to bless the entire world.

Today, we know much more about those blessings than they did. We have the full revelation of God, and we know that the Messiah came into this world, gave himself as a perfect sacrifice, rose from the dead, ascended back to heaven, and established his eternal kingdom (of which we are now a part).

If you ever have any doubts about the importance of the church in the plan of God, then Zechariah is the book for you! Are we just a footnote to history? Perhaps in men's histories, but in God's histories we are anything but a footnote!

Most of the visions we have seen have pointed to Christ and to the church of Christ. If that was a cure for discouragement in Zechariah's day, then how much more must it be a cure for discouragement in our own day! For them, it was a blessing yet future, but for us it is a blessing that we enjoy every day.

Ephesians 1:18-23 – The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye

may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

That had not yet happened in Zechariah's day, but for us it is a living reality – and we should thank God every day for the time in which we live.

This final vision has much in common with the first vision we studied. The first vision and the eighth vision act as bookends to the visions in between. Both the first vision and this final vision describe different colored horses going throughout the earth. In both visions, God dispatches key figures to fulfill a divine assignment.

ZECHARIAH 6:1

6:1 And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass.

Although the text does not confirm it, many commentators believe that the first vision occurred at dusk, and the eighth vision appeared to Zechariah at dawn on

the same evening. Some even explain the "mountains of bronze" as the color of the mountains when the dawning rays of the sun strike them.

In verse 1, we see four chariots coming out from between two mountains of brass. What does that mean? In the Old Testament, chariots sometimes carried important individuals. But in most cases, the Old Testament refers to chariots as the ultimate military weapon. Solomon bought chariots from Egypt in 1 Kings 10:29, and Isaiah prophesied against those who trusted in those chariots.

Isaiah 31:1 – Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!

Jeremiah described Babylon's chariots.

Jeremiah 4:13 – Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled.

But God also has chariots, and their description in Isaiah 66 reminds us of verse 1 here in Zechariah 6.

Isaiah 66:15-16– For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many.

Psalm 68 also reminds us of verse 1 here, even mentioning a mountain, Mount Sinai.

Psalms 68:17 – The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

So what are we seeing here in verse 1? We will soon see that these four chariots are being sent out by God.

The number four, as we have said, figuratively depicts the earth – the four seasons, the four compass points, the four basic elements – even the base 4 used to encode our DNA!

So what we see here are God's war chariots being sent out to show God's dominion and power over the earth. It reminds us of:

Jeremiah 10:10 – But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.

No earthly power can stand against God. Nebuchadnezzar learned that lesson the hard way in Daniel 4 when he was made to live like an ox. As McGuigan says, that great king was bragging one minute and munching grass the next! And here is the lesson he was being taught:

Daniel 4:17 – To the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

These chariots are going forth to teach that same lesson to anyone and to everyone who needs to learn it. And there were many people in Persia and Babylon who needed to learn it, as there still are today throughout the world.

What are the two mountains of brass? Although we have seen mountains before in this book and elsewhere in the Bible, nowhere else in the Bible do we find mountains of brass.

Elsewhere we have seen earthly mountains arrayed against God, and those mountains have been turned into plains. That might be the case here, but these mountains instead seem to depict the abode of God, or at least they surround the abode of God – his stronghold. If so, the brass would indicate their beauty and their strength. Verse 1 reminds me of Psalm 48.

Psalm 48:1-2 – Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.

Why are there two mountains? Perhaps they show the combined royal priesthood of Christ, which is a key theme in this book and in this chapter (as we will see). It is also a key theme in the book of Revelation.

I think that is the picture we see here in Zechariah 6:1. These chariots come out from God's beautiful stronghold to perform his will upon the earth.

ZECHARIAH 6:2-4

2 In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; 3 And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and bay horses. 4 Then I answered and said unto the angel that talked with me, What are these, my lord?

Now we can really see the similarity between the first vision and the eighth vision. Each involves horses of different colors, although the colors are different between the two visions.

What do the colors signify? We have the same difficulty with that question here as we did in the first vision. Most likely the colors depict the different missions of the four chariots. If so, white may indicate victory, red may stand for bloodshed, black for judgment, and the dappled color may signify death. We can't be certain, and it may simply be that the colors serve only to distinguish the chariots, having no further significance.

The ancient rabbis believed that the four colors represented four world powers, with the four powers of Daniel being the most likely candidates: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. If so, that would be a nice tie-in with Daniel to go along with the many other tie-ins we have already seen. But, unlike with Daniel, we are not told here that these four colors represent four world powers.

As usual, Zechariah has the same question that we have. In verse 4, he asks, "what are these?" Let's read the answer.

ZECHARIAH 6:5

5 And the angel answered and said unto me, These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth.

The angel tells Zechariah that these four chariots are "the four spirits of the heavens" and that they "go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth."

Our first question is what is meant by "the four spirits." Are they *spirits* (as the KJV translates the

word) or are they just *winds* (which is another possible translation of the Hebrew word used here)?

The same word seems to mean "winds" in Psalm 104:4, where the ASV has: "Who maketh *winds* his messengers; Flames of fire his ministers." But the KJV has: "Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire," so there is a translation disagreement with that verse as well.

We saw this same Hebrew word in the previous chapter of Zechariah – the two women in 5:9 had "the wind" in their wings. There the meaning of the word was almost certainly "wind" rather than "spirit."

If the same word from Zechariah 5:9 also means "winds" here in Chapter 6, then the meaning here would be similar to what we see in Jeremiah 49.

Jeremiah 49:36 – And upon Elam will I bring the **four winds** from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward **all those winds**; and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come.

But others maintain that the meaning here is "spirits" and that these chariots represent four divine spirits or emissaries sent by God to do his work on the earth. That view makes more sense to me because verse 5 is an *explanation* of a figure (the chariots in verse 2–3). Although not impossible, it seems odd for the explanation of a figure to be yet another figure.

Whether the meaning is spirit or wind, the message of verse 5 is clear: No matter who it is who thinks they can thwart God's plan, they will soon learn otherwise. God is Sovereign over the universe, and, if anyone thinks otherwise, they will soon learn the truth as God comes against them from every direction!

Why is that message important here? The Jews at this time were standing in the ruins of their city and were surrounded by the rubble of their former temple. These visions had promised them a wonderful future under their Messiah and his eternal kingdom. They may have wondered whether it would really happen – after all, they had also been promised blessings for Jerusalem and the former temple, and that was all now just rubble!

God's message in these final visions is two-fold.

First, as we saw in the prior vision, God reminds the Jews that they are the reason they are surrounded by rubble. God had told them it would happen if they forsook the covenant, and they forsook the covenant. They have no reason to act surprised about their current situation.

Second, God's message is that those future blessings are secure because God said they would happen. True, these people might fall away again and be punished. But God would always have a faithful remnant with which to work his plans on the earth. God is in charge, and what he says is going to happen will happen. These divine emissaries are being sent out to make sure it all happens, and nothing will stand in their way.

The question is not whether God will bless his people. That has never been in doubt. The question is whether we are a part of God's people. If we are, then we will share in those wonderful blessings. If we are not, then we will not. But the blessings will come to God's faithful people. That is certain.

The explanation continues in verse 6.

ZECHARIAH 6:6-7

6 The black horses which are therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them; and the grisled go forth toward the south country. 7 And the bay went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth.

Verse 6 shifts our attention from the chariots to the horses, and this emphasis will continue throughout the remainder of the vision.

Verse 6 also contains some unexpected descriptions of the horses. For example, the order in which verse 6 mentions the horses varies slightly from their introduction in verses 2-3. Also, verse 6 fails to mention the red horses, and the grisled and bay horses for the fourth chariot in verse 3 are mentioned separately in verses 6-7. I don't think we should read too much into these minor differences in the description.

The emphasis here seems to be on the north, which is where both the black horses and the white horses go. This emphasis on the north fits perfectly with the history of the time - anyone coming from Babylon in the east would approach Jerusalem from the north. So to Jerusalem, Persia (modern day Iran) and Babylon (modern day Iraq) were northern powers.

But what about Egypt in the south? Egypt was still an important power but its power was waning. Even so, Egypt is not left out - the grisled horses travel south.

Why doesn't the angel mention east and west?

Because if God can take care of what is coming from the north and from the south (and we know that he can!), then God can handle any problems that might arise from the east or from the west. The north and the south were the biggest problems at the time, and so God uses problems from those two directions to represent *all* problems. We will see that type of reduction again in this book.

The description of the bay horses in verse 7 is vague, but it seems most likely that the bay horses went south with the grisled horses as they are associated with the same chariot.

The phrase "walk to and fro through the earth" occurs three times in verse 7. That repetition emphasizes the message here – there is no place to hide for the enemies of God. God knows where they are, and God can reach them wherever they are. They are not safe in Babylon or Egypt or anywhere else. They can't hide from God!

ZECHARIAH 6:8

8 Then cried he upon me, and spake unto me, saying, Behold, these that go toward the north country have quieted my spirit in the north country.

From the perspective of those in Jerusalem, all of the trouble lay in the north. Babylon was the seat of all political unrest and evil in their minds, and anyone coming from Babylon always arrived from the north.

Verse 8 tells us that these chariots have accomplished their purpose in the north. God's spirit has been quieted in the north country. Literally, God's spirit is at rest in the north. What does that mean?

Hadn't the people seen these prophecies before? Didn't Isaiah prophecy something similar against Babylon in Isaiah 13?

Isaiah 13:19-20 – And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

That sounds pretty quiet! But that had not *literally* happened in Zechariah's day, or even to the present day.

So what does verse 8 mean? Why is God at rest in the north? When is God at rest in the north? Once again, Daniel answers that question for us.

Daniel 2:44 – And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, **but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms,** and it shall stand for ever.

God would accomplish that rest through the church! The church would break and consume those other kingdoms, and so God's spirit would be at rest after that was accomplished.

Isaiah tells us the same thing.

Isaiah 2:4 – And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up

sword against nation, neither shall they
learn war any more.

Those verses are describing the establishment of the church in the first century – and how is that great event described? As a time when the nations of this earth would be judged and broken, and as a time when there would be peace with God. Those are the *same two blessings* we see here in this final vision!

This final vision is pointing to the church – the kingdom of Christ that would come about 500 years later. And the description we see here of that kingdom is a beautiful description – God is in heaven, and all is right with the world!

But wait! The world was in a mess! The people of God were living among ruins! The powers of the earth seemed to be in total control! **Yes, but God is in heaven, and all is right with the world!** That was true in Zechariah's day, and that is also true in our own day.

Yes, the world is in a mess today. Yes, the powers of the earth seem to be in total control. **But God is in heaven, and all is right with the world!** Things are not what they seem.

Do we believe it?

John 16:33 – In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

And think about John 19:30 for a moment.

John 19:30 – When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished:** and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

"It is finished." There is so much meaning behind those three words. What is finished? All that God had been planning for us since before the foundation of this world. All that God had promised to Abraham so long before. All that God had promised through centuries of speaking to mankind through his prophets. All that Daniel and Zechariah and the others were telling us about Christ and his mission to bless the entire world. It is finished!

Yes, Jesus would rise from that grave a few days later. And yes, Jesus would ascend back into heaven and establish his kingdom shortly after that. And yes, someday Jesus will come again to claim his own. But it was finished on that cross. **That cross was the finish line!**

We should never read John 19:30 without pausing to think about all that Jesus finished on that cross! He finished the kingdoms of this earth – they were broken and consumed. He finished his work of reconciliation – we can boldly approach God because of his shed blood. Everything changed at the cross!

Ephesians 2:16 – And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.

Colossians 1:20 – And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Hebrews 12:2 – Looking unto Jesus the author and **finisher** of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It is finished! And Jesus, the finisher, finished it! We are at peace with God, and the enemies of God have been broken. And those are the same two wonderful blessings we see promised here in this closing vision. It all happened in the first century when Jesus gave himself as the perfect sacrifice on the cross and established his eternal kingdom.

INTRODUCTION TO VERSES 9-15

Before we look at verses 9–15, let's consider two questions about this final part of Chapter 6. First, how does this section relate to the eight visions we just studied? And second, is this section another vision or is it something else?

As for the first question, commentaries are all over the map on how this section relates, if at all, to the eight visions. There is definitely a relation, and we can see that simply by looking at what these verses share in common with the prior visions.

We saw Joshua, the high priest, in Chapter 3, and we will see him again in these verses. Also, we saw Zerubbabel, the descendent of King David, in Chapter 4, and – although we will not see Zerubbabel here – we will see his ancestral crown. Also, we saw the Branch in 3:8, and we will see the Branch here in 6:12.

I think what we are seeing here is what we would expect to see at this point in the book – a beautiful capstone for the eight visions that preceded it. All of those visions were ultimately pointing to something or someone, and we are about to see what or who that is in these next few verses.

And if anyone doubts that the visions we just saw were pointing toward Christ and his church, the royal priesthood, then I believe we will see that those doubts should be erased by these final verses of Chapter 6.

What about the second question – is this a vision? Are we seeing a ninth vision? And, if not, what are we seeing here?

Commentaries are almost unanimous in saying that verses 9–15 are **not** a vision, and I agree with that conclusion.

We don't have any of the usual "vision" language that we saw with the earlier visions, and we don't see an interpreting angel. Also, the focus here is not on what Zechariah is *seeing*, but is instead on what Zechariah is *doing*. Zechariah is told to do something – and we can be sure that he did it.

Zechariah is not the only prophet who was told to do something as a sign for the people. In fact, one might say that Zechariah got off light in that regard!

Hosea was told to marry a prostitute in Hosea 1:2. Ezekiel was told to lie on his left side for 390 days and eat bread baked over human dung in Ezekiel 4. So I suspect that Zechariah was just fine with this assignment (although it was a dangerous assignment, as we will see in a moment).

What was Zechariah's assignment?

ZECHARIAH 6:9-11

9 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, **10** Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, which are come from Babylon, and come thou the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah; **11** Then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest;

Zechariah is first told to find three people (Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah) and take them to see a fourth person (Josiah, the son of Zephaniah). He is then told to make crowns of silver and gold and to put them on the head of Joshua the high priest.

Who are all of these people? We have already met Joshua, but what about the others?

We should first ask if "Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah" are even proper names. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew words, not as names, but as descriptions: "from the rulers, from the useful men, and from those who have understood it." But most commentaries see the Hebrew words here as three proper names, and I don't see any reason to disagree with that conclusion.

But who are they? The short answer is that we don't know, but they were likely important exiles who had recently arrived from Babylon.

Why do I think they were important men? First, it seems they had some silver and gold. And second, their father's name is not given, which suggests that everyone already knew who Zechariah was talking about. I think one commentator accurately described the situation:

Zechariah's selection of truly renowned individuals to contribute to the restoration effort and to witness the solemn ceremony underscores the political and religious importance of the prophet's action. The involvement of such conspicuous people must have exerted great influence over the community and left a lasting impression.

I think that is why these three men were chosen, although it was God rather than Zechariah who chose them.

But why did Zechariah take them to see Josiah son of Zephaniah? Who is that?

Let's start with Zephaniah. Because Zephaniah is mentioned, he must have been more prominent than his descendant, Josiah.

The first Zephaniah we likely think of is the prophet whose book bears his name. That Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah. Even though Zephaniah's descendant shares the same name as King Josiah, few commentaries think that this Zephaniah is the prophet Zephaniah.

Instead, the most likely candidate is Zephaniah the priest, from Jeremiah 21:

Jeremiah 21:1-2 - This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchiah and **Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah**, saying, "Inquire of the LORD for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is making war against us. Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds and will make him withdraw from us."

Zephaniah is often mentioned in Jeremiah, and we even know how he died.

2 Kings 25:18-21 - And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest ... And Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. And the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath.

That sort of illustrious background explains why Josiah is identified by his relation to Zephaniah. Most likely, Josiah was the son or grandson of this powerful priest from the past.

So, back to our earlier question: why did Zechariah take them to see Josiah son of Zephaniah?

Perhaps the simplest solution is that Josiah was someone who was able to make crowns from the gold and the silver supplied by Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah. That explanation makes the most sense to me.

And how do we know that Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah supplied the silver and gold? The Hebrew in verse 10 is literally: "take from the captives - from Heldai, and from Tobijah, and from Jedaiah." What was taken?

Most commentators agree that what Zechariah took from them was the silver and gold that he has in the very next verse. Either it was their silver and gold, or perhaps they had been entrusted with the silver and gold by those who remained behind so that it could be used for the temple.

Other possibilities are that verse 10 instructs Zechariah to take them to Josiah's house or that verse 10 instructs the prophet to take their offering. The verse is ambiguous on that point, unless you are reading the NIV, which solves the ambiguity by adding uninspired words to the inspired text: "Take silver and gold from the exiles." Don't get me started on that!

A final possibility is that this silver and gold was plunder from Babylon. If so, then we see an interesting parallel here between the departure from Babylon and the much earlier departure from Egypt. In Exodus 25:1-3, Moses accepted gold and silver plunder from Egypt for use in making the tabernacle.

Verse 11 uses the plural "crowns." How many crowns did they make, and why did they make more than one crown?

One theory is that they made two crowns, a silver one for Joshua and a gold one for Zerubbabel, but (as the theory goes) the text failed to mention Zerubbabel for fear of offending the Persian authorities. That theory is dead wrong for several reasons, not the least of which is that placing a crown on *anybody's* head (silver or gold) would certainly offend the Persians. You can be sure that King Darius did not want the Jews to crown anyone! This was a dangerous and courageous thing for Zechariah to do! And he even brought witnesses with him!

Also, that theory completely misses the entire point of this symbolic action – one that we have already seen in the visions – that of a **combined royal priesthood**. No one would be too surprised to see a crown on Zerubbabel's head – but that cannot be said of Joshua the high priest. Putting a crown on Joshua's head was shocking, and likely the most shocked person of all was Joshua himself!

The most likely answer is that multiple crowns were placed on Joshua's head. Zechariah was not told in these verses to crown anyone other than Joshua.

Perhaps the gold and silver crowns were intertwined when placed on the head so that they together became a single crown. If so, then that in itself would be a symbolic depiction of what is being shown here – a combination of two offices: priest and king.

In fact, we are seeing a theme here of two things becoming one. The descriptions of the church we saw earlier show Christ reconciling man to God. And they also showed the unity between Jew and Gentile in the church. And, of course, they showed the royal priesthood. Each of these involves two becoming one.

The key question is not what the crowns looked like but rather what did they mean? We know they were not intended to invest Joshua into the office of high priest. Why? Because Joshua was already the high priest.

Some suggest that this action was just intended to honor Joshua because of the important role he was about to play. That might be a good explanation if Joshua had been given a fruit basket, but he was not – Joshua was given a **crow**n. Placing a crown on someone's head goes far beyond just giving that person honor. Crowns had a specific meaning then just as they do now.

So what did the crowns mean? We don't have to guess. Why? Because we already know, and because verse 12 tells us.

ZECHARIAH 6:12-13

12 And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: 13 Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Before we discuss the details of these two verses, let's look at them from another angle.

Let's assume for a moment that I am a prophet, and that I prophesy that the United States president in the year 2030 will, at the same time, also be a United States senator representing the state of Texas. That

is, this one person would hold both of those offices at the same time.

You certainly can't prove me wrong today, but you can say that my *one* prophecy is really *two* prophecies. Why? Because for my prophecy to come true, there would have to be a big change in the law. The constitution forbids a sitting president from simultaneously serving in the house or the senate. The constitution would have to be changed before my prophecy could ever come true.

We see the same thing here in verses 12–13, but with the Old Testament covenants rather than with the U.S. constitution.

Under the Davidic covenant, kings came from the tribe of Judah, while, under the Mosaic covenant, priests came from the tribe of Levi. The same person could not be priest and king under both of those covenants. For that to ever be true, at least one of those covenants would have to change or be replaced with something else. Which is it? Jeremiah answers that question.

Jeremiah 31:31 – Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.

But how is that verse related to what we see here in Zechariah 6? Keep reading in Jeremiah 31.

Jeremiah 33:15 – In those days, and at that time, will I cause the **Branch** of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

That is the same Branch we see here in verse 12 – that Branch is Christ. When Christ came 500 years later, he would usher in a new covenant. And when he did, what would happen to the old covenant?

Hebrews 8:13 – In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

These verses to a Jew of Zechariah's day are just like my presidential prophecy to an American today. You know immediately that something has to change. That prophecy cannot come true under the current system.

Let's look again at the text of verses 12–13. Again, verse 12 – "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD."

Verse 12 tells us *why* Zechariah placed crowns on Joshua's head – it was to teach us something about the Branch, something about Jesus. We have seen the Branch before in this book, and we know that the Branch is a Messianic title for Christ.

Verse 12 ("he shall grow up out of his place") sounds much like Jeremiah 33:15, which we read earlier: "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David." And that verse also reminds me of Luke 2:52 – "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

And verse 12 tells us that Jesus would build the temple – "he shall build the temple of the LORD."

Really? I thought Zerubbabel was building the temple. Did Jesus build a temple?

Mark 14:58 – We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.

John 2:19 – Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

That temple was Jesus' body (John 2:21), but that temple had two meanings. First, Jesus built the temple in three days when he rose from the dead, but that resurrection ushered in another temple that Jesus built – one that is also described as his body – the church.

Ephesians 1:22-23 – And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things **to the church, which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 2:20-21 – And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto **an holy temple** in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 6:16 – For ye are **the temple of the living God**; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jesus, *not* Zerubbabel or Joshua, is the great temple builder! Zerubbabel and Joshua were building an *earthly* temple, but the *heavenly* temple made without hands could be built *only* by Christ.

Once again, God is asking the people to look up and see the wonderful things that God is planning for his people – things that would come about, in part, because of their faithfulness to God.

And for those commentators who *incredibly* can read these verses and not see Jesus, I have the same advice – **look up!** Lift up your eyes to see the wonderful blessings in these verses, and then look at Jesus and his eternal kingdom to see their fulfillment.

Let's read verse 13 again:

Verse 13: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

There are few verses in the Bible more beautiful or more meaningful than Zechariah 6:13. "He shall be a priest upon his throne!"

We know from verse 12 that we are reading about Jesus, the Branch. So what we see in verse 13 is this: "Even **Jesus** shall build the temple of the LORD; and **Jesus** shall bear the glory, and **Jesus** shall sit and rule upon his throne; and **Jesus** shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

We know that Jesus fulfilled these wonderful prophecies. We have already seen that Jesus built the temple – both in his own body being raised from the dead and in his body, the church, being established in Acts 2.

We know that Jesus bore the glory.

Revelation 5:12 – Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

And we know that Jesus was both priest and king. That is the central prophecy in these verses. That is why we see these gold and silver crowns being placed on the head of Joshua, the high priest. Jesus is King.

Revelation 19:16 – And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

1 Timothy 6:15 - Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

And Jesus is High Priest.

Hebrews 3:1 - Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 4:14 - Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

And you mean to say that couldn't happen under the Old Covenant? Right! That is exactly what Hebrews 7 tells us.

Hebrews 7:12-14 - For the priesthood being changed, **there is made of necessity a change also of the law.** For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

But what does that last phrase in verse 13 mean - "and the counsel of peace shall be **between them both**"?

Those who think the crowns were meant for Joshua and Zerubbabel point to this verse for support. But Zerubbabel is not mentioned here anywhere, so what then is meant by the phrase "between them both"?

The "both" in that phrase are the two offices we just saw - priest and king. Both of those two offices would be a counsel of peace; they would never be in

disagreement or conflict. Why? Because they would be perfectly combined in the same person – and because that one person would be the prince of peace! (Isaiah 9:6)

What does it mean that Jesus is both King and High Priest? As King, Jesus has all authority and all power.

Matthew 28:18 – And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

And as High Priest?

Hebrews 7:24–27 – But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

The Messiah could not just be one or the other – the Messiah had to be both, and he is both.

Jesus is the perfect King and the perfect High Priest. And that is *not* just a New Testament idea. Instead, that was something prophesied centuries before the New Testament was written. We see it here in Zechariah.

But can we trace it even earlier than that? When did God start planning the combined priesthood and kingship? Long before the the time of Zechariah! How do we know that? Because the Bible in Genesis 14:18 tells us

about Melchizedek, the mysterious king of Salem to whom Abraham gave a tenth part of all.

Jesus is both priest and king, but so was Melchizedek. But Melchizedek was not priest and king under the Mosaic covenant. Why not? Because Melchizedek predated Moses. The precursor of Jesus' priesthood goes back further than the Levites and the Mosaic covenant.

Psalm 110:4 links Melchizedek with Christ, describing Jesus as "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." And Hebrews 7 explains how a change in the law was required for this change in the priesthood to occur – a change that had to happen if Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, was to be both king and priest. No Jew reading about this in the New Testament could ever claim surprise. It was described in the Old Testament starting with the very first book!

We should also pause to look at Jeremiah 33, which like Daniel 2 is a chapter that is very helpful in our study of Zechariah. We just looked at verse 15, which describes the Branch. Let's look now at verses 17–18.

Jeremiah 33:17–18 – For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually.

That prophecy is pointing to the same thing that we see here in Zechariah – the combined kingship and priesthood of Jesus, and his church, the royal priesthood.

But wait – where is Melchizedek in that description? How did Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, be a man from the Levites?

Simple. The prophecy is not that Jesus would be **from** the Levites, but that he would be **for** the Levites. He would do the things that the Levites were charged with doing: "offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually." And, of course, Jesus did just that with his own perfect sacrifice on the cross. All of the atoning works of the Levites was done to perfection and for eternity by Jesus. The Levites would never lack of man to do these things as Jeremiah prophesied because Jesus did them all on the cross.

Hebrews 7:26-27 - For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: **for this he did once, when he offered up himself.**

Hebrews 10:11-14 - And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, **after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever,** sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. **For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.**

And we, the church, the royal priesthood, also offer up sacrifices.

Romans 12:1 - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,** holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Hebrews 13:15 – Through him then **let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God**, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Oh, but we should take all of those prophecies in Jeremiah literally, we hear. Really? Are we to take everything in Jeremiah 33 literally? How about verse 22?

Jeremiah 33:22 – As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.

By one estimate there are over 7 quintillion grains of sand in the world. That's 7 followed by 18 zeroes. The current world population is over 7 billion. So if we were to have 7 quintillion Levites, that would mean we would have enough Levites to populate one billion worlds, each with our own current total population! That's a lot of Levites!

You can mark it down – those who claim they take everything in the Bible literally never do so. Instead, they take everything literally except for all of the parts they don't take literally! And they are never consistent in how they pick and choose.

Those premillennialists who are looking for a literal return of the Levitical priesthood and a literal return of animal sacrifices, need to sit down and read the book of Hebrews. When they do they will discover (1) that Jesus is our perfect High Priest, (2) that Jesus is not a priest under the Levitical priesthood, and (3) that we are saved by his blood, not by the blood of bulls and goats.

ZECHARIAH 6:14

14 And the crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of the LORD.

Verse 14 is a bit of a puzzle. Let's start with the easy part at the end of the verse.

These crowns would apparently be left in the temple as a memorial. They would remain a constant reminder of the symbolic action that Zechariah performed with them, and of the wonderful perfect King and High Priest who would come to bless the entire world as God had promised to Abraham long before.

But would they be a memorial to everyone or just to "Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah"?

I think they would be a memorial to everyone, but they would especially be a memorial to those who had provided the materials and the workmanship that created the crowns, which is why I think these men are mentioned here by name.

So where's the puzzle?

We recognize Tobijah and Jedaiah from verse 9, but where we had Heldai in verse 9, here we have Helem. And where we had Josiah the son of Zephaniah in verse 10, here we have Hen the son of Zephaniah. Did Josiah have a brother named Hen? As I said, it's a bit of a puzzle.

The short answer is that we don't know for sure what is going on here. But, again, there is also a longer answer!

The longer answer is that we are likely seeing something here that we often see in the Bible – two dif-

ferent names for the same person. We see that in the books of Daniel and Esther, for example, as well as elsewhere in the Bible.

But why would God use two names here for the same person? Remember the context. What are we seeing here? We are seeing two offices combined in one person. Perhaps God is emphasizing that theme by using two names for the same person.

If that is not what is going on here, then most likely Helem is just a variant spelling of Heldai.

And what about Hen? The Hebrew word means grace, and so perhaps Hen was an honorary title for Josiah, who, as we said, might be the workman who crafted the crowns. Others suggest that the name Hen instead means that Josiah was the temple steward responsible for donations to the temple treasury.

We don't know for sure; they could both just be nicknames, or even different people.

ZECHARIAH 6:15

15 And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.

The first half of verse 15 confirms our interpretation that these verses are pointing to Christ and his church. It reminds us immediately of that great prophecy of the church in Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:2-3 – And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be

exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob.

It also reminds us of Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:17 – And came and preached peace to you which were **afar off**, and to them that were nigh.

Ephesians 2:22 – In whom ye also are **builded together** for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

But what does that last phrase in verse 15 mean? "And this shall come to pass, **if** ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God."

If? Do you mean if the people had been unfaithful, then God would have changed his mind about bringing Christ into the world? No. Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8) and foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20). We were chosen in him before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). None of those plans of God were ever going to change.

We were chosen? Does that mean we were *individually* chosen? No, and that is the answer to our question here in Zechariah 6. Look again at the passage from Ephesians, and notice the pronouns.

Ephesians 1:4-5 – According as he hath chosen **us** in him before the foundation of the world, that **we** should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated **us** unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

Notice the pronouns – we and us rather than I and me. What was chosen was the faithful remnant. I was not personally predestined, but the church was. God knew there would be a faithful remnant, and God knew where that faithful remnant would end up.

If these people did not obey God, that did not mean God would change his plans to bless the entire world through Christ. How do we know that? For many reasons, but one of the clearest is in Psalm 89.

Psalm 89:30-34 – If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. **My covenant will I not break**, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.

So, in what sense was the faithful remnant predestined? Simple. God had unconditionally promised to bless the entire world through the coming Messiah, and for that to happen there had to be a faithful remnant through which that Messiah would come and establish his eternal kingdom. Thus, that faithful remnant was predestined. They had to exist. Why? Because it is impossible for God to lie.

So what does the end of verse 15 mean? It means that if these people disobeyed God, then God would accomplish his plan with another people. God would choose another faithful remnant. And eventually (and sadly) that is exactly what happened.

Matthew 21:43 – Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken

from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

CHAPTER 7

ZECHARIAH 7:1-2

**1 And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu;
2 When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezzer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the LORD,**

The "fourth day of the ninth month of Chisleu" in the fourth year of King Darius' reign occurred in December 518 BC. That means that the events in Chapters 7 and 8 occurred about two years after Zechariah received the visions in Chapters 1-6.

The completion and rededication of the temple occurred in 515 BC, so that event is still about three years away.

The month of Chisleu is the Babylonian name for the month. Its usage here, along with the people we have already seen with Babylonian names (such as Zerubbabel) show the strong cultural influences that Babylon had on God's people.

Verse 2 is difficult to translate. The language of the verse is relatively straightforward, but there is a difficulty in identifying the subject and the object of the verb "sent."

The KJV has: "When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezzer and Regemmelech, and their men..." The ESV is clearer: "Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favor of

the LORD." (Also, the ESV is correct that Bethel should be retained as a proper name rather than translated as "the house of God" as it is in the KJV.) The Hebrew literally reads, "He sent Bethel Sharezer and Regem-Melech and his men." At least three different interpretations have been suggested.

Some suggest that Darius from verse 1 is the subject of the verb "sent" in verse 2. They suggest that King Darius sent these men to safeguard his contributions toward the temple. We can safely reject this idea - it makes little sense in the context, and grammatically there is no basis for going all the way back to Darius to find the subject of the verb in verse 2.

A second approach is to take "Bethel Sharezer" as a proper name of a person who would then be the subject of the verb "sent." Jeremiah 39:3 has a similar compound personal name, "Nergal Sharezer." And non-biblical texts have several examples of "Bethel" used in compound names. A text from the time of Nabonidus, a Babylonian king who reigned slightly before the time of Zechariah, includes the Akkadian equivalent of "Bethel Sharezer." Some suggest that is the same person we see here, but we can't say that for sure. It does, however, show us that at least someone had this compound name, so that may be the case here as well.

A third approach is to understand verse 2 to say this: "the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech." Although the Hebrew text does not include the word "people," this interpretation would mean that the people who lived in Bethel sent a delegation consisting of "Sharezer and Regem-Melech." Bethel was located slightly more than ten miles north of Jerusalem, and it had long been a center for pagan worship. (We know from 1 Kings 12:29 that Jeroboam I set up a calf worshipping cult there.) But after the exile, Ezra 2:28 tells us that Bethel was home to 223 faithful exiles.

Either the second or the third view could be correct, and the third (in my opinion) is the most likely. Grammatically, it would mean that Bethel was being used here as a singular name for the people who lived there. We do the same thing today. For example, if we read that "Wall Street remains skeptical," we know that "Wall Street" is being used as a singular term for the all of the people who work there.

What about the object of the verb "sent"? Who was sent? Although there are some dissenters, most commentators take Sharezer and Regemmelech as the names of the two people who were sent. They and "their men" were sent from Bethel.

Why did they come? Verse 2 tells us they came to pray, and verse 3 tells us what seems to have been the primary reason for their trip to Jerusalem – they had a question they wanted to ask.

ZECHARIAH 7:3

3 And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?

Again, the ESV has a better translation of the question: "Should I weep **and abstain** in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

The word "abstain" here refers to abstaining from food. That is, their question involved fasting, and whether they should continue fasting in the fifth month.

Why in the fifth month? That month had an important historical meaning for the exiles.

2 Kings 25:8 – And in the **fifth month**, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem.

During the exile, the people had commemorated the downfall of their city by fasting in the fifth month. That had been going on for about 70 years, and so now these men had been sent from Bethel to ask whether that practice should be continued now that they were back home from Babylon.

It certainly seems like a reasonable question (at least on the surface), but these travelers from Bethel will soon have reason to regret ever having asked it. Before we see why, let's look at one more interesting thing about verse 3.

Notice that the request is made to both the priests and the prophets. One might have expected a question such as this to be directed only to the priests, but that is not what happened. Presumably, the word "prophets" refers to Haggai and Zechariah, but there could have been other prophets as well. That tells us something about the people's high regard for the prophets, which suggests that they had at least learned that lesson from the exile.

These men of Bethel could have taken it upon themselves to end the fasting all on their own, but they did not. Instead, they first wanted to make sure it was all right to do so, and so they asked both the priests and the prophets in Jerusalem.

It seems like they were being very careful to make sure they did everything right. And so one might expect a quick yes or no answer from the priests and the prophets, but that is not at all what happens. In

fact, they don't get any answer to their question until near the end of the next chapter!

ZECHARIAH 7:4-6

4 Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, 5 Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? 6 And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?

Have you ever asked someone a question, and then immediately wished you hadn't? I think that Sharezer and Regemmelech did that here.

God does not answer their question about fasting (at least not yet). Instead, God shifts the focus by questioning the sincerity of their fasting and by asking some questions of his own (much as he did with Job!).

Having a fast each year in the fifth month to remember the fall of Jerusalem may have started off well, but it seems that by now it had become just another empty ritual. (That is always something that God's people must guard against, both in Zechariah's day and in our own day.)

Were they fasting and mourning unto God, or were they fasting and mourning unto themselves? Were they fasting and mourning over their sins, which had caused all of this to happen, or were they fasting and mourning just because of all the hardships they had personally experienced? Had their fasting become the sort that Jesus described in Matthew 6?

Matthew 6:16 – Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

In short, God's question was this: Was their fasting for God (as verse 5 asks) or was their fasting for themselves (as verse 6 asks)?

Their question to the priests and the prophets was simple, and they likely wanted a simple answer, but that is not what they got. Yes, their question was simple, but it was not *only* simple; their question was also superficial, much like their worship.

God listened to their question, but God then turned their attention to the real question – were they as a nation committed to God, or were they committed only to themselves? The question came from just a few, but God's question in verse 5 is directed to "all the people of the land, and to the priests." These questioners had opened the proverbial can of worms!

Verse 5 also expands the scope of the original question. In verse 3, the question asked about a fast observed during the **fifth** month. Verse 5 also mentions a fast observed in the **seventh** month. Which fast was that?

The answer is that we don't know for sure, but the fast in the seventh month may have been intended to commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah, who was the governor of Judah appointed by Nebuchadnezzar and murdered by Ishmael. That event happened in the seventh month.

2 Kings 25:25 – But in the **seventh month**, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck down Gedaliah

and put him to death along with the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah.

This section of Zechariah about fasting and sincere worship reminds us of similar statements in Isaiah.

Isaiah 58:1-7 - (verse 4) Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. ... (verse 6) Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

To apply Isaiah's language to the question posed here, had their fasting allowed their "voice to be heard on high"? God's response through Zechariah suggests that the answer was a resounding no! It had not!

The charge here was a very serious one - false worship. That charge is serious at any time in history, but particularly here when the people had just returned from a long exile that had been brought upon them because of their false worship. Was history about to repeat itself? When we look at the question from this perspective, we can suddenly understand why God responded as he did.

Verse 6 completes the thought from verses 4-5. "And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" Fasting for the wrong reason displeased God, but so did *feasting* for the wrong reason. Were they doing these things for God, or were they doing these things for themselves?

ZECHARIAH 7:7

7 Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?

Zechariah was not proclaiming a new message. The "former prophets" had proclaimed the same message. What was missing here was not the truth; what was missing was the will to obey the truth.

Also, we should not miss a clear but subtle message from verse 7 – God expected his people to know what the former prophets had said.

There is no room here for any excuse in not knowing what God had said earlier through his prophets. And if God expected that of them – when written scrolls were few and far between – how much more must God expect of us who live in a country where God's entire word is freely and readily available at any time and in any place? Ignorance of God's word has never been a good excuse, but it has never been a worse excuse that it is today, at least in this country!

What if the people had heard and heeded those earlier prophets? How would things be different? In short, everything would be different. The exile would never have occurred, and the people would still be surrounded by prosperity rather than by desolation.

Why does verse 7 mention the **south**? Perhaps no part of the geography of Israel painted a more desolate picture of their plight than did the "Negev," the southernmost part of the nation. These "foot lands" lay between the Judean hills and the plains of Philistia, and they were once filled with orchards. But now they were a desolation, and it was all because the people

had not listened to the prophets. Would they make that same mistake again?

Verse 7 is a bridge between verses 1-6 and the verses that follow. In verses 1-6, Zechariah declared that the people were guilty of failing to worship God with a sincere heart. Verse 7 ties that same sin to what the people had done before the exile. It points to the desolate countryside as evidence that those earlier prophets were true prophets. But verse 7 also points forward. If the people did again what they had done before, then God would do again what God had done before. The desolation would continue, and the exile would return.

What we are seeing here is a **theme** that is running throughout this book. That theme was clearly stated in the opening verses:

Zechariah 1:2-3 – The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; **Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.**

Verse 7 concludes the thoughts in verses 1-6, but it also introduces the remainder of this chapter, which will call upon the nation to turn and repent.

God had previously spoken to his people when they were prosperous, but they did not hear him.

Jeremiah 22:21 – I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, ‘I will not listen.’

God was now speaking to them again, not in their prosperity, but in their desolation. Would he get a different response? Would they hear him now?

ZECHARIAH 7:8-10

8 And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, 9 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: 10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

What we see in these verses are themes that run all throughout the Bible. We see these commands over and over again from the books of Moses to the sermon on the mount and all throughout the rest of the New Testament. God wants his people to live in a certain way, and no one can ever claim ignorance of those requirements. They are repeated over and over again in the Bible.

The question that had been posed by Bethel dealt with an **outward** show of religion – fasting. God is telling the people to instead focus on what is **inward**. Having done that, what is outward will take care of itself.

Verse 9 has two positive commands, and verse 10 has two negative commands. Let's look at each of them.

The first positive command is to "execute true judgment" or "administer true justice." This theme runs all throughout the prophets.

Amos 5:21-24 – I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the

melody of thy viols. **But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.**

Jeremiah 7:5-7 - For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; **if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour;** If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

The word "true" in verse 9 carries with it the idea of reliability, permanence, and faithfulness. This justice is the kind of justice on which people can rely. It will not change based on the person involved, with perhaps the rich living under a different set of rules than the poor. In our own society, true justice is denoted by the idea that justice is blind, or at least should be.

We should follow our perfect example. Acts 10:34 tells us that God is no respecter of persons; that is, we are all living under the same set of rules, and we will all be judged by the same standard. If that were not the case, then how could we rely on or trust in the promises of God?

The second positive command in verse 9 is to "show mercy and compassion."

One commentator described the Hebrew word translated "mercy" as "notoriously difficult to translate, no English translation can capture the breadth of the word's connotations and denotations."

Some say that the meaning is close to that of the Greek word translated "grace" in the New Testament. It denotes the blessings that flow to God's people from

God's faithfulness. Those blessings include "mercy," but they also include forgiveness, protection, and much more. God gives these blessings to us, and we in turn are to give them to others.

Along with "mercy," verse 9 also uses the word "compassion." The Hebrew word for compassion is related to the word for "womb." It conveys the gentle tender love that a mother has for her children.

And, again, how God treats us should be the basis for how we treat other people. Zechariah was not the only prophet to proclaim this word from God.

Micah 6:8 – He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Hosea 12:6 – Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.

Verse 10 mirrors the two positive commands in verse 9 with two negative commands.

The first negative command is to not oppress widows, orphans, strangers, or the poor. Those were not secondary concerns then, and they are not secondary concerns today. Caring for the oppressed is a central concern of a religious life. It is part of the definition!

James 1:27 – **Pure religion** and undefiled before God and the Father is this, **To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction**, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Widows, orphans, strangers, and the poor – what do they all have in common? They are all easy to oppress.

They have no one to defend them. They are the most vulnerable in any society – both in Zechariah's society and in our own society, 2500 years later.

But widows, orphans, strangers, and the poor do have a defender – God. And if God's people are living as God has commanded them to live, then the widows, the orphans, the strangers, and the poor will have God's people as their defender.

"The true measure of any society is determined by how that society treats those that are the most vulnerable."

God leaves no room for any doubt about how his people should treat those who are most vulnerable.

Exodus 22:21-23 – Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry.

Deuteronomy 10:19 – Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 – Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.

Isaiah 1:17 – Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Matthew 25:42-43 – For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

Verse 10 concludes with a final negative command: "let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart."

Whatever we do, we must be motivated by a desire to seek the highest good for all men. And, yes, sometimes that will require that we offend that person. Why? Because a person's highest good is that person's eternal home with God, and that must be our goal for everyone. That is what it means to love our enemies – not to agree with them, but to seek their highest good.

God does not desire that any should perish – can we say the same thing? If not, then we have a problem with the command in verse 10.

How did God's people react to these commandments? Let's keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 7:11-12

**11 But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.
12 Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the**

former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.

The past tense in these verses, along with the "great wrath" in verse 12, lets us know that this reaction was the reaction of those who lived **prior** to the exile. It was this reaction to God's commands that led to the exile. The warning is clear – the people of Zechariah's day must not react as their ancestors had reacted or they will suffer the same fate their ancestors had suffered.

So how did their ancestors respond to these commands from God? Verses 11–12 use three metaphors to answer that question: they pulled away the shoulder, they stopped their ears, and they made their hearts as an adamant stone.

The first figure of speech – "they pulled away the shoulder" – also appears in Nehemiah 9:29, which says they "withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear." Literally that phrase means "they presented a stubborn shoulder." It refers to a stubborn ox that refuses to submit to the yoke. As used here it means the people were resisting the purpose for which they had been created.

The second metaphor, "they stopped their ears," is easy to understand. Stopping your ears was a common reaction to the word of God then, and it remains so today. And for those that take that path, God often punishes them by giving them even more of what they want.

Isaiah 6:10 – Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

God's people must be the opposite of those who stop their ears – they are instead to have the law of God written on their hearts.

Jeremiah 31:33 – But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The final metaphor is that "they made their hearts as an adamant stone" or flint. Again, that figure of speech is easy to understand – they were so hardened in their sin that they were almost unreachable. Ezekiel explains the change that needed to occur in their lives.

Ezekiel 36:26 – A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

What is the outcome of pulling away your shoulder, stopping your ears, and making your heart as an adamant stone? Verse 12 answers that question: "therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts."

Let's pause and ask a question: How did we get here?

This chapter began with a question that seemed innocent on the surface – a question about fasting. But that question was not innocent; it ignored something that should have been front and center to these people.

They were standing in the rubble of their ruined city – not because they had continued or discontinued some annual fast – but because their ancestors had rejected the law of God and had turned their backs on the

prophets who were proclaiming the word of God to them! And these people of Zechariah's day were close to going down the same path! They should have been focused on things much more weighty than what they had asked about at the beginning of this chapter!

God is very angry at the end of verse 12 – so what happens next?

ZECHARIAH 7:13-14

13 Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: 14 But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.

In Chapter 1, verse 3, God said, "turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you." Here, in verse 13, God says, "they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear." In the face of such a wonderful promise in Chapter 1, God is reminding them here of the bad choice that their fathers had made.

There is a textual question about verse 13. While the first part of the verse speaks of God in the third person ("that as **he** cried, and they would not hear"), the second part of the verse speaks of God in the first person ("so they cried, and **I** would not hear").

From the context it seems that God is using both the third person and the first person in reference to himself. Why? We don't know for sure, but one commentary offered this explanation: "Through this subtle shift, Zechariah's audience is transported back into the audience of the earlier prophets, making vivid this divine disciplinary statement."

Another writes: "The change in person from 'He' to 'I' is not uncommon in the prophets and reflects the vividness of the message in the mind of Zechariah." But, although I am sure it was vivid in Zechariah's mind, these words did not originate in Zechariah's mind, so I don't much favor that explanation. Of course if you are unfortunate enough to be using the NIV you won't even know there is a problem here – that version simply changes "he called" to "I called" in verse 13! (And now you know why NIV stands for the Nearly Inspired Version!)

Verse 14 says that God scattered the Jews to nations they knew not – Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and Persia. God had told them earlier that such would happen if they rejected his covenant.

Deuteronomy 28:49 – The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand.

God had brought them out of Egypt to "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:17), but now, as we have already seen, that pleasant land was desolate. The milk and the honey were long gone!

Chapter 7 ends far from where it began. The people came seeking clarification on a relatively minor religious matter. But to their surprise, they did not receive an answer to that question (and they won't get an answer until near the end of the next chapter). Instead, they were partly accused of and partly warned about having the same sort of sinful attitudes that had caused the exile in the first place. And they were told that if they did have such attitudes as their fathers, they should not be surprised when they met the same fate as their fathers.

In Zechariah 1–6, God has offered repeated promises of blessings (both present and future), and he has encouraged the people as they struggled to rebuild the temple. But they needed to know that whether or not they would enjoy those blessings rested on whether or not they were obedient to God.

The themes of Zechariah 7 are true worship and the consequences of disobedience. Those are vital themes both to them and to us.

God wants neither superficial worship nor superficial obedience. Instead, God wants his people to love him with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind – and when we do, neither our worship nor our obedience will ever be superficial.

CHAPTER 8

The love of God for his people is on full display in Chapters 7 and 8. It was because of his love for them that God gave the people the stern message of Chapter 7 after they asked their superficial question about fasting. And it is because of his love for them that God in this chapter will reassure them of their position and of their present and future blessings.

If the people had heard only Chapter 7, they would have left discouraged. If they had heard only Chapter 8, they would have left over-confident. Together these two chapters provide the perfect balance of what the people needed to hear.

Both Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 are intended to get the people to live righteous lives, but they provide different motivations for doing so. In Chapter 7, God's people were to repent and live righteously to avoid a repeat of the punishment that caused their captivity. In Chapter 8, God's people are to repent and live righteously because of the promise of their future restoration and blessings.

One of the most notable features of Chapter 8 is the phrase "the Lord of hosts," which occurs seventeen times in this chapter. That designation is intended to convey the might and authority of God on earth. God is the Creator of everything, God is King over everything, and everything belongs to God.

If the people had any doubts about whether God could deliver on his promises, those doubts were completely baseless and unfounded. God is the Lord of Hosts! If God says it will happen, it will happen. No one can possibly prevent God from doing what he has promised to do. That key fact is a central theme of Chapter 8.

ZECHARIAH 8:1-2

1 Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.

The message in verse 2 is not new. We saw the same message all the way back in Chapter 1.

Zechariah 1:14 – Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy.

And, of course, the description of God as a jealous God goes back further than that.

Exodus 20:4-5 – Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.

Jealousy is a particularly strong emotion. What does it mean that God is jealous?

The key to understanding the jealousy of God is to see God's jealousy in terms of the **covenant** that God has with his people and in terms of the **love** that God has for his people. God will not tolerate any rivals, and that intolerance operates in two directions – within and without. First, God will not tolerate rivals from within in the form of false gods and false worship. But, second, God will not tolerate rivals from without in the form of foreign nations that threaten his people.

God's jealousy is like the jealousy of a husband for a wife, which is displayed when either the wife looks to someone else or when someone from outside the marriage comes in and seeks to harm the wife or persuade her to leave. It is in that second sense that we see the jealousy of God in verses such as:

Isaiah 42:13 – The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up **jealousy** like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.

Do we always think of God as an *emotional* God? Or do we sometimes picture God as just a giant computer of some sort who knows everything and keeps track of everything?

A clear message of the Bible is that God has very strong emotions. We see God loving, we see God hating, and here we see God being jealous. Those are perhaps the three strongest emotions.

And, of course, we see the emotions of Jesus in the New Testament. We see his love, his anger, his compassion, and his tears. Have you ever thought about how much we can learn about God from the shortest verse in the Bible? "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

And when we see God the Son, we are seeing God the Father. In God there is no un-Christlikeness! "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Yes, God is an emotional God – one who can burn with love, with anger, and with jealousy. And although some may have trouble thinking about God in such terms, that is how God describes himself in his word.

And we should be thankful that God is emotional. Why? Because it is only because of God's great love for us that we have the hope of eternal salvation. An unemotional God would have been just fine with mankind forever remaining hopeless and hell-bound – but our loving heavenly Father was not.

Why do we see this description of the jealousy of God here in the opening verses of Chapter 8?

Again, we need to put ourselves in the place of those former exiles living in the ruin of their city and building a temple that seemed just a faint shadow of the former temple that had been destroyed. They must have wondered if God still loved them as much as he had loved their ancestors. So much had changed for God's people – had God's love for them changed as well? Had God turned his love and his attention to some other nation? Was God looking around?

Chapter 8 opens with a resounding "no" to that question. God still loved his people just as he always had – and God was still jealous for them just as he always had been.

A later prophet would remind these same people that God does not change. "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). And they should have been very thankful for that fact! Why? Because if God had been the sort to change, then they would likely have been destroyed long ago. That's what the entire verse from Malachi 3 says.

Malachi 3:6 – For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

God has a burning love for his people. And nowhere was that burning love more on display than when it came to the wonderful blessings that God had in store for his people – blessings that God is telling them about all throughout this book of Zechariah. God's burning love for his people is what caused God to send Jesus into this world to establish his eternal kingdom.

You mean the church is related to the jealousy of God? Absolutely! Listen to the word:

Deuteronomy 4:2 – For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

Where else have we seen that phrase? "A consuming fire"?

Hebrews 12:28–29 – Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: **For our God is a consuming fire.**

Notice the word "for" in that last verse. The reason we received the church is because of the burning love that God has for his people – because God is a jealous God. Let's be thankful for the jealousy of God!

ZECHARIAH 8:3

3 Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.

If anyone can read verse 3 and not think of Isaiah 2, then we need to go back and brush up on our "church chapters" (Psalm 2, Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, Joel 2, Acts 2, and Ephesians 2). Verse 3 here in Chapter 8 is pointing to the same events that are described in Isaiah 2:2-3.

Isaiah 2:2-3 – And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Both here and in Isaiah 2 we see the mountain of the Lord. In both we see Zion. In one we see the city of truth, and in the other we see the law and the word of the Lord going forth. In both we see God dwelling among his people – dwelling in their midst in Zechariah 8, and teaching them his ways after they come to the house of God in Isaiah 2.

That house or city is the new Jerusalem, which is the church. Just as the old Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God's people in the Old Testament, so is the new Jerusalem, the church, the dwelling place of God's people in the New Testament.

Revelation 21:2 – And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

I know we sometimes say that Revelation 21 is describing heaven, but Revelation 21:2 lets us know right from the start that we are **not** seeing Heaven, but rather we are seeing something "coming down from God **out of heaven.**" In fact, we are seeing the church in Revelation 21.

The church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5). The church is the New Jerusalem and the holy city of Revelation 21. And the church is the city of truth of Zechariah 8:3. We are seeing a people, not a place, in Revelation 21.

And what about God dwelling with his people in the midst of Jerusalem? First Corinthians 3:16 tells us that we are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in us. Ephesians 2:22 describes the church as a dwelling place or habitation of God in the Spirit. God dwells with men now in the church. Christ's perfect sacrifice made that possible.

Once again, God is lifting the curtain to give the people of Zechariah's day a glimpse of the wonderful eternal kingdom that was coming. We saw this same promise earlier in the visions, where it also referred to the church.

Zechariah 2:10 - Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord.

Look at verse 3 again. **The city of truth!** Don't you just love that description of the church? This is the only place in the Bible where that phrase occurs. But it is not the only place where that description is applied to the church.

1 Timothy 3:15 - But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God,

which is the church of the living God,
the pillar and ground of the truth.

What we are seeing in verse 3 is the church – the pillar and ground of the truth! But who will get to enjoy these great blessings in the city of truth? Keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 8:4-5

4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. 5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

Who in the city of truth will get to enjoy these great blessings? Everyone.

Everyone in the city of truth will enjoy those blessings. The references to the very old and to young children is a figure of speech. By mentioning the extremes of human lifespan, the text shows that the entire population would enjoy these blessings. No one would be left out! Not even the very young or the very old. Revelation conveys this same message with another figure, the 144,000. Each figure means the same – ALL of God's faithful people will enjoy these blessings.

Is that true of the church? Yes, the church is the body of the saved. There are no lost people in the church. The lost are outside the body of Christ – either because they were never in the body or because they were in the body but fell away. How do we know that? Because everyone in the kingdom has "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). There are no lost people in the eternal kingdom.

This prophecy of the church goes hand in hand with the great prophecy of Jeremiah 31:34 – "for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." Verses 4–5, by mentioning the young and the old, also remind us of Joel 2.

Joel 2:28 – And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.

And we know with absolute certainty when that verse from Joel 2 was fulfilled. How? Because Peter told us in Acts 2:16 that it was being fulfilled on that very day when he was proclaiming the first gospel sermon. Joel 2 was fulfilled in Acts 2, when the church was established. As with verse 3, verses 4 and 5 are talking about the church!

ZECHARIAH 8:6

6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.

As I have mentioned before, some commentaries on Zechariah read this book and see neither Christ nor his church. I suppose they avoid the obvious in an attempt to rid the Bible of predictive prophecy, but the text itself contradicts their efforts – and verse 6 is a clear example of that.

If the previous verses had dealt only with finishing the temple and repopulating the city, then no one listening would have thought them farfetched. The temple was already under construction, and people were already moving back into the city. Yes, much of the

city was still rubble, but it could all be rebuilt given enough time and enough people.

But verse 6 tells us that the people had a different reaction to these prophecies. They seem to have thought the prophecies were so farfetched that not even God would be able to make them happen! And because of that attitude, the people receive a sharp rebuke.

God begins by asking them if what seemed "marvelous" in human eyes would actually prove "marvelous" in his own sight? In other words, should an action be too difficult for God to accomplish simply because the deed is too difficult for man to accomplish?

A well-known book by J. B. Phillips is entitled *Your God is Too Small*, and the attitude expressed by the title of that book seems to have been a problem here as well. The people were assuming God shared their own limitations and their own near-sightedness, and of course that is not the case.

Jeremiah 32:27 – Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?

Luke 18:27 – The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

The point of the rhetorical question in verse 6 is clear: how can any man sit in judgment on God's ability to fulfill his own word?

Again, we are seeing a theme here: if God says it will happen, then it will happen. These promises were a test of the people's faith. And the more wonderful the promise, the greater the test of faith.

Notice that verse 6 of Zechariah 8 is specifically addressed to the "remnant of this people." The word "remnant" occurs three times in Zechariah, all here in

Chapter 8 (verses 6, 11, 12), and it occurs frequently in the other prophets as well. What does it mean?

Commentaries like to say that the remnant was "a technical term for those who had survived the exile." And that is partly true, but it fails to tell the whole story. Yes, **at that time**, the remnant included those faithful people who had returned from the exile – but the remnant also included those faithful people who had remained behind in Babylon (such as Daniel).

And the "remnant" was not just an Old Testament idea. Today there still remains a remnant consisting of God's faithful people.

Romans 11:5 – Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

God's faithful people have always been a remnant! Or perhaps I should say, *almost* always. God's people have been in the majority only twice in human history – just after creation and just after the flood. Other than that, we have always been a remnant.

And were it not for the faithful remnant, things would have turned out very differently.

Isaiah 1:9 – Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

All that God was doing *with* his people, *for* his people, and *to* his people at this time was designed to ensure the existence and preservation of a faithful remnant. Why? Because it was through that faithful remnant that the Messiah would come to bless the entire world.

God's plans depended on the faithful remnant; they did then, and they do now. And that means that the remnant

has a **responsibility**; it did then, and it does now. Or rather, **we** do now! If we don't proclaim the truth today, then who will do it?

ZECHARIAH 8:7-8

7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; 8 And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

Can there be any doubt now that we are reading about the church? Look at verse 8: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God"? Where else have we seen that?

Jeremiah 31:33 – But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; **and will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

2 Corinthians 6:16 – And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and **I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

Verse 7 shows us a beautiful picture. It shows God gathering his people from wherever they are, from the east to the west, and bringing them into the holy city, Jerusalem, so that they can dwell with him and be his people. That holy city of Jerusalem is the church!

Hebrews 12:22-23 – But ye are come unto mount Sion, **and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,** and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and **church of the firstborn,** which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

There can be no doubt – Zechariah is pointing straight to the church! If these people were discouraged, then what they needed to do was look at Christ and his eternal kingdom. And if that was true before the cross, how much more must it be true for us after the cross? If we are discouraged, we need to open our eyes and see what God has prepared for his people!

ZECHARIAH 8:9

9 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.

Verse 9 shifts the time frame back to the events of Zechariah's day. The message leaves for a moment the discussion of the future heavenly temple and returns to more immediate concerns – the *earthy* temple that the people were at that time working to rebuild.

How do we know that we have moved back to the earthly temple in verse 9? Perhaps the best way to know that is to look at the very first thing that God tells them here in verse 9 – let your hands be strong! That command cannot be discussing the temple made *without* hands!

Verse 9 must be discussing the temple made with hands, which was the temple they were at that time working to rebuild. The text of verse 9 itself also makes clear that the focus has shifted: "ye that hear in **these** days **these** words by the mouth of the prophets."

A major focus of both Zechariah and his contemporary, Haggai, is to encourage the people to finish building the temple. That encouragement becomes a command in verse 9, with God himself telling the people to get busy and finish what they had started.

The "prophets" in verse 9 include Haggai as well as Zechariah himself. Haggai tells us when the foundation was laid.

Haggai 2:18 – Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it.

That was in December 520 BC. The messages in Zechariah 7 and 8 were given in December 518 BC. The temple would be completed and dedicated a few years later in 515 BC. But for that to happen, the people needed to get busy! The temple was not going to rebuild itself! And that physical earthly temple was part of God's plan to bless the world through Christ 500 years later.

ZECHARIAH 8:10

10 For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour.

In verse 10, God explains why the people must *strengthen* their hands. What had been going on that might cause their hands *not* to be strong? Verse 10 answers that question.

In short, the people had been facing very harsh conditions ever since their arrival back from Babylon. As one commentary described it, "to do anything beyond meeting life's basic necessities would require sacrifices of time and financial resources reaching almost heroic levels."

Verse 10 says, "*There was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast.*" Not only was the city in ruins, but the economy was also in ruins. No one was hiring anyone, neither man nor beast. There were no jobs, and there were no wages. Each day must have been a struggle to survive.

Verse 10 says, "*Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction.*" Not only were the people living in harsh conditions, but their neighbors were actively working against them and sending back false reports about them. This "affliction" caused further economic harm by affecting agriculture and trade. There was no peace in the land.

Verse 10 says, "*For I set all men every one against his neighbour.*" What we see here is a complete breakdown in social order. The situation had become so bad that neighbor had turned against neighbor. The prevailing attitude had become "every man for himself."

But what does it mean in verse 10 when God says that **he had set** every man against his neighbor? That tells us that these events were, at least in part, a judgment from God intended to wake the people up to their situation and to remind them that they had a job to do in rebuilding the temple. God was doing this to get their attention.

ZECHARIAH 8:11-12

11 But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. 12 For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

Verse 11 begins with two very encouraging words, "but now!" Things had been bad in the past, but now things would be different.

Based on their current situation and on their past situation, it would have been very understandable for the people to believe they were facing a very bleak future. But that was not the case at all! If the people listened to God and obeyed his word through the prophets, then God would **not** be to them in the future as he had been to them in the past.

The word "residue" in verse 11 is the "remnant" we have discussed before. God is speaking here about the faithful few, and he is promising once again to bless them.

What we see in verse 12 is a clear connection with Haggai, who was preaching to this same people at this same time. In Haggai 1, the prophet proclaimed a divine judgment brought about by the people's haphazard approach to rebuilding the temple.

Haggai 1:10-11 – Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil,

and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

But that judgment was withdrawn after the people repented and recommitted themselves to rebuilding the temple.

Haggai 2:18-19 – Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.

That reversal in Haggai is the backdrop for Zechariah's prophecy here. The promise in verse 12 occurred between the judgment in Haggai 1 and the reversal of that judgment in Haggai 2.

ZECHARIAH 8:13

13 And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

What we see in this verse is the same choice we have seen repeatedly in this book and that we see repeatedly in the rest of the Bible – the choice between a blessing and a curse.

Because of their sin, the people had been taken into exile where they became "a curse among the heathen." God promises them here that he would save them from that, and they would be a blessing once again. Part of

that promise had already happened – they had returned from exile and were once again living in Jerusalem. But they had not yet become a blessing.

Note the language here – it does not say that the people would be blessed but rather says that they would be a blessing. What does that mean? I think it is pointing all the way back to Genesis 12 and Genesis 22.

Genesis 12:3 – And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 22:18 – And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

That great promise to Abraham has been behind much of what we have seen in Zechariah. It is the reason why God preserved the remnant and why the work of these exiles was so important. It was all part of God's plan to use this people to bless the entire world.

Three times in this chapter, Zechariah has referred to the remnant. Here in verse 13 a different designation is used: "O house of Judah, and house of Israel." Why?

I think that designation confirms that the blessing we are seeing in this verse is going all the way back to the blessing of Genesis 12. Israel had been scattered by Assyria two hundred years prior to Zechariah, and yet they are mentioned here along with Judah. This verse is looking backward over the history of both Judah and Israel to point the people back to the day when Abraham had received that great promise.

Verse 13 concludes with the same command with which verse 9 began: "let your hands be strong." What happens next? Verses 14–15 will show what God will do to bless his people, and verses 16–17 will describe what Judah must do to satisfy God's demands.

ZECHARIAH 8:14-15

14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: 15 So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.

God has given these people a very tough message, but here he tells them not to be afraid. But things looked pretty bad. Shouldn't the people have been afraid? No. Why? Because God was standing by to bless them – and the choice was theirs. Whether they received blessings or suffered the fate of their ancestors was in their own hands. We are reminded of Joshua 24:15 – "Choose you this day whom ye will serve."

The choice was theirs. But once they made their choice, could they trust God to do what he had promised? Absolutely, and the proof of that fact given here in Zechariah is interesting. To show his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise to **bless** them, God points to his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise to **punish** them!

And once again there is a lesson in there for us. Yes, God has promised great blessings to those who obey his gospel and who live faithfully unto death – but God has also promised great wrath to those who reject his word and who live apart from Christ. We should never doubt that God will be faithful to **all** of his promises.

The Hebrew verb translated "thought" or "determined" in verse 15, when God is the subject of the sentence, almost always introduces God's intention to bring judgment rather than blessing. The only exception occurs right here in verse 15 where that word is used to express God's intention to bless his people. The

use of that Hebrew word here emphasizes the dramatic reversal that Judah would experience if they obeyed God.

We are seeing one of our key themes at work in these verses – God will accomplish his plans on this earth, and there is nothing that can stop that from happening. God is the one acting in these verses. Yes, God's people can choose to obey or to fall away, but if they choose the latter, then God will find a faithful remnant elsewhere that he can use to accomplish his plans.

ZECHARIAH 8:16-17

16 These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: 17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.

In verses 16–17, God once again tells the people how they should live. Yes, the people had blessings, but they also had responsibilities. The commandments listed here remind us of the similar commands we saw in 7:9–10.

Notice the beginning of verse 16 – "these are the things that ye shall do." We can read and meditate on the word all day, but in the end what matters is what we do.

James 1:22 – But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

The first command is to "speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour." This command combines two vital

concepts – our concern for the truth and our concern for our neighbor. Those two concerns must go together, as this command emphasizes.

The second command is to "execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates." This command reminds us what we saw in Zechariah 7:9 – "Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother." This justice includes individual justice (how we respond to those who wrong us personally) but also includes corporate justice (how society responds to those who wrong it). That latter view seems to be what is stressed here given the reference to "your gates" in verse 16. As before, the "judgment of truth" is impartial judgment.

Leviticus 19:15 – Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

The third command is to "let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor." We saw that same command in Zechariah 7:10 and discussed it there. Why is that command being repeated? For the same reason it is repeated all throughout the Bible – it is important, and God's people were not doing it as they should.

The Bible only has to command something once for it to be a command we must follow, but when the Bible commands the same thing over and over again, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, then that suggests we should really pay attention! God uses repetition for the same reason we do – for emphasis!

The fourth command is to "love no false oath." This command reminds us of the vision we studied in Chapter 5 in which the flying scrolls entered "into the house

of him that sweareth falsely by my name" (Zechariah 5:4). Bringing false testimony has always been a serious offense. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). In Chapter 5, we discussed how that particular sin may have been tied to the rebuilding of the temple.

Notice the words we are seeing in these commands, both here in Chapter 8 and earlier in Chapter 7 – truth, true judgment, mercy, compassion, peace. We are reminded of what Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23.

Matthew 23:23 – Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted **the weightier matters of the law**, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

That is what we are seeing here – the weightier matters of the law. There is always a temptation to focus on those things that we can tick off a list and then be done with – but we can't live like that and be pleasing to God. God's message in Zechariah 8 and in Matthew 23 is a message to us as well – we need to focus on the weightier matters, and not leave the other matters undone.

At the beginning of this chapter we saw the jealousy of God, and we talked about the emotions of God. At the end of verse 17 we see another example of those divine emotions: "for all these are things that I **hate**, saith the LORD."

When God says that he **hates** something, we need to pay very close attention! We are reminded of the list in Proverbs 6:16–19, which has some overlap with the list here in Zechariah 8.

If God hates something, then God's people must hate that thing as well. Psalm 45:7 tells us that the Messiah would love righteousness and hate wickedness. That is our example – we must love righteousness and hate sin. And when we think about the terrible things that sin has caused and continues to cause in this world, hating sin should not be a problem for us.

And, although we are told that the world will hate us (Matthew 10:22), we cannot return that hatred and be pleasing to God. We must follow the example of Christ – he hates sin, but he loves sinners (John 3:16, Luke 19:10). And for that fact we should always be very grateful – because we are all sinners (Romans 3:23).

ZECHARIAH 8:18-19

18 And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, 19 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.

Remember that question that was posed all the way back in the third verse of Chapter 7? Well, here finally is the answer! I wonder if Sherezzer and Regemmelech even remembered their question? They had certainly gotten an earful from God between the question and the answer.

And the answer? Should they continue the fasts? Yes and no.

Yes, they should continue the remembrances, but those remembrances should become cheerful feasts rather than mournful fasts. Rather than a reminder of the sad

past, they should look forward to the wonderful blessings that are coming for God's people.

I think we all must admit that such an answer would have had little impact had it appeared immediately after the question in Chapter 7. Only now, after the intervening messages from God, could the people really appreciate the answer here in verse 19.

In Zechariah 7:3, the people had asked about a fast in the fifth month. God's initial response to them in 7:5 mentioned fasts in the fifth and seventh months. Here in 8:19, we see fasts that were also being held in the fourth and tenth months. All four of these fasts were to be turned into feasts.

We talked about the fasts in the fifth and seventh months when we looked at Chapter 7. What were the fasts in the fourth and tenth months intended to remember? The fast held during the tenth month probably recalled the initial siege on the city.

Jeremiah 39:1 - In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, **in the tenth month**, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it.

The fast in the fourth month probably recalled the month when the city was destroyed.

Jeremiah 39:2 - And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, **in the fourth month**, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up.

Far from fasting, these events were to become times of "joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts." The term "joy" used here means "exultation or rejoicing." The word "gladness" refers to the fellowship that family and friends share around a meal. The Hebrew phrase for

"cheerful feasts" does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament, but its meaning is clear.

God's message in giving them this answer is that things are going to be different. Past memories of pain will be replaced by these thoughts of future gladness. But, for that to occur, the people must do their part in obeying God. That is what the verses in between the question and the answer told them.

We talked earlier in this chapter about what we should *hate*. Verse 19 concludes with a reminder about what we should *love*: "therefore love the truth and peace."

Both love and peace. We cannot love the truth and not love peace; and likewise we cannot love peace and not love the truth. Peace and truth always walk hand in hand, and we must love them both.

ZECHARIAH 8:20-23

20 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: 21 And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. 22 Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. 23 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

With verse 20, and the phrases "it shall yet come to pass" (verse 20) and "in those days" (verse 23), God

once again turns to blessings that were yet future for those in Zechariah's day. And, as we have seen before, these verses once again refer back to Isaiah 2 in looking forward to the church.

Look at verse 21 - "and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also." And look at verse 23 - "we will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." And compare those verses with Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:3 - And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.

Look at verse 22 - "many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem." We saw that same prophecy all the way back in Zechariah 2:11 - "and many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people." Compare verse 22 with Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:2 - And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; **and all nations shall flow unto it.**

When did that prophecy come to pass? When did all nations flow unto the Lord's house? Ephesians 2 tells us that that prophecy was fulfilled in the church.

Ephesians 2:17-18 - And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Isaiah 2, Zechariah 2, and Zechariah 8 are all pointing to the same great event – the time at which God would fulfill his promise to Abraham to bless the entire world (Genesis 12:3) – both Jew and Gentile – through the Messiah. And that happened in Acts 2, when the church was established and the gospel was proclaimed to all. Verses 20–22 here in Zechariah 8 are pointing straight to the church.

Verse 23 declares that ten men speaking the different languages of the world would seek God. Again, that happened in the church. And, in fact, the proclamation of the gospel in many different languages *literally* happened in Acts 2.

Verse 23 is an interesting reversal of what we see in Genesis 11, one chapter prior to the great promise in Genesis 12:3.

Genesis 11:7 – Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

That confusion of tongues occurred because of man's pride and arrogance. But the prophecy here is that the church would reverse that confusion.

There is one body (Ephesians 4:4), which is the church (Colossians 1:18, 24). Why?

Why is there only one church? Wouldn't things have been easier if God had, for example, created one church for the Jews and another church for the Gentiles? No. There is one church because God wants us to be reconciled to him in one body. There is one church because of the promise to Abraham, which Galatians 3:7–9 identifies as the gospel.

Anyone who argues in favor of having multiple churches celebrating their diversity of doctrines is sewing confusion – and we know that God is not the author of

confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). What that means is that when we see confusion (as we see in the religious world today), we can be certain that God is not behind it. We can be certain that confusion is not part of God's plan for the church.

God's creation was scattered and confused in Genesis 11 because of its sin. That situation is *reversed* in the *one* church. And the church is the fulfillment of the great promise in Genesis 12, which was given to Abraham just a few verses after the tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

One more comment about verse 23 – the text says that some would "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: **for we have heard that God is with you.**" How did they hear that? How did they know what these Jews believed? What caused them to go with them? It's the same answer we see in Romans 10.

Romans 10:14-17 – How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

In this great prophecy about the church we see a reminder that we have a vital role in the plan of God. "For we have heard that God is with you." Is that what people today are hearing about us? Faith cometh by hearing – but what are they hearing? Our constant

prayer and our constant effort should be that we will lead lives that cause people to say to us, "we will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

With the end of Chapter 8, the first part of the book of Zechariah comes to a close. The people are back from exile, they are rebuilding their ruined temple, they have been reminded of their responsibilities before God, and they have been given promises of wonderful blessings yet to come. Psalm 126 captures the scene beautifully.

When the Lord turned again the captivity
of Zion, we were like them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
and our tongue with singing: then said
they among the heathen, The Lord hath
done great things for them. The Lord
hath done great things for us; whereof
we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O
Lord, as the streams in the south. They
that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He
that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing
precious seed, shall doubtless come
again with rejoicing, bringing his
sheaves with him.

That is where we are at the end of Chapter 8.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 9-14

One of the commentaries I read begins its discussion of Chapters 9–14 with the following statement: "Many have long agreed with the claim that Chapters 9–14 are perhaps the most problematic six chapters in the Bible." And when you read them, you quickly see why.

As one would expect, commentaries disagree about almost everything when it comes to these final six chapters of Zechariah. We will need to tread carefully and keep our interpretative guidelines in mind. Also, as

one would expect, those proclaiming various false doctrines have had a field-day when it comes to these final six chapters. Why? Because their difficulty makes them easy to twist.

Premillennialists, for example, cite these chapters for their false view that the Mosaic system will be brought back into force during the so-called millennial reign of Christ. (We know that claim is false based solely on what we have seen so far in Zechariah – the combined kingship and high priesthood, not to mention the countless other reasons we know that view is false from our study of the rest of the Bible!)

As with any difficult section of the Bible, our efforts to understand it will be richly rewarded, but that is particularly true of these six chapters. Why? Here is how one commentator answered that question:

In many respects the book of Zechariah stands as a capstone or culmination to prior biblical revelation. ... The book of Zechariah, particularly the final six chapters, functions much like a lens, both focusing and refracting theological concepts from the remainder of the Old Testament.

That claim about the book of Zechariah is confirmed when we turn to the New Testament to see how often the book of Zechariah is quoted – and particularly how often these final six chapters are quoted. For example, Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9 and Zechariah 11:12–13.

Matthew 21:4–5 – *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*

Matthew 27:9 – *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value.*

Later we will discuss why that verse in Matthew refers to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah.

The book of John quotes Zechariah 12:10 and Zechariah 14:8.

John 19:36–37 – *For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.*

John 7:37–38 – *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7 in Mark 14:27.

Mark 14:27 – *And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.*

And notice the introductory language in those references.

Matthew 21:4–5 – *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet*

Matthew 27:9 – *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet*

John 19:36–37 – *For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled*

Mark 14:27 – *And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written*

The prophecies in Zechariah referenced by these verses were Messianic prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus. Why do I stress that fact? Because a common (liberal) view is that the prophecies originally had nothing to do with Jesus, but rather the New Testament writers combed through the Old Testament looking for verses that matched something in the life of Jesus, and then they pulled those verses out of context and turned them into Messianic prophecies. **That view is completely false.**

When the New Testament quotes an Old Testament prophecy and says "this is that," then **that is that!** The prophecies about Christ in Zechariah are just that – prophecies about Christ, and that is what they have always been from the day they were first proclaimed by God and written down by his prophets. If the New Testament says that an Old Testament verse was fulfilled by something that occurred in the life of Christ, then that is the final word on the subject. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the text of Zechariah also inspired the text of the New Testament.

And for those who would charge the New Testament writers with twisting the Old Testament, do they realize against whom they are making that charge?

Mark 14:27 – *And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will*

smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

Did Jesus take that verse from Zechariah 13:7 out of context in applying it to himself? That is what some commentators falsely suggest.

The prophecies in Zechariah are all genuine prophecies, and some of them are prophecies about Christ – a fact we know from their citation in the New Testament. And that fact will be very helpful to us. How? **Because it will help us date the prophecies.** We know with absolute certainty that at least some of these prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus in the first century.

In addition to Messianic prophecies, another thing we will see frequently in these closing chapters of Zechariah is God's judgment against the nations. We see such judgments elsewhere in both the Old and New Testaments. Those judgments typically serve a number of functions.

- First, they show that God is the only true God and that God alone is worthy of worship.
- Second, as recognition of that fact, they often show the vanquished nations turning to God and making offerings to him.
- Third, they show the defeat of the oppressing nations resulting in great joy and relief among those who had been oppressed.
- And fourth, we see the end of the arrogant self-sufficiency of those nations who had rejected God and persecuted his people, making way for God's kingdom to take their place.

That pattern is a common one. We see it in Isaiah and Jeremiah; we see it here in Zechariah; and we see it in the book of Revelation. The oppressors of God's people will change, but how God deals with those op-

pressors will not – God judges them and holds them accountable for their sins against his people.

The themes of these judgments are themes we have seen before:

- God will accomplish his plans on this earth, and no one can stand in his way.
- God knows what is happening, and no one can hide from God or escape the judgment of God.
- God loves and cares for his people, and God will deal with any threats that are made against his people.

If our interpretation of these chapters ever departs from those major themes, then we should take that as an indication that we have likely gone down the wrong path.

As with any difficult text of the Bible, a good starting point is to drive some tent pegs into the ground. That is, we should make note of some unmoving and immovable easy-to-understand facts that will help us interpret the more difficult verses. If our interpretation runs up against an immovable Biblical tent peg, then we need to change our interpretation. What are some of those tent pegs?

1. We have already discussed the first one. When the New Testament refers back to a prophecy in Zechariah and tells us what it means, then that ends the inquiry as to the meaning of that prophecy. We know with absolute certainty what that prophecy is about, and we know when it was fulfilled.
2. The new covenant replaced the old covenant, and the old covenant is never coming back (Hebrews 8:13, Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 7:12). There is no need for the old covenant to come back, and it

can't come back as long as Jesus is both King and High Priest.

3. Under the new covenant, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile as to salvation in Christ (Romans 10:12, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11).

Just three tent pegs, but most commentaries on Zechariah violate all of them!

Finally, it should go without saying, but let's say it anyway – we must pay very close attention to the context of these verses, and we should be on the lookout for any clues as to their time frame.

For starters, Chapters 9–14 follow Chapters 1–8! That doesn't sound like much of a news flash but you would be surprised at the number of commentaries that treat Zechariah as two completely separate and unrelated books. (They do the same with Revelation by treating Chapters 2 and 3 as being somehow unrelated to the chapters that follow.) Whatever we decide about Chapters 9–14, what we say should make sense when viewed in light of Chapters 1–8. Zechariah is a unified whole – as is the entire Bible.

As for the time frame, we should always look for it when studying any prophecy in the Bible. For example, the time frame is vital in understanding the book of Revelation, and fortunately the time frame of that book could not be stated any more clearly. Here in Zechariah we need to watch for helpful phrases such as "in that day," and, of course, we need to note whenever the New Testament provides a time frame by telling us when a prophecy in Zechariah was fulfilled.

And one final guideline that has already proved helpful in our study of this book – we should use easy-to-understand verses to help us understand the more difficult verses.

For example, if our view of these chapters is that they contain signs of the end of the world, then again we know we have veered off course. Why? Because the end of the world will come like a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10) at a time when no one suspects (Mark 13:33).

For another example, if our view of these chapters is that they teach the old covenant will come back into force and that the Jews will someday be living under a different gospel than the Gentiles, then we know that we have gone very badly wrong. Why? Because of at least two very easy-to-understand verses:

Hebrews 8:13 - In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Romans 10:12 - For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

The old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant, and the old covenant is not coming back and cannot come back. And there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek as to salvation in Christ. Those are two of our Biblical tent pegs, and those tent pegs are supported by verses that are impossible to misunderstand.

The final six chapters in Zechariah are broken up into two main sections, each containing an oracle or a burden. Those two sections are Chapters 9-11 ("the burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach") and Chapters 12-14 ("the burden of the word of the Lord for Israel"). Let's start with the first of those two burdens in Zechariah 9:1.

CHAPTER 9

ZECHARIAH 9:1

1 The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD.

Commentaries differ on the precise meaning of the word "burden," which introduces Chapter 9 and later introduces Chapter 12. It can mean a "divine judgment," or it can just mean a "divine utterance." While we will see many judgments in these final six chapters, we will see other things as well, so perhaps the broader meaning is the better choice – a divine utterance.

The big question in verse 1 is the meaning of "the land of Hadrach." What is Hadrach? Where is Hadrach? There are almost as many answers to that question as there are commentaries, but I think we can focus our attention on two possibilities – one literal and one figurative.

The literal view is that Hadrach is the name of an actual city located somewhere in Syria. (Damascus, which is also mentioned, was one of the major cities in Syria.) The problem with this view is that Hadrach is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible, which leads some to wonder why it would merit such a large oracle from God.

Those that take this literal approach usually identify Hadrach with the city of Hatarikka, which is mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions. But that connection is tenuous, and it does not solve the main problem: why would this obscure city be mentioned here?

Why would God give such a long pronouncement against an obscure Syrian city that is mentioned nowhere else

in the Bible? Also, note that verse refers not just to Hadrach but to *the land of Hadrach*. That sounds less like a city and more like a region or a nation. I think we need to look for a better explanation for Hadrach, and fortunately there is a better explanation.

It is possible that Hadrach is not the *literal* name of any city or nation, but is instead a *figurative* name. Before we consider what the name might depict, let's ask another question – are such figurative names used anywhere else in the Bible? Yes, they are.

In Isaiah 21:11, "the burden of Dumah" refers to Edom using the word Dumah, which means silence. In Jeremiah 25:26 ("and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them") and Jeremiah 51:41 ("how is Sheshach taken!") Babylon is referred to as Sheshach, which means humiliation. In Isaiah 29:1 ("woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!") Jerusalem is called Ariel, which means the hearth of God.

And we see this done with *people* as well as with cities. The book of Jeremiah, for example, gives Pharaoh Neco one of the greatest nicknames in history. In Jeremiah 46:17 we read, "Call the name of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, 'Noisy one who lets the hour go by'" (RSV). The Living Bible paraphrase of that nickname is "the man with no power but with plenty of noise." In the original languages, that nickname is a pun – it has a similar sound in Hebrew to Pharaoh's actual Egyptian name.

We see another example in Jeremiah 20.

Jeremiah 20:3 – And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The Lord hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib.

Pashur was the priest who ordered Jeremiah to be beaten and placed in stocks. When Jeremiah got out of the stocks, he told Pashur he had a new name – Magor-missabib, which means "terror all around." That would be the plight of Judah when Babylon approached if the people listened to Pashur instead of Jeremiah.

So if we determine here that Hadrach was a divinely inspired (and possibly insulting) nickname, then it would not be the only one in the Bible. But what could Hadrach mean, and to what could it refer? What does the word mean?

Some say Hadrach was derived from one of Syria's false gods – Chadrak, but I don't think so. Instead, I think we need to break Hadrach up into parts to see what it means here. The first half of Hadrach ("Had") means sharp, and the second half of Hadrach ("Rach") means soft. So, the oracle starting in Zechariah 9 is directed to the land of *sharp-soft*, or perhaps *strong-tender* or *strong-weak*.

I think what we have here is yet another symbolic nickname. That view is bolstered by the fact that Hadrach appears nowhere else in the Bible and, in fact, appears nowhere else in the secular records. They may dig the city of Hadrach up tomorrow and force me to reconsider my position, but for now I think a symbolic view is the better view.

And this view of Hadrach is an ancient view. The Jews have long viewed Hadrach as figurative. Where they go wrong is how they apply the term – they consider Hadrach (*sharp-soft*) to be a reference to the Messiah, whom they said would be harsh to the Gentiles but gentle to the Jews. That view is wrong – Hadrach is not the Messiah. But I think they were on to something in their figurative understanding of Hadrach based on how the word sounded when spoken. (And the fact that they felt the need so long ago to understand the word figuratively supports the view that the word should be

understood figuratively now. Their interpretation suggests that they also had never heard of a place called Hadrach!)

So, what could Hadrach mean? What nation had a *sharp* side and a *soft* side? And what nation would we expect to see here in this oracle? The answers to those questions are all the same – **Persia**. Identifying Hadrach with Persia makes perfect sense in view of the historical context. Persia was the very power who was then lording over his people. But how was Persia both soft and sharp? There are several possible answers.

First, Persia had a divided character. It was militarily and economically strong but it was famous for its moral weakness. One commentary described Persia this way:

Persia was at the same time characterized by an effeminate softness that later made Persian debauchery and effeminacy a byword and the source of the moral contamination of Greece and Rome.

Second, while Persia had done some good things for God's people, such as letting them return to Jerusalem, Persia was not in the business of being nice! You can be sure anything that Persia did was intended to benefit Persia, and (as we discussed in the introduction) Persia benefited from having a Jewish buffer between themselves and Egypt. But perhaps that sort of duplicity could be another explanation for the sharp-soft character of Persia. Persia had a soft side!

A third possible explanation comes from Daniel. The Medo-Persians overthrew Babylon on the night that Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall in Daniel 5. The combined nation of Medo-Persia is described in Daniel 8:3.

Daniel 8:3 – Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.

Why is one horn higher than the other? Because the higher horn denotes the supremacy of the Persians in their merger with the Medes. And the higher horn comes up last. That temporal order is in perfect accord with history. The Medes were the dominant power until Cyrus the Great came along and brought prominence to the Persians. So perhaps the sharp and soft name Hadrach denotes the sharp and soft Medo-Persia.

A fourth possibility is that the Medes are not in view here at all, but instead the sharp and soft description refers to the strength of Persia in producing conquerors such as Cyrus the Great, but also to the softness of Persia in its eventual defeat at the hands of the Greeks.

I favor the second or the fourth possibility if I have to pick just one, but God may have chosen the name based on a combination of reasons.

Whatever the explanation, I think the best view is to take Hadrach (sharp-soft) as a figurative name for Persia. But that leaves us with yet another question: Why does the text use a figurative name? Why not just call Persia Persia? There are two possible answers to that question.

First, God may have wanted to use this name simply to make the point that Persia had a sharp side and a soft side. That is why God used the other figurative names we looked at earlier. He used them to make a particular point, and sometimes as a divine insult directed at an oppressor of his people.

A second possible reason is that Persia was denoted by this hidden name so that the neighbors of the Jews would not be able to use this text in their efforts to show that the Jews were traitorous against Persia. (And it is possible that both of these reasons are correct. We don't have to choose one over the other.)

What about the rest of verse 1: "*and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD.*"

Damascus was a major city in Syria, and so verse 1 is telling us that this judgment against the Persians would begin in Syria. That is, the burden would first rest upon Damascus. As for what this burden is, let's hold off on that question until we read a few more verses and get some more evidence.

The final phrase in verse 1 is difficult: "*when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD.*" What does that mean?

Some say it means that God saw all of the evil that these nations had inflicted on his people. Others say it means instead that all of these people would someday recognize God. I think the best view is the simplest view. What we are seeing in these verses is a judgment by God against the Persians. I think the end of verse 1 is simply saying that all of these people would be watching the mighty force that God would send, which means that they would in effect be watching God as he moved in judgment down upon the Persians.

ZECHARIAH 9:2-4

2 And Hamath also shall border thereby; Tyrus, and Zidon, though it be very wise. 3 And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the

streets. 4 Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire.

The beginning of verse 2 should have been left as the ending of verse 1. Hamath is another city in Syria, and it would be judged along with Damascus.

With the second half of verse 2, we see that that the judgment will also come against Tyre and Sidon.

Notice that we have seen four cities so far. Also, in the next set of verses we will see four of the well-known five cities of Philistia. Why four?

For the same reason we have seen four used symbolically earlier in this book. The number four is symbolic for the earth, and what we are seeing here are God's judgments against earthly powers. This symbolic use of four is additional evidence that Hadrach in verse 1 is not just another city in Syria because, if it were, then Sidon would be the fifth city rather than the fourth city.

Even though Sidon is mentioned, the focus of the prophecy (as we will see) is against Tyre.

Tyre was known in the ancient world for its worldly wisdom. But verse 2 tells us that its wisdom would not save it. In fact, nothing that Tyre could do would be enough to save it from the force that was coming its way. Even if Tyre built a large stronghold, it would not be enough. And their silver and gold would not help them either. They could not bribe their way out of this danger.

Whatever was coming would be different from the enemies that Tyre had faced before. The city had been besieged by the Assyrians for five years and by the Babylonians for thirteen years – but this time things

would be different. They would fall, and they would fall quickly.

What was coming? Again, let's hold off on that answer until we see all of the evidence.

One thing we can say for sure is that the fall of Tyre would be a shocking event. That's what verse 4 tells us. "Behold! The Lord will cast her out!" That verse also confirms that this judgment would be a judgment from God. The great commercial city of Tyre would fall into the hands of a great conqueror sent by God.

ZECHARIAH 9:5-6

5 Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. 6 And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

The Philistines are next in line for this coming judgment against the Persians. Four Philistine cities are mentioned here: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod.

Why isn't Gath mentioned? Again, I think we are seeing a symbolic use of the number four.

Ashkelon would fear for its own safety when it saw what happened to Tyre. Eventually Ashkelon would no longer be inhabited. Gaza and Ekron would see what happened to Tyre and be very sorrowful. If the great city of Tyre fell, then what hope did Gaza and Ekron have? Ekron's trust in Tyre would be put to shame, and Gaza's king would perish.

Verse 6 tells us that a bastard would dwell in Ashdod. What does that mean?

It could mean that the city would be ruled by one born of incest or adultery, or it could simply mean that the city would be ruled by a stranger or a foreigner. Either way, Ashdod would be humiliated. These four great cities were the pride of the Philistines. When those cities fell, the "pride of the Philistines" was "cut off" as verse 6 tell us.

So, who was this great conquerer sent from God? When and how was this prophecy fulfilled? We are at last in a position to answer that question.

What have we seen? We have seen that a great force from God would start with Damascus, move to Tyre, and then move against the cities of Philistia. When did that happen and who or what was this great force sent by God?

Let's listen as *Wikipedia* answers that question!

In spring 333 BC, Alexander the Great crossed the Taurus into Cilicia. After a long pause due to illness, he marched on towards Syria. Though out maneuvered by Darius' significantly larger army, he marched back to Cilicia, where he defeated Darius at Issus. Darius fled the battle, causing his army to collapse, and left behind his wife, his two daughters, his mother, and a fabulous treasure. ... Alexander proceeded to take possession of Syria, and most of the coast of the Levant. In the following year, 332 BC, he was forced to attack Tyre, which he captured after a long and difficult siege. The men of military age were massacred and the women and children sold into slavery. When Alexander destroyed Tyre, most of the towns on the route to Egypt quickly capitulated. However, Alexander met with resistance at

Gaza. The stronghold was heavily fortified and built on a hill, requiring a siege. When "his engineers pointed out to him that because of the height of the mound it would be impossible... this encouraged Alexander all the more to make the attempt". After three unsuccessful assaults, the stronghold fell, but not before Alexander had received a serious shoulder wound. As in Tyre, men of military age were put to the sword and the women and children were sold into slavery.

And another article sheds more light on the Siege of Tyre.

The Siege of Tyre was orchestrated by Alexander the Great in 332 BC during his campaigns against the Persians. The Macedonian army was unable to capture the city, which was a strategic coastal base on the Mediterranean Sea, through conventional means because it was on an island and had walls right up to the sea. Alexander responded to this problem by first blockading and besieging Tyre for seven months, and then by building a causeway that allowed him to breach the fortifications. It is said that Alexander was so enraged at the Tyrians' defense of their city and the loss of his men that he destroyed half the city.

The prophecy in the opening verses of Zechariah 9 is describing these same events. They were also prophesied by Daniel in Daniel 2:39.

Daniel 2:39 – And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and

another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

The kingdom in charge at the time that Daniel's prophecy was given was Babylon. The coming inferior kingdom in Daniel 2:39 was Medo-Persia. That prophecy was fulfilled in Daniel 5. The "third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth" in Daniel 2:39 was Greece, and that is what we are seeing prophesied here in Zechariah 9.

And these prophecies were given in great detail in Zechariah 9 almost 200 years before the events occurred! Here is how one commentary describes it:

The astonishing accuracy of these prophecies points to the invasion down this very route by the famous Macedonian conqueror, Alexander the Great. In the year 333 BC, Alexander won a great victory over the Persians at Issus. Instead of pursuing his enemy into the Persian interior, which would expose his line of supply to the powerful Persian navy in the Mediterranean Sea, Alexander brilliantly turned south to roll up the Persian cities along the coast. His strategy was to eliminate the enemy navy by removing its ports, marching through Phoenicia and Philistia down to Egypt, and only then returning north to deal with the Persian ground forces.

And, again, the Persians could have known all about Alexander's brilliant plan had they just read these prophecies written 200 years before the event! (And, of course, when we read Zechariah we understand who was really behind that brilliant plan!)

But what about Jerusalem? Did Alexander the Great destroy Jerusalem? If not, why not? We will see the

answer to those questions in verse 8, but first let's look at the very difficult verse 7.

ZECHARIAH 9:7

7 And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite.

Verse 7 is one of those very difficult verses that are scattered throughout these final six chapters of Zechariah just to keep our life interesting! Here is what one commentator said about verses 1-7:

This prophecy was, no doubt, so designed by divine providence as to cover the victorious progress of Alexander the Great, for the order of the towns mentioned is identical with Alexander's line of march after the battle of Issus. Yet we dare not conclude that verses 1-7 are a prophecy of this hero's success, for verse 7 marks a result that did not follow upon his conquest.

Although I agree with that commentator that verses 1-6 precisely describe Alexander's conquest, I think that commentator is completely wrong about verse 7. Whatever verse 7 means, it must be pointing to something that happened after Alexander's conquest. We just need to figure out what it is.

Verse 7 starts by telling us two things that the people would stop doing: "*I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth.*" What do they mean?

Removing his blood from his mouth likely refers to the drinking of sacrificial blood as an act of worship or eating of victims used in sacrifice with the blood. Removing his abominations from between his teeth likely refers to the animals the people were forbidden to eat under the Mosaic law or to sacrifices offered to idols and then eaten. The people would turn from those things.

Instead, we are told that those left alive "shall be for our God" and "shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite." What does that mean?

The ESV translates the phrase "shall be for our God" in verse 7 as "shall be a remnant for our God." That means the remaining Philistines would become a part of the remnant. In fact, they would be as a governor or a chief in Israel, which means they would hold an honored position in the remnant.

The last description in verse 7 is that Ekron would be as a Jebusite. What does that mean?

The Jebusites were the ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 11:4 – And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land.

The Jebusites were not run out of the land as most others were, but instead they continued to live among the Jews.

Judges 1:21 – And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

Ekron was the closest Philistine city to Jerusalem, and so the point here seems to be that the remaining Philistines would also live alongside the Jews like the Jebusites had done for many years.

So, verse 7 seems to be saying that after the Philistines were conquered by Alexander the Great, they would all be converted to God.

It is true that such did not happen *immediately* after the conquest, but nowhere does verse 7 say that this would occur immediately. Did it ever happen? Yes, it did, in at least two ways.

During the time between the testaments, the Maccabean rulers of Judea successfully annexed the Philistine territory. Mosaic regulations were enforced on those who lived in the area. That might be what verse 7 has in mind, but I think a better view is that verse 7 is looking forward to the day when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together in the one church.

To see why that is the best view of this verse, let's ask an important question: **Why was God doing all of this?** Why was God using the Greeks to destroy the Persians? And why would God later use Rome to conquer the Greeks? Why? Because God was creating the perfect cradle for his son, and I am not referring to the manger. The perfect cradle was a world almost entirely at peace and in which the Greek language was used all throughout the known world. In short, it was the perfect setting for Jesus to come and bless the entire world (both Jew and Gentile) as had been promised to Abraham so long before.

And it was when that blessing came that verse 7 would be fulfilled. I think that is the best way to view the very difficult verse 7. God was doing all of this so that the Philistines of this world could turn to him, obey the gospel, and be saved. If there were no verse

7, then we would be left to wonder why we were given verses 1-6. Verse 7 is the explanation for verses 1-6.

So what happened to Jerusalem when Alexander marched through the area? Verse 8 answered that question 200 years before it happened! And what an incredible answer it is!

ZECHARIAH 9:8

8 And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.

Before we comment on verse 8, let's read from the writings of Josephus what happened when Alexander marched on Jerusalem (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, Chapter 8, Paragraphs 4 and 5 (slightly paraphrased)):

Now Alexander, when he had taken Gaza, made haste to go up to Jerusalem; and the high priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror, as not knowing how he should meet Alexander and his army. He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifices to God, whom he besought to protect that nation, and to deliver them from the perils that were coming upon them; whereupon God warned him in a dream, which came upon him after he had offered sacrifice, that he should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest appear in white garments, but that he and the priests should meet the king in their usual

priestly attire, without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent. Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced; and declared to all the warning he had received from God according to which dream he acted entirely, and so waited for the coming of Alexander.

And when he understood that Alexander was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests and the multitude of the citizens. ... and although the enemies of the Jews thought they would soon have liberty to plunder the city, the very reverse happened; for Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head having the golden plate on which the name of God was engraved, Alexander approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest. The Jews also did all together, with one voice, salute Alexander, and encompass him about: whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, they asked him how it came to pass, that when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews? To whom Alexander replied, "I did not adore him, but rather I adored God who hath honored him with that high priesthood; for I saw this very person in his priestly clothing in a dream, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no

delay, but boldly to pass over the sea, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence it is, that having seen no other in such priestly clothing, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind." And when he had said this and had given the high priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him, and he came into the city; and when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests. And when the book of Daniel was showed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that he himself was the person intended.

Having read that fascinating account from Josephus, let's read verse 8 again: *"And I [God] will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth."*

Josephus is not inspired, but what he wrote certainly seems to fit very well with what we see here in Zechariah 8. Jerusalem was not destroyed by Alexander! Why? Because God was encamped around it. God protected Jerusalem from Alexander the Great – both when Alexander marched by Jerusalem on his way to Egypt in 332 BC and when Alexander marched back by Jerusalem afterwards.

How did God protect Jerusalem from Alexander? The Bible does not provide those details, but perhaps Josephus does. In any event, we know that God protected Jerusalem and kept it from being destroyed while these other cities were being destroyed by Alexander. And we know that protection was prophesied by Zechariah almost 200 years before Alexander the Great was born!

Remember in our introductory comments how we described the many commentators who say that Zechariah is really two books? Why do they say that? We can see why right here – if they dated the second half of Zechariah as early as the first half, then they would have to admit that the Bible contains predictive prophecy. That they can never admit, and so they do to the second half of Zechariah what they do to the book of Daniel – they try to move the date of the book until after the events it predicts. The efforts of such commentators to undermine the Bible tell us much more about those commentators than about the Bible. I am reminded of one of my grandfather's favorite quotes:

There is no deafness so permanent as the deafness that will not hear. There is no blindness so incurable as the blindness that will not see. There is no ignorance so deep as the ignorance that will not know.

We are also reminded of:

Matthew 13:15 – For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

And we are reminded of:

Ephesians 4:18 – Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

One must be truly blind not to see Christ, the church of Christ, and the power of God in the book of Zechariah!

Look at the end of verse 8: "*and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.*" What does that mean? It can't mean that at no future time after Alexander would an oppressor ever pass through Jerusalem. Why? Because Daniel had already prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of another oppressor, the Romans. We read of that in Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:11, and we read of that in Matthew 24:15 where Jesus refers to those same prophecies. Another oppressor was definitely coming for Jerusalem.

So what does the end of verse 8 mean? It *could* be a reference to the church, which we know from countless other passages enjoys divine protection. In fact, Daniel told us that the church would be the kingdom that would destroy other kingdoms, and not vice versa. But I'm not sure the church is in view here in verse 8.

Perhaps the best explanation is the simplest explanation. We get the simplest explanation by viewing the last half of verse 8 in the immediate context of the first half of verse 8, which is all about Alexander's invasion. That is, this oppressor is the same one who passes by and returns. If that is true, then this statement would mean that *Alexander* would never again come into the land of Judah. This would be his only encounter with the Jews, and as far as we know from

secular history, that is the case. In fact, Alexander died about nine years later at the age of 32 (which means he was only about 23 when he marched on Jerusalem – about the same age that Zechariah was at the beginning of this book!).

By any earthly measure, Alexander certainly earned his title of "great." By the time of his death, Alexander's empire of roughly two million square miles stretched from the Danube to the Nile to the Indus. In modern terms, his empire included Greece, Bulgaria, much of Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, Afghanistan, western Pakistan, and parts of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

You have to work pretty hard not to see the hand of God in the life of Alexander the Great! The Bible is clear about who was behind the successes of Alexander, and it was not Alexander. Alexander was simply fulfilling the role that God had arranged for him hundreds of years before he was born.

"For now I have seen with my eyes." What does that phrase mean at the end of verse 8? It means that God was once again looking with favor on his people. God was noticing their plight, God was judging their enemies, and God was sending them a deliverer. And if they thought that Alexander the Great was their promised true deliverer, they were badly mistaken! The next two verses tell us about the true deliverer of the Jews. We just saw the mighty Alexander the Great marching with his great army, so I suppose the true deliverer will come with even more pomp and circumstance, right? Well, let's see.

ZECHARIAH 9:9

**9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold,
thy King cometh unto thee: he is just,**

and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

That's a very different picture from how Alexander rode into a city! And it's very different from how many of the Jews of Jesus' day expected their promised Messiah to enter their city. That difference proved a stumbling block for many of the Jews when Jesus arrived – but they should have known what to expect. Zechariah had told them 500 years earlier.

Verse 9 is a beautiful verse (certainly one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible), and it is a verse that we know with **absolute certainty** is a prophecy about Christ. How do we know that? Because of Matthew 21.

Matthew 21:1-9 – And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, **that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet**, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed

them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

That event in Matthew 21 is precisely what is being prophesied about here in Zechariah 9:9. After telling the people about what would happen when Alexander the Great came, God tells them what would happen when the *Messiah* came – an event that occurred about 300 years after the death of Alexander.

Zechariah calls upon "the daughter of Zion" to "rejoice greatly." The daughter of a place is the population of that place personified as a female. Why should the population of the city experience this outburst of joy? Because of the shocking announcement that follows: "Thy King cometh unto thee."

King? What king? The last Jewish king was long dead. Zerubbabel was from the royal line, but Zerubbabel was no king. The king of the Jews at this time was the foreign Persian king, Darius!

And notice what this great King would do – he would *come unto* the people, unlike Alexander the Great who *bypassed* Jerusalem. And that was not the only difference between Alexander the Great and the truly great King who was coming. They had totally different characters.

What do we learn about the character of Jesus from verse 9? Zechariah describes the coming Messiah in four ways.

First, the coming Messiah is "just." He would be no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), which is certainly true of Christ. But this word can also be translated as "righteous." He would be without sin or blame.

1 Peter 2:22 – Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.

Second, the coming Messiah will come "having salvation." He would come to save his people from their oppressors, and he would free them from their captivity. He would seek and save the lost.

Titus 2:11 – For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.

Luke 19:10 – For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Third, the coming Messiah is "lowly." He would be humble.

Matthew 11:29 – Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Fourth, the coming Messiah would come into Jerusalem "riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." What does that tell us about Jesus?

From the time of Solomon, the donkey was considered a lowly animal and a symbol of peace. So this type of entrance would stress the meekness of Christ, and it would also show that Christ was the promised prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6).

Donkeys have always had a bit of a bad reputation, but this particular donkey received a great honor. In fact, this donkey is so famous that it became the subject of a poem called "The Donkey," by G. K. Chesterton, which is one of my favorites. It describes the triumphal entry from the donkey's perspective!

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,

Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.
With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.
The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.
Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

That donkey experienced quite a transformation, which I suspect is the whole point of that poem.

We need to pause here and deal with a difficulty both in this text in Zechariah and in the New Testament verses that record its fulfillment.

We earlier read Matthew's account:

Matthew 21:2-7 - Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: **loose them, and bring them unto me.** ... And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, And brought the ass, and the colt, **and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.**

Here is how Mark and Luke describe it.

Mark 11:2-7 - Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; **loose him, and bring him.** ... And they brought the

colt to Jesus, and cast their garments **on him**; and he sat upon him.

Luke 19:30-35 – Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: **loose him, and bring him hither.** ... And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments **upon the colt**, and they set Jesus thereon.

Here then are our questions: how many donkeys did Jesus ask for, and how many donkeys did Jesus ride into the city? One or two?

First, let's ask a related question: how many donkeys were prophesied? Here, again, is what verse 9 says:

Zechariah 9:9 – Riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

That verse definitely mentions at least two donkeys – the colt and its mother. But how many would be ridden? "Riding upon an ass, and upon a colt." The Hebrew text is ambiguous. It could mean riding on two donkeys (an ass *and* a colt), or it could mean riding on only one donkey (an ass *that is* a colt).

Most commentaries favor the latter view and say that verse 9 is an example of Hebrew parallelism, and I agree. Why? Because verse 9 shows the King riding upon the ass and upon the colt, which would suggest that the ass and the colt are the same animal. Common sense, along with Mark 11 and Luke 19, tells us that Jesus road only a single donkey into the city.

But what then about Matthew 21? Those verses clearly mention two donkeys: an ass and the colt of that ass.

Here is the charge that is laid against Matthew by some modern critics: Matthew simply invented a second

animal because his wooden reading of the Hebrew parallelism told him that it was needed. That charge is ridiculous.

For starters, it is beyond laughable to think that some professor whacking away at his word processor in 2022 knows more about Hebrew parallelism than did Matthew, the educated Hebrew tax collector of the first century.

Second, beyond the fact that Matthew was inspired, we know from the rest of Matthew's book how careful Matthew was with historical facts and their relation to Old Testament prophecies.

And, third, and perhaps most importantly, Zechariah 9:9 mentions two donkeys! The colt and the mother of the colt. So how can Matthew possibly be faulted for mentioning two donkeys!

But why does Matthew mention both donkeys while Mark and Luke mention only one?

First, that difference is not a contradiction. If you have two donkeys, then you also have one donkey. Nowhere do we see the phrase "only one donkey." There are many examples where one gospel writer provided a more detailed description of some event than did another gospel writer. That's why God gave us multiple inspired witness accounts.

Second, that Mark and Luke cited only one donkey confirms our view that Zechariah 9:9 is describing the King as riding only one donkey. And that is most likely why Mark and Luke mention only one donkey even though Matthew tells us there were two.

But one question remains: why, as Matthew tells us, did Jesus ask for both donkeys to be brought to him even though he would ride only one donkey? Why did Jesus ask for the young colt that he would ride into

the city and also ask for the mother of that young colt?

The most likely answer is both simple and wonderful. Jesus most likely asked for both donkeys because the colt that Jesus rode was a young animal that had never been ridden but that was still running behind the female donkeys. That colt was about to have a frightening new experience, made more so by the great noise of the crowd, and Jesus wanted to make sure its mother was nearby! That was no doubt partly because the colt would be better behaved with its mother in sight, but I think there may be another reason as well – Jesus cared about that colt and its mother!

Luke 12:6 – Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?

Yes, Jesus is the King of kings who upholds all things by the power of his word. But Jesus also cares about sparrows and donkeys. Do you think Alexander the Great cared about such things? Jesus did, and he still does.

And when we see Jesus that way, we are seeing Jesus as he is pictured here in Zechariah 9:9. That, I think, is why Matthew recorded all of those details. They tell us more about Jesus.

ZECHARIAH 9:10

10 And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.

Verse 9 described the coming King. Verse 10 describes the coming *Kingdom*. That coming King, of course, is

Jesus, and the coming Kingdom is his church, the church of Christ, which was established in Acts 2. Verse 10 tells us three things about the church of Christ.

First, the church of Christ would be a *peaceful* kingdom. All of the implements of battle would be cut off – the chariot, the horse, and the battle bow. Instead, the King would speak peace.

How is the church a peaceful kingdom? In at least two different ways.

First, unlike Alexander the Great's kingdom, the kingdom of the coming Prince of Peace would *not* be established by earthly force. Instead, Jesus would conquer men from within.

John 18:36 – My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 – For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

And second, there would be finally be peace between Jew and Gentile in the kingdom of Christ, the one church.

Ephesians 2:14 – For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken

down the middle wall of partition between us.

That is the same peace about which Isaiah prophesied.

Isaiah 2:4 - and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Second, the church of Christ would be a *united* kingdom. The people of God in this verse are designated as "Ephraim" (the northern tribes) and "Jerusalem" (the southern tribes). By describing the people of God in the coming kingdom in these terms, the text is telling us that the coming kingdom would be united. They would all be one body.

This is the same great event that was prophesied by Hosea.

Hosea 1:4-11 - For yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. ... for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. ... **for ye are not my people,** and I will not be your God. ... and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Notice how the northern tribes were considered by God after they were scattered – "for ye are not my people." They were considered like Gentiles. But one day, Hosea says, that would all be different. One day, the northern tribes would once again be God's people, and they and Judah would live under one head. When did that happen? When did Christ preach peace to the heathen, as we see here in Zechariah 9:10? We know when that happened. Ephesians 2 tells us when that happened as we read just a moment ago. And Romans 9 tell us when Hosea 1 was fulfilled.

Romans 9:23–26 – And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in [*Hosea*], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

The prophecy from Hosea and the parallel prophecy from Zechariah were both fulfilled by the establishment of the eternal kingdom in Acts 2, as described in Ephesians 2.

So far we have seen that Zechariah was telling the people that the coming kingdom of Christ would be a *peaceful* kingdom and a *united* kingdom. And what else?

Third, the church of Christ would be a *universal* kingdom. "His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." That phrase is an idiom that simply means everywhere. The kingdom of Christ would not be limited to the Jews or to the promised land. Instead, the coming kingdom of

Christ would extend to all people and all nations, just as Abraham had been promised in Genesis 12.

There are no racial barriers or national barriers or economic barriers or educational barriers in the kingdom of Christ. The doors are open to all who will hear and obey the gospel of Christ. To the Christian, there are only two groups of people in the world – those in Christ and those out of Christ. If we set up any other partition, then we are not following God's plan for his one church. The church of Christ is a universal kingdom.

By the way, the word "Catholic" means universal, and so if anyone ever asks for your opinion about the Catholic church, you should take that question as a teaching opportunity. The Lord's church is *catholic* (universal), but the "Catholic Church" as that term is used today is not the Lord's church.

ZECHARIAH 9:11

11 As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

Verse 11 is a beautiful verse. It opens with the phrase, "as for thee also." Who is "thee"?

It is the people of God, to whom Zechariah is relaying this message from God. It is the people of God who are living in their ruined city under the dominion of a foreign power. It is the people of God who are yearning to be set free. Would that ever happen? God's promise here is that, yes, it would happen. They would be released from their prison and set free.

The figure of the "pit wherein is no water" reminded the people of the desperate circumstances of Joseph and Jeremiah.

Genesis 37:22 – And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him [*Joseph*] into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

Jeremiah 38:6 – Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.

How can anyone escape from the pit with no water? How can anyone escape who is sunk deep in the mire? How? Verse 11 tells us how – "by the blood of thy covenant."

Which covenant is that? We know the answer to that question! A moment ago we saw this chapter quoted in Matthew 21. Keep reading a few chapters later in Matthew:

Matthew 26:28 – For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

The king who rode that young donkey into Jerusalem in Matthew 21 is the same king who shed his blood to establish the new covenant in Matthew 26. It is through his blood, and only through his blood, that anyone can ever escape the pit in which there is no water.

Colossians 1:13-14 – Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption

through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

Ephesians 1:7 – In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

Colossians 1:14 – In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

Hebrews 9:13–14 – For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 12:24 – And to Jesus the mediator of the **new covenant**, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Revelation 1:5 – And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed *[or freed]* us from our sins in his own blood.

That is the message of verse 11. And we often sing about that same message.

Would you be free from the burden of sin?

There's power in the blood, power in the blood.

Would you o'er evil a victory win?

There's wonderful power in the blood.

The way out of that pit is through the blood of Christ. That is the message of verse 11.

ZECHARIAH 9:12-13

12 Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee; 13 When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.

Verse 12 contains one of the most well-known phrases in the book of Zechariah – "prisoners of hope." But as with so many well-known phrases in the Bible (such as "the truth shall make you free" on the main building of the UT campus or "beat their swords into plowshares" on the UN building) this one has often suffered greatly from being lifted out of its context. The late Desmond Tutu, for example, famously referred to himself as the "prisoner of hope." What does it really mean? (And the answer has nothing to do with the UN, Desmond Tutu, or the Texas Longhorns!)

To answer that question we need to compare verse 11 with verse 12. In verse 11 we also have prisoners, but they are *freed* prisoners. Here in verse 12 it appears that the prisoners *remain* prisoners, albeit prisoners of hope. How do we explain that?

The answer is that there is a change of time frame between verse 11 and verse 12, just as there was a change of time frame between verse 8 (discussing Alexander the Great) and verse 9 (discussing Christ). The discussion about Christ and his kingdom that started in verse 9 ended in verse 11 with the freeing of prisoners by the blood of the new covenant. That

the prisoners remain prisoners in verse 12 tells us that verse 12 has backed up in time from verse 11, but how far? What is the time frame of verse 12 and the verses that follow?

Verse 13 answers that question: "and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece." Although verse 8 promised that Jerusalem would be protected against Alexander the Great, verse 13 tells us that there will still be a conflict between the Jews and the Greeks. These verses describe that conflict, which occurred in the time between the testaments.

We sometimes describe the time between the testaments as *the silent period*. And that description is correct in the sense that no books of the Bible were penned during that time. But God's word is not silent as to what would happen and what did happen in that time between the testaments. God's plan to bless the world did not go into hibernation during that time. We are about to see a description of it here, as we also do in Daniel.

To begin, let's review the history of that time between the testaments.

After the death of Alexander the Great, Greece was split into four pieces that were ruled by his four generals: Cassander in Macedonia and Greece; Lysimachus eastward in Thrace and Asia Minor; Ptolemy in Egypt, Cyprus, and nearby Asia Minor; and Seleucus to the Indus River.

Ptolemy and his successors established themselves in Egypt and at first also controlled Palestine. The Seleucids on the other hand controlled Mesopotamia and Syria. There was constant friction between these two groups, and as was often the case, Palestine became a battlefield. In 200 BC, the Seleucids gained Palestine from the Ptolemies at the Battle of Panias.

Initially the Seleucid rule was popular with the Jews. According to Josephus, Antiochus III eased the tax burden considerably. However, Antiochus soon came in conflict with Rome and after several defeats was forced to pay a large annual indemnity. This meant that Antiochus had to tax the Jews more heavily, and understandably his popularity began to wane.

Antiochus III was killed in 187 BC while raiding a temple treasury in Elam to pay off the Romans. His successor, Seleucus IV, continued this policy by plotting unsuccessfully to rob the temple treasury in Jerusalem. He was assassinated in 175 BC. As one might expect, this period gave rise to Jewish opposition and the gradual emergence of a Jewish nationalistic movement.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes came to power after the death of his brother, Seleucus IV. He needed to unify his empire against the threats of Rome to the west, Parthia to the east, and Egypt to the south. He sought to accomplish this unity by fostering Hellenism; that is, by encouraging the adoption of Greek culture and ideals. He particularly identified with Zeus and took the name *Theos Epiphanes* ("the god appearing") because he considered himself a divine personification of Zeus.

Due to the Roman taxes, Antiochus Epiphanes was virtually penniless when he assumed the throne, so he increased taxes and continued to rob temples.

Although they all disliked the taxes, the Jews were divided about Hellenism. Younger Jews were eager to adopt Greek culture and integrate it into Jewish society, but most older Jews were uncompromising traditionalists.

Matters came to a head in Jerusalem when two men tried to out bribe each other in an effort to have Antiochus make them high priest. The winner supported the estab-

lishment of a Greek gymnasium within sight of the temple. There, young men (including priests) studied Greek culture and took part in sports. The intertestamental book of First Maccabees describes the situation this way:

Whereupon they built a place of exercise at Jerusalem according to the custom of the heathen. And made themselves uncircumcised, and forsook the holy covenant, and joined themselves to the heathen.

Greek sports were conducted without clothing. Also, when First Maccabees says that they made themselves uncircumcised, it is not just speaking figuratively. Some of the Jews actually tried to reverse their circumcision with surgery.

Later, the high priest (who had obtained that position by paying Antiochus a bribe) assisted the king in plundering the temple and said nothing while Antiochus murdered citizens and nearly destroyed the city.

Later, an altar to Zeus was built in the temple and sacrifices were offered on it. And that was not all. Antiochus issued decrees forbidding the practice of Jewish religion on pain of torture and death. The Sabbath and the Jewish feasts were not to be observed and circumcision was forbidden. Copies of the Torah were to be destroyed, and Jews were to be forced to offer sacrifices of pigs to Zeus and eat the meat of the sacrifice.

One elderly priest, Mattathias, refused to sacrifice to Zeus and, with his five sons, he rose up and killed the king's officers who were trying to force him to comply.

This event led to the Maccabean Revolt, which eventually gave rise to the first independent Jewish nation since before the Babylonian captivity. This nation lasted only 79 years. In 63 BC, the Romans under Pom-

pey conquered Jerusalem and once again the Jews were under foreign domination.

And that is a snapshot of what happened between the writing of the Old and New Testaments. And with that history in mind, let's turn back to Zechariah 9.

Who then are the "prisoners of hope" in verse 12? They are the faithful people of God who were awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises and the coming of the Messiah. They remained prisoners because the Messiah had not yet come and had not yet freed them. Yes, they were prisoners, but they were prisoners of **hope**. They were "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). But while we and Titus wait in hope for Jesus' *second* appearance, these prisoners of hope were waiting in hope for Jesus' *first* appearance.

And were these prisoners of hope ever set free? Yes.

John 8:31-32 – Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him [the prisoners of hope!], If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

They were set free by their knowledge of the truth of the gospel and by their obedience to that gospel that came from that knowledge. Notice the phrase in John 8:31 – "If ye continue in my word." Jesus is not speaking here about just an academic knowledge of the truth; he is speaking about a knowledge of the truth that leads to obedience of the truth. They were set free the same way that we today are set free. They heard and obeyed the gospel of Christ. There is only one path to freedom.

John 8:36 – If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

John 14:6 – Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 – In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 12 tells these prisoners to turn to the stronghold? What is that stronghold?

Some say it is Jerusalem, but I think the better view is that this stronghold is God. It was God who would send the Messiah to free his people from their prison. It was God who would protect them from Alexander and ensure their victory over the Greeks. God was their stronghold, not Jerusalem. If they were going to survive the very difficult times to come, their only hope was in remaining faithful and true to God. The walls around Jerusalem that would go up soon under Nehemiah were not going to save them.

Verse 12 ends by saying "even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee." What does that mean? This promise is directed to the faithful people of God. Yes, they have suffered, and yes they will suffer again, but God will more than make up for that temporary suffering. He will give them a double measure of blessings.

What would God do for them during their coming conflict with the Greeks? Verse 13 begins an answer to that question. For starters, God would bend Judah like a bow, and he would fill that bow with Ephraim. As we saw with verse 10, Judah and Ephraim are both mentioned to show that God's faithful people would be *unified*, and God would use their unity as a weapon against their enemies.

Now, when it came to Hellenism, as we have seen, the Jews were *not* unified. Some favored the Greek influ-

ence while others did not. But God's *faithful* people were unified! God's faithful people knew that the Greek influence was wrong, and they fought against it. Their unity gave them strength, and God used that strength as a weapon. There is a powerful lesson here for us about the importance of being and remaining unified.

1 Corinthians 1:10 – Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

When the Lord's church follows that command, we become a powerful weapon in the hand of God.

The sons of Zion in verse 13 are the sons of the elderly priest Mattathias, known as the Maccabees, who stood up against the Greeks and successfully overthrew them. By their faithfulness and their unity, they placed a sword in the hand of God, and God used that sword to deliver them.

ZECHARIAH 9:14-15

14 And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord GOD shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. **15** The LORD of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar.

Verses 14–15 provide a further description of the Maccabean Revolt, which would occur about 300 years after these verses was written.

Verse 14 shows God fighting for his people. God is seen over them; his arrow goes forth like lightning; he blows his trumpet; and he travels with whirlwinds of the south. Each of these descriptions is an image of *warfare*.

God is like a storm cloud hovering over the battle-field, complete with lighting, thunder (the sound of the trumpet), and mighty winds. The most violent storms in this area were the storms that came from the south, and that is how God is pictured here.

Verse 15 tells us that God would be a shield as well as a sword. God would defend his people, and he would give them victory over their oppressors.

God's faithful people "shall devour" their enemies. The figure there is of a devouring lion that consumes its prey.

The sling stones remind us of another time when God gave the victory to one of his faithful servants over a much larger and seemingly more powerful enemy.

The end of verse 15 is a frightening image. The victory of God's people is shown in graphic terms. They would figuratively drink their enemies' blood like wine, and there would be so much blood that it would look like the sacrificial bowls and the altar in the temple. We see a similar image in Revelation, not with respect to Greece but with respect to Rome.

Revelation 14:20 – And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

God very often gives blood-thirsty people exactly what they want - blood, but it is their own blood that God gives them! That is what we see in verse 15, and in many other similar judgments in the Bible.

Psalms 58:10-11 - The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.

Yes, God's people are not to take vengeance, but that does not mean that there won't be any vengeance.

Romans 12:19 - Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

These verses are showing us the vengeance of God. They are showing us the repayment by God. And they are also showing us the victory of God's people over their enemies, and that victory was vital for the plan of God to continue. For Christ to come into the world as promised, there had to be a faithful remnant, and the fight we are seeing here was a fight for the survival of that faithful remnant.

ZECHARIAH 9:16-17

16 And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. 17 For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

Yes, there would be a great and bloody conflict between God's people and their oppressors, but verse 16 promises that God would save them in that day as the flock of his people. And history tells us that is exactly what happened. The Maccabean Revolt was successful.

And had it not been successful, what sort of people would have been living in Jerusalem when Jesus came into this world? Would there have been any faithful people left, or would Greek culture have done to Judaism what it would later do to the Romans?

It has rightly been said that while Rome conquered the Greeks, Greek culture conquered Rome. Absent the faithful people of God remaining loyal and true to God, and keeping the world at bay, that same fate could have befallen all the Jews.

Once again, there is a lesson here for us – no matter how bad things get in the world around us, we must remain loyal and true to God. He is depending on us! Our great commission is to change the world – not to be changed by the world!

Notice the beautiful images in verse 16. First, Israel is God's flock. He is the good shepherd, and every sheep is precious to him. Second, God's people are as precious to him as jewels in a crown. They are glittering upon his land. The land is the crown in which the precious stones, the redeemed people, are placed.

Verse 17 shows us the reaction when God's faithful people are victorious and back in their holy city. "For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids."

The subject of "his" in verse 17 is most likely Israel rather than God. Israel is once again prosperous and beautiful. The grain and the wine are symbols of prosperity and abundance.

God's people have been given a victory by God over a great oppressor, and now all is well with them. It is time to rejoice and be thankful to God. We see that same pattern in the book of Revelation – a prayer for deliverance, a terrible struggle, a mighty victory, and great rejoicing.

Zechariah 9 is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. It accurately describes the battle plan of Alexander the Great, the protection of Jerusalem, and the Maccabean Revolt centuries before those things occurred. And Chapter 9 contrasts Alexander the Great with the perfect King who was to come. And when that mighty king came into this world, he did not march in like Alexander, but rather he was born in a manger, and he rode into the city lowly, riding upon a colt.

The final six chapters of Zechariah have rightly been called the most challenging chapters in the Bible, and we have now finished the first of those six chapters. And it didn't seem that hard after we paid attention to the context, including the historical context, after we made sure we didn't depart from the clear teachings of the Bible found elsewhere, and after we looked for descriptions from the New Testament to compare with what we are reading here.

CHAPTER 10

ZECHARIAH 10:1-2

1 Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; so the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field. 2 For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a

flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd.

The first two verses of Chapter 10 continue the same thought that we saw at the end of Chapter 9 – things would all be different after the oppressor of God's people was judged.

Verse 1 says that the people would pray to God for "rain in the time of the latter rain," and God would give them that rain. The rain "in the time of the latter rain" refers to the spring rains that they needed for a successful harvest.

The key point in verse 1 is that the people would ask **God** for the rain rather than ask their false idols for the rain, as they had so often done before. Verse 1 is a promise from God – when his people turn to him and rely on him for help, he will send them that help. God had just delivered them from the Greeks, and God would deliver them again.

Verse 2 compares that current situation with how the people had acted in the past. Verse 2 glances back at those who did *not* seek help from God but rather from idols, and verse 2 shows how they were left destitute because of their lack of faith in God. They had relied on idols, but those idols were vain. They had relied on fortune tellers, but those fortune tellers had been liars. Neither the idols nor the fortune tellers had provided any comfort. Their promises of rain and prosperity were not fulfilled.

And what was the result of their faithlessness? Their reliance on soothsaying and idolatry had caused them to wander away like a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Because they had not relied upon God as their shepherd, they were left without a shepherd.

Instead, they went into exile and were punished for their faithlessness. Not only did they not have their heavenly shepherd, they also had no earthly shepherd.

The only kings they had known for quite some time were evil kings of Judah prior to the exile and foreign kings during and after the exile. The last good king of Judah was Josiah, who had died almost a hundred years earlier.

But verse 1 is a promise that the sad situation in verse 2 need not be repeated. If the people would rely on God rather than on their false idols and their fortune tellers, then God would bless them.

Verse 2 includes a key word that we will see many times in these closing chapters. The word "shepherd" occurs thirteen times in Chapters 10-13. We will see the one true shepherd, but we will also see other shepherds, including a foolish and worthless shepherd in Chapter 11. "Shepherd" is a key word in these closing chapters.

ZECHARIAH 10:3

3 Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle.

Who are the shepherds and the goats in verse 3? Most likely the shepherds are the evil Jewish leaders who tried to lead his people astray, and the goats are the evil Greek leaders who dominated Israel during the time between the testaments.

One of the very worst goats was Antiochus Epiphanes, whom we talked about earlier. He desecrated the temple under the Greeks, just as Rome would later desecrate the temple in the first century.

How would God punish these false shepherds and these goats? He would visit his own flock of sheep and turn them into a mighty war horse.

If you are a sheep dreaming of someday becoming a mighty war horse, then this is your path! Anytime we study God's word, we need to be on the lookout for themes, and there is a theme in this verse that we have already seen in this book – the transformative power of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 – But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are **changed** into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The beautiful image in verse 3 tells us two important things about the people of God. First, they are very powerful when they rely on God. And, second, they have a vital role to play in the plan of God. God uses his people to accomplish his plans on this earth. And, yes, those are also lessons for God's people today. We are very powerful with God on our side.

Philippians 4:13 – I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

And we are vital to God's plan to bless the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15). If we don't go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature, then who will? God is depending on us!

The brilliant figure in verse 3 accomplishes two things. First, it promises strength and courage to God's people. Second, it reminds them that God does not accomplish his work on earth without his people. The Maccabean victories over the Greek armies were a preparation for the coming Messiah, and God was relying on them to do what they did.

So with the old leaders removed, what happens next? God raises up a new leader!

I love this book! At every opportunity, God tells his people about Jesus. At every opportunity, God tells

his people about the church of Christ. God wanted them to know what was coming. He wanted them to know all that he was doing for them and preparing for them. That is why we are seeing Christ and his church so often in these verses.

So who is this new leader that God will raise up next? Do we really have to ask that question?

ZECHARIAH 10:4

4 Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together.

Who is the "him" in verse 4? The last person mentioned by name was Judah in verse 3, so verse 4 could be a reference back to the Jews as a whole or to the tribe of Judah in particular.

Verse 4 is saying that out of Judah would come four things – the corner, the nail, the battle bow, and every oppressor together.

The translation at the end of verse 4 in the KJV is not very good: "out of him every **oppressor** together." The ASV is much better: "from him every **ruler** together." The ESV is also good: "from him every **ruler** – all of them together."

So who is this great leader that God would raise up to help his people? We know the answer to that question! Verse 4 is a description of Jesus, the coming Messiah!

Jesus came from the Jewish people, and in particular from the tribe of Judah.

Hebrews 7:14 – For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which

tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

Jesus is the **corner** from Judah.

Isaiah 28:16 – Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, **a precious corner stone**, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Ephesians 2:20 – And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being **the chief corner stone**.

Jesus is the **nail** from Judah. How so? What is the function of a nail? It holds things up; it holds things together.

Hebrews 1:3 – Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and **upholding all things** by the word of his power.

The word used for "nail" may also mean "peg," which is something fixed and immovable.

Hebrews 13:8 – Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Jesus is the **battle bow** from Judah. Jesus came to this earth to do battle against the enemies of God and against the enemies of God's people.

1 John 3:8 – For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

And remember the wonderful prophecy of Zecharias (*not* Zechariah).

Luke 1:68-75 – Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: **That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;** To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, **that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies** might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

And if anyone ever doubts that Jesus is a warrior, they need only turn to Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:11-16 – And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a

name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Jesus is the **battle bow** from Judah. Jesus is the **nail** or peg from Judah. Jesus is the **corner** from Judah. But what about that last phrase? What does it mean that out of Judah came "every **ruler** – all of them together"? Who are these rulers – all of them together – who also came from Judah?

Some point to Matthew 19:28 and argue that these rulers are the apostles. They were all certainly Jewish, but were they all from the tribe of Judah? The short answer is that we don't know for sure. But, as we said, we may not need to show that they are all from the tribe of Judah because Judah here may be referring to the Jews as a whole.

I think a **better explanation** is that these rulers in verse 4 are a much larger group of rulers than just the twelve apostles. These rulers may be **all** Christians. Why?

Romans 5:17 tells us that we are now *reigning* in life through Jesus. The church is a *royal* priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). Revelation 1:5–6 tells us that we became part of a *kingdom* of priests when we were freed from our sins by the blood of Christ. Revelation 20:6 says that we *reign* with Christ.

And for those premillennialists who are looking for a thousand year reign **of** Christ, they need to read the text more closely. Revelation 20:4 does not talk about a reign **of** Christ for a thousand years – it says that Christians "lived and reigned **with** Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). We are the ones who reign a thousand years, and we do so with Christ. And the number one thousand is being used there as a figure that describes the nature of our reign with Christ. It is *not* a literal one thousand years.

I think that we are the rulers in verse 4! Christians reign with Christ.

But how do Christians come forth out of him (Judah) as verse 4 says? Simple. Christ came from the tribe of Judah, and we became Christians through Christ. Also, we are blessed in Christ just as God promised to Abraham in Genesis 12, and that blessing came through Abraham's seed.

Galatians 3:7 – Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Galatians 3:29 – And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

I think that we in the church are the rulers in verse 4. Why do I prefer this view over the others? Because of the verses that follow. Verse 5 begins by describing this same group of rulers.

ZECHARIAH 10:5

5 And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight, because the LORD is with them, and the riders on horses shall be confounded.

That's us! We are "as mighty men!" We tread down our enemies! We fight because the Lord is with us! We confound riders on horses!

Do we see ourselves that way? Do we understand what it means to be a member of the eternal kingdom of Christ? Or are we being held back by an inferiority complex? If so, then the answer is to see ourselves as Christ

sees us! We are the church of Christ! And that's not our name; it's our description!

Oh, but what can we do? The world is so big, but we seem so small. The world is so powerful, but we seem so powerless. Who is listening to us? What can we do? The first thing we can do is understand what the word of God has to say about us.

Matthew 16:18 – And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Notice that that verse does not picture Hell storming our gates, but more the other way! The gates of Hell are not an offensive weapon! I think the point there is the same we see in Jude 23 – “And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.”

Romans 8:37 – Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

1 John 5:4 – For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Hebrews 12:22-23 – But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

Ephesians 1:22-23 – And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to

be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Daniel 2:44 - And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Do we believe that or not? That is the question. Do we have any doubts about the power of the Lord's church?

Where is the church today? It is here and at other faithful congregations around the world. Where is the mighty Roman empire today? Long dead and gone. That mighty Roman empire tried to destroy the church of Christ in its infancy - that is precisely how that conflict between Rome and the church is pictured in Revelation. And what happened? The Roman empire is gone; the church is not. And what happened to Rome is the same fate that awaits ALL of the kingdoms of this earth!

That is what verse 5 is describing. "The riders on horses shall be confounded." Those riders thought they were better armed. They thought they would just mow us all down and destroy the church. But that is not what happened, and the promise is that it will **never** happen. The church is not just any kingdom; the church is the **eternal** kingdom. And there is room for only one eternal kingdom! That is what Daniel 2 tells us.

The church is the most powerful organization on earth, and it has been since the day it was established in Acts 2. The church will outlast all the kingdoms of this earth, and we in the church are reigning with Christ, our Messiah and King. That is the message of verse 5. Do we believe it? The more we understand how

Jesus views his church, the more we will be transformed by that knowledge.

If we see the church as just another religious group in a block filled with religious groups, then that is all we will ever be. If we are being held back, it is likely not the world holding us back, but us holding ourselves back!

ZECHARIAH 10:6-7

6 And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the LORD their God, and will hear them. 7 And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD.

Verses 6 and 7 are telling us something about the church that we have already seen several times in this book – the coming eternal kingdom of Christ would be a *unified* kingdom and a *peaceful* kingdom. God would gather all of his people into that kingdom, and there would be no walls or partitions within that kingdom. God would reconcile and unify his people in the church.

Perhaps we should pause and notice just how often those two descriptions of the church are being repeated, not only in Zechariah, but elsewhere in the prophets as we have seen. The church is a unified kingdom and a peaceful kingdom. That has always been God's plan for the church, going all the way back to the great promise to Abraham in Genesis 12.

Verses 6 and 7 use a figure that we have seen before: the Gentiles are depicted by terms that were once applied to the old northern kingdom – those terms are "the house of Joseph" and "they of Ephraim."

The northern tribes had been scattered by the Assyrians 200 years earlier. Hosea had told them that they would become like Gentiles to God, and that is what had happened. But Hosea also told them that one day they would once again be God's people, and that happened in the church.

That is exactly what Paul says in Romans 9:24–26, where Paul quotes the prophet Hosea. And that is what verses 6 and 7 are saying here in Chapter 10. "They shall be as though I had not cast them off." Paul tells us in Romans 9 that that promise was fulfilled in the church, and so we have further confirmation that what we are seeing here in Zechariah is the church.

And all of the blessings in the church will be shared alike by Jew and Gentile. These two verses mention **seven blessings** that they both would enjoy (and that we do enjoy) in the church. They will be strengthened, they will be saved, they will receive mercy, they will be gathered together, they will be heard by God, they will be like mighty men, and they will rejoice.

We could preach an entire sermon on each of these seven blessings that we in the church all enjoy, but those seven blessings and many others are best described by Paul:

Ephesians 1:3–4 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all spiritual blessings** in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that

we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

We in the church have all spiritual blessings, and that is the prophetic message of verses 6-7. And perhaps the number seven is being used figuratively to say that these seven blessings depict the perfect blessings that we enjoy in the church.

ZECHARIAH 10:8

8 I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased.

Verse 8 is yet another beautiful description of the church. The word translated "hiss" in verse 8 means "whistle," so verse 8 pictures God whistling for his people like a shepherd would whistle to attract his sheep. God is gathering all of his sheep together in the church. Why? Verse 8 answers that question. God is gathering all of his sheep together because he has redeemed them.

Colossians 1:13-14 - Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath **translated** us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have **redemption** through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 8 says that "they shall increase as they have increased." The first "they" refers to the church (the future people of God), while the second "they" refers to Judah (the former and at that time present people of God). Just as ancient Israel had increased as God had promised Abraham in Genesis 22:17, so would the New Testament Israel increase through the preaching of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 3:7 – So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; **but God that giveth the increase.**

The remaining verses in Chapter 10 describe in more detail this gathering by God of the redeemed into the church.

ZECHARIAH 10:9

9 And I will sow them among the people; and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again.

Verse 9 describes the evangelistic efforts that must happen before there can be an increase. "I will sow them among the people." That is not a sowing to scatter, but is instead a sowing of seed for increase. When did this happen? When did God sow his faithful people among the people of the world?

Matthew 28:19–20 – Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

Verse 9 is pointing to the great commission.

What happens next? Three things: "they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again."

First, those in distant lands where God has been long forgotten will remember God. When we go into all the world, the proclamation of the gospel will cause them to know God and to know what God demands of them.

Second, "they shall live with their children." What does that mean?

Let's start with the first half: "they shall live." Through their obedience to the gospel, they would live. They would have everlasting life. The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17).

And then the second half: "they shall live with their children." Where else have we seen that promise applied to the church?

Acts 2:38-39 - Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, **and to your children**, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Notice that both of the groups mentioned in Acts 2:39 (your children and those that are afar off) are mentioned here in Zechariah 10:9. There can be no doubt that we are reading here about the church. When the people turned to God, not only would they live, but their children would live as well if they also obeyed the gospel. The promise was to them and to their children.

The third thing we see in verse 9 is that they will "turn again." They will no longer live in the kingdom of darkness. They will no longer wander in the wilderness of sin, idolatry, and spiritual bondage. They will repent.

After the gospel has been proclaimed, and after some have heard and obeyed the gospel, what happens next? What happens next is that God brings his people out of the bondage of sin and death and brings them into the

kingdom of his dear son – and that is what verse 10 shows us.

ZECHARIAH 10:10

10 I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them.

Egypt and Assyria were great historical lands of captivity. To any Jew, Egypt and Assyria meant bondage and oppression, so they are used here as a figure for the bondage of sin and death.

What about Gilead and Lebanon? What do they represent?

They were the areas east and west of the Jordan that had been depopulated when the northern kingdom was carried away by the Assyrians. Once again, we see the beautiful figure of a people who were not God's people once again being declared God's people. This is the work of reconciliation. When did that happen?

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 – And all things are of God, who hath **reconciled** us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of **reconciliation**; To wit, that God was in Christ, **reconciling** the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of **reconciliation**.

Ephesians 1:9-10 – Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times **he might**

gather together in one all things in Christ.

How many would be reconciled? The end of verse 10 says that there will be so many that there will not be enough room for them all.

But I thought that only few would find the way that leadeth unto life (Matthew 7:14). How can there be such a large number of the saved? Two answers.

First, the intent here is less on the headcount and more on the lack of any geographical constraints. Unlike the old Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem is universal and open to all who will obey the gospel. The old promised land will not be big enough to contain all of God's people in the coming kingdom. There will no longer be any geographic constraints on the city of God. We saw this same thing all the way back in Zechariah 2 with the vision of the measuring line.

Second, the same number can be *small* when viewed in light of the world's population but *large* when viewed in light of the population of the people of God at the time of Zechariah, which was quite small. Compared with the small group of exiles gathered around Zechariah, the number of people in the church, past and present, is a huge number.

ZECHARIAH 10:11

11 And he shall pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up: and the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart away.

Verse 11 is a beautiful description of the work of Christ for the people of God. Just as God led ancient Israel through the Red Sea to escape the bondage of

Egypt, so Jesus would lead his people through the sea to give them a way of escape from the bondage of sin.

But notice the description here of that way of escape – it is through the sea *with affliction*. It is through *suffering* that the Messiah would make a path to freedom for those held captive by sin. That suffering is both the suffering of the cross and the suffering of his own temptations.

Hebrews 2:17-18 – Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that **he himself hath suffered being tempted**, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

1 Peter 3:18 – For Christ also hath once **suffered** for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

Verse 11 tells the rivers would be dried up, which means that the people would be given a way of escape. They would still need to walk over the dry land, but that way was now available to them.

The power of Egypt and Assyria would be broken. What that means is that the power of sin and death to enslave people would be broken.

Hebrews 2:14-15 – Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death **he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil**; And deliver

them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

If someone chose to remain in bondage, that would be their choice – but the rivers were now dry; the way was now clear; Jesus had provided a way of escape to those who would choose to take it.

Why remain in Egypt and Assyria when Jesus has created a dry river bed over which you can easily escape? That same question can be asked today. Many hear the gospel week in and week out, and yet they choose to reject the way of escape and to instead remain in Egypt and Assyria, the wilderness of bondage, sin, and death. Why? Someday they will ask themselves that question, but it will be too late.

ZECHARIAH 10:12

12 And I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD.

Those rescued from bondage would be *strengthened* by God, and they would walk *in his name*. We in the church are strengthened by Christ, and we do all things in the name of Christ.

Philippians 4:13 – I can do all things through Christ which **strengtheneth** me.

Colossians 3:17 – And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

What have we seen in Chapter 10? We have seen a description of Christ, the Messiah, and of the kingdom of the Christ, the church, and those descriptions perfectly match the descriptions of Christ and the church of Christ that we read in the New Testament.

CHAPTER 11

Zechariah 11 is one of the most fascinating chapters in the Bible. If you love history, then you will particularly enjoy this chapter because we will need to pause several times to review the historical context of these wonderful prophecies – some of which predate their fulfillment by nearly six hundred years!

ZECHARIAH 11:1-3

1 Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. 2 Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down. 3 There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled.

"Open thy doors, O Lebanon!" Lebanon is about as far north of Jerusalem as Austin is from Houston. These "doors" are the passes around Lebanon that provided access to Palestine from the north. Something is coming from the north, and to anyone living in Jerusalem that was always a very ominous message. And that which is coming is coming so "that the fire may devour thy cedars." Lebanon was known for its cedar trees.

Psalms 29:5 – The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

Whatever is coming is very powerful and is full of fire and fury. And it will come sweeping in from the north.

The cedar trees in Lebanon and northern Palestine would be the first to go, but the fir trees in south-

ern Palestine would also be affected. Those southern fir trees are told to howl for two reasons. First, they would soon suffer the same fate as the northern cedars. And, second, "because the mighty are spoiled." If they thought their mighty leaders would be able to save them, they would be sadly disappointed.

The "oaks of Bashan" were east of the Jordan River, and they would also be affected by what was coming. They are told to "howl" because their protecting forest has been destroyed. If the forest of Lebanon has been brought down, then the open country of Bashan cannot possibly escape.

The trees are not the only thing howling. In verse 3, there is also the howling of the shepherds. Why? Because their glory has been spoiled. The land has been ravaged, and there is no place of protection for them or for their sheep. And there is "a voice of the roaring of young lions." Why? Because "the pride of Jordan is spoiled." Again, the land has been devastated, and the lions' usual habitat no longer offers any protection.

What we are seeing here is figurative language describing an unstoppable and ferocious invasion of Palestine from the north. We should not be surprised to see such an invasion. Except for Egyptian invasions, invasions of Palestine almost always came from the north. And if we started listing such invasions throughout history, we would have a very long list. We saw one earlier in this very book with a prophecy about Alexander the Great. So the real question is to figure out *which* invasion from the north is being described here.

Let's turn that question around. What invasion from the north would we expect to see at this point in the text? (This question is much easier for us to answer than for the initial readers of Zechariah to answer because their future is our history. Remember that the

prophecies in these chapters were written centuries prior to their fulfillment.) What have we see so far in Chapters 9–11? The two major historical events we have seen are the invasion of Palestine by Alexander the Great and the Maccabean Revolt by the Jews against one of the Greek kingdoms that followed after the death of Alexander. What would we expect to see next?

The answer is that we would expect to see the conquest of Palestine by the next great power in the vision of Daniel 2 – the Romans. And that is what we see here in the opening verses of Zechariah 11 – four hundred years before it occurred! We will find further confirmation that the Romans are in view here as we proceed through the chapter.

But we were just seeing a description of the church. Do you mean to say we have suddenly jumped *back* in time nearly a century from the establishment of the church? Yes. And we have seen such jumps before in this book.

One reason that these final chapters of Zechariah are so challenging is that the focus keeps shifting. Chapters 9–11 are describing what will happen to the Jewish people, but God has frequently paused to jump forward in time to describe the coming Messiah and his kingdom. The reason for those jumps is clear – they explain *why* the other prophecies are so important. They explain why Alexander the Great was important. They explain why the Maccabean Revolt was so important, and in this chapter they will explain why the Romans were so important.

Chapter 11 begins by describing a great invasion from the north by a power that is destructive and unstoppable. Nothing is spared by this invader; it conquers everything from the north to the south. Let's pause for a brief historical review.

The ruling dynasty of Judea between the testaments was known as the Hasmonean dynasty. The name "Hasmonean" comes from the great-grandfather of Mattathias, the priest and father of the Maccabean brothers we talked about earlier.

The Hasmonean dynasty had been established under the leadership of Simon Maccabaeus, twenty years after his brother Judah Maccabee defeated the Seleucid army during the Maccabean Revolt. From 140 to 116 BC, the Hasmonean dynasty ruled almost autonomously from the Seleucids, but from 110 BC, with the Seleucid empire disintegrating, the Hasmonean dynasty became fully independent.

Hyrchanus II and Aristobulus II were great-grandsons of Simon Maccabaeus. They became pawns in a conflict between two famous Romans – Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. In 64 BC, Pompey added Syria and Lebanon to the Roman Empire.

Where did Pompey go after Lebanon? History tells us, and the opening verses of Zechariah 11 also tell us – Pompey went to Palestine. This is the great invasion from the north that is described in these opening verses.

In 63 BC, Jerusalem was besieged and conquered by Pompey. Pompey himself entered the Holy of Holies, but he did not remove anything. The next day he ordered the temple cleansed and its rituals resumed. Pompey then headed back to Rome. Judea remained autonomous but was required to pay tribute.

The death of Pompey in 48 BC, the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, and the Roman civil wars that followed temporarily relaxed Rome's grip on the Hasmonean kingdom, but that did not last very long. The Hasmoneans were soon crushed by the Romans under two more famous Romans – Mark Antony and Octavian. (Octavian

would later become Augustus, the first emperor of Rome.)

The installation by Rome of Herod the Great as king in 37 BC made Israel a Roman client state, and that installation officially marked the end of the Hasmonean dynasty.

The origin of the Hasmonean dynasty is recorded in the apocryphal books of First and Second Maccabees. The other primary source for the Hasmonean dynasty is the first book of *The Wars of the Jews* by Josephus.

What we see in these opening verses of Chapter 11 is a figurative description of the Roman conquest of Palestine. It is interesting that we see similar symbols (burning trees and lions) in the book of Revelation – but there they are used to describe Rome's *payback* rather than Rome's *conquests*!

No one should be surprised about what we see here. We have been waiting for the arrival of the Romans ever since Daniel 2, and what we see here in Chapter 11 is yet another prophecy that Rome would be next in line after the Greeks. (Keep in mind that when this prophecy was written, the Greeks had not yet taken over. These prophecies about Rome are looking forward beyond Persia by two entire kingdoms – Greece and Rome!)

And this invasion certainly looks like bad news, but is it really? Remember Daniel 2:44 – "**And in the days of these kings** shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed." Absent Rome, we would never have had the church!

Yes, some bad things were going to happen when Rome showed up, but Rome was part of God's plan to bless the entire world through Christ! And Rome also played an important role in Jerusalem's future, as Daniel told us, as Jesus told us in Matthew 24, and as this chapter will also tell us.

Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius, Alexander, Pompey, and the first century Roman emperors from Augustus to Domitian – they all have something in common. They thought they were in charge, but they were badly mistaken. They were simply playing a role that God had laid out for them centuries before they were born! Most of them lived and died without ever knowing that, but Nebuchadnezzar knew it – at least he did after he was sent out into the field to live like an ox for a few years!

Daniel 4:33-35 – The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: **and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?**

And Cyrus? If he had looked at a scroll of Isaiah, he would have found his own name there, written long before he was born! And Alexander? According to Josephus, he was shown the verses in Daniel that described his conquest.

One of the most wonderful pieces of evidence for God outside the Bible is the secular history of the world between the testaments. To all but the most blind,

that history clearly shows God moving all of the pieces into place. And how else can we describe the rise of Alexander or the rise of Rome? History can't answer those questions, but the Bible does. They rose from obscurity to conquer the world because it was God's will that they do so. Why? So that God could fulfill his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 – a promise that was made two thousand years before the events described in this chapter!

ZECHARIAH 11:4-5

4 Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; 5 Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not.

Verse 4 introduces the primary theme of Chapter 11 – **who will lead the people?** Who will be their shepherd? In a sense, that is the primary theme of the entire Bible! In whom will man trust? Whom will man follow?

Zechariah is about to perform some actions in this chapter that are intended to teach the people an important lesson about their leaders, just as Zechariah was earlier asked in Chapter 6 to perform an action by placing crowns on the head of the high priest to teach the people something about their promised Messiah.

Zechariah is addressed in verse 4, and he is told to "feed the flock of the slaughter." What does that mean? It means two things.

First, it means that the people's leaders weren't doing their job. Otherwise why would Zechariah be asked to do their job? But notice that this verse is not directed at the leaders of Zechariah's day but rather at the leaders at the time of the Roman con-

quest. It is a prophecy and a warning of what was to come.

Second, verse 4 also tells us that the flock was headed to slaughter. They were destined for destruction at the hands of those leaders.

Verse 5 tells us four things the leaders of the people did to the people – they possessed them, they killed them, they sold them, and they had no pity on them.

The leaders thought they owned the people. They thought the people were theirs to do with as they pleased. The leaders made decisions that enriched themselves and that led to the death of those they were leading. They were so brazen that, far from feeling guilty, they thanked God for the money that they made by selling out the people under their care! And they had no compassion on those who were suffering under their leadership.

It would be hard to imagine worse leaders than that! But are such leaders really all that unusual? Haven't we seen such leaders all throughout history? Don't we see such leaders today? The problem with earthly leaders is that they are *earthly* leaders! Earthly leaders are tempted toward pride and greed, and many fall into those traps.

Paul even warns about those same two dangers for leaders in the church.

1 Timothy 3:2-6 – A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, **not greedy of filthy lucre**; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own

house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, **lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.**

No earthly leader is immune to the dangers of greed and pride.

So if no earthly leader is immune to these temptations, and if many earthly leaders yield to those temptations, then what is the answer? Stay tuned! Chapter 11 will provide a solution to that problem! But first the sad description of the people continues in verse 6.

ZECHARIAH 11:6

6 For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them.

A dramatic change has occurred in verse 6. When Alexander the Great showed up, God camped around the city to protect his people. But here God no longer has pity on the inhabitants of that same land. What has happened?

It is said that people get the leaders they deserve, and that certainly seems to have been the case here. The leaders in verse 6 are being used by God to punish the people that they lead. It is a very frightening thing to realize that God sometimes raises up bad leaders for the purpose of punishing those being led! That's what we see here, and perhaps we have seen that elsewhere as well.

What has caused this dramatic change? Why are the people of God no longer the people of God? We will find out soon, but there is an important lesson here for us. It is very sad when the *people* of God instead become the *enemies* of God – but that has happened before, and it can happen again.

In a shocking announcement ("Lo!" or "Behold!" in verse 6), God says that he "will deliver the men every one into his neighbor's hand, and into the hand of his king." Not only would they be destroyed by their leaders, but the people would also be destroyed by internal strife as neighbor turned against neighbor.

Although the focus here is still on Rome, the time frame has shifted *forward* over a century from the invasion of Palestine in 63 BC to Rome's conflict with Jerusalem in AD 70. What began with Pompey in 63 BC ended with Vespasian and Titus in AD 70, and Chapter 11 is describing both the beginning and the end of that conflict.

Verses 1–3 are focused on the first Roman conflict in 63 BC, while verses 5–6 are focused on the Roman conflict in AD 70. **How do we know that?** Largely because of the emphasis in verse 6 on *internal strife*. To see why that matters, let's pause for another brief historical review.

After many years of tension under Roman rule, several crucial events finally led to the outbreak of war between the Romans and the Jews in AD 66. The Roman procurator Florus (the ninth since Pilate) had often angered the Jews by siding with the Greeks in their disputes with the Jews. Florus also took seventeen talents from the temple treasury to pay government expenses. When the people protested, Florus had Roman troops sack part of the city and scourge and crucify the Jewish protesters.

In response to Florus, the Jews stopped their twice-daily sacrifices for the emperor's welfare, which was seen by Rome as an act of rebellion. Those sacrifices had been part of a concession granted to the Jews in lieu of participating in emperor worship.

Florus' activities in Jerusalem gave rise to several revolutionary movements. One group massacred a Roman garrison in August of AD 66. Later they attacked Herod's palace and massacred the Roman forces there after the Romans had agreed to surrender in exchange for safe passage. Another group captured the Roman fortress of Masada.

By late AD 66, Rome had finally had enough. Cestius Gallus assembled an army of 30,000 soldiers and marched on Palestine. He took control of Galilee with little resistance and then marched toward Jerusalem, eventually making his camp a mile to the north of the city.

Though victory was in his grasp, Cestius for some inexplicable reason abandoned the siege after about a week. (Anytime you see the word "inexplicable" in a history book, you should start looking for the verse in the Bible that explains it!) Withdrawing his forces in retreat, Cestius lost nearly five thousand men and lost valuable military supplies to the Jews. That withdrawal provided a window of escape for those who were looking for the signs from Matthew 24 about the destruction of the city.

During the winter months of AD 66/67, the Jews prepared for Rome's inevitable attack in the spring. The Jews did this by setting up a revolutionary government that divided the territory into six districts, each ruled by a military governor. The historian Josephus was the military governor of Galilee.

In the spring of AD 67, the Roman general Vespasian and his son Titus were sent by the emperor Nero to

restore order. They arrived with an army of nearly 60,000 men. Vespasian's first sustained opposition came from a hilltop fortress under Josephus' command. After a seven week siege, that fortress fell in July AD 67. Josephus surrendered and was taken prisoner. Having subdued the district of Galilee, Vespasian set up garrisons throughout the area during the winter months.

The actual siege of Jerusalem was delayed for nearly two years. First came the news of Nero's death in June AD 68. Since a military command terminated with the death of the emperor who had given it, Vespasian waited for word from the new emperor.

But no word came because of the political turmoil that occurred in Rome after Nero's death. Galba was assassinated in January AD 69, Otho was assassinated in April AD 69, and Vitellius was struggling to stay alive himself. The year 69 was the famous year of four emperors in Rome.

In June of AD 69, still having received no official word, Vespasian resumed military action on his own, only to break it off in July when he was proclaimed emperor by the Roman forces in the east. In the spring of AD 70, Vespasian left for Rome and placed his son Titus in charge of conquering Jerusalem.

The city of Jerusalem eventually fell to the Romans but more as a result of Jewish self-destruction than Roman military power. In fact, Josephus said that "for barbarity and iniquity [the Jews] did no way differ from the Romans." (Remember that the prophecy of *internal strife* in verse 6 is our primary clue at this point that the focus in verse 6 has shifted from 63 BC to AD 70. Other clues will follow.)

Jerusalem was torn by internal power struggles almost from the beginning of the war with Rome. On one hand, the political forces were divided between extremists

and moderates, a war party and a peace party. On the other hand, the extremists themselves were divided not only from the moderates but among themselves.

Initially, after the successful rout of Cestius, the moderates had gained control of Jerusalem. By the end of AD 67, however, the war party and the Zealots joined up with other extremists who had moved to Jerusalem after Vespasian's invasion of Galilee. Together they terrorized the moderates and attacked the high priest. Eventually, they seized the temple and replaced the high priest.

The moderates, supported by the public, regained the outer courts and pinned the Zealots inside. Eventually a large outside force entered the city under cover of a severe storm and linked up with the Zealots by re-taking the outer courts and killing the moderate leader. The Zealots then went on such a brutal rampage, attacking supporters of the moderates, that the majority of that outside force broke away and returned home. But, by that time, the extremists had already gained control of the city.

That was not the end of the internal strife because the Zealots soon split among themselves. By the spring of AD 69 there were three rival groups in the city, with the third group having been admitted into the city by the remainder of the moderates and by the people, who were weary of the brutality of the Zealots. The third group controlled most of the city. One group of Zealots occupied the outer courts of the temple and part of the lower city of Jerusalem. The other group of Zealots held the inner temple.

During Titus' siege of Jerusalem in the spring of AD 70, the outer court Zealots used the opening of the temple during the Passover to storm the inner courts and force the other Zealots to join them against the third group. Only as Titus was about to breach the

walls did the Zealots reluctantly agree to work together with the others in defense of the city.

The Jewish civil war in the city had not only cost many lives, but fires had consumed much of the grain stored in the city while the Romans were camped outside. According to Josephus, the ensuing famine caused 600,000 deaths.

During the Passover of AD 70, Titus moved his troops closer to the city walls and began his assault from the north. In May, he breached Agrippa's wall after nearly two weeks of attack.

Titus prevented provisions from reaching the famine-starved people in the city. Any one who attempted to escape from the city was killed either by the rebels on the inside or by the Romans on the outside.

In July AD 70, Titus broke through the second north wall and moved his forces into position to attack the north and west temple fortifications. He managed to get control of the outer courts on the ninth of August and took the inner courts on the tenth, plundering and desecrating the temple, setting it on fire, and slaughtering thousands.

In September, Titus ordered the burning and sacking of the entire city. Titus had the temple and city walls razed to the ground except for Herod's three towers and a part of the west wall, which he left standing to show the "character and strength" of the city. Since it was too late in the year to sail to Rome, he waited until the spring to return with his spoils from the temple and with nearly 100,000 prisoners to join Vespasian in a triumphal march in Rome in AD 71.

If you travel to Rome today, you can see the Arch of Titus that was constructed in AD 82 by the Emperor Domitian shortly after the death of his older brother Titus. It was built to commemorate Titus' victories, including the Siege of Jerusalem. The south panel of

the arch shows the spoils taken from the temple in Jerusalem, including the golden menorah, the gold trumpets, the fire pans for removing the ashes from the altar, and the table of shewbread.

Verses 5 and 6 of Zechariah 11 are describing these events long before they happened. The people were destroyed by their leaders and by their own internal strife, and it was all a judgment from God. Not only does that fit with the history of AD 70, it fits with Jesus' prophetic description of those same events in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:6-8 - And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

According to one source, more people died as a result of the Jewish three-way civil war than died at the hands of the Roman army.

Before we move on, let's pause and remember the initial audience for this prophecy. It was not initially directed to a rebellious people, but rather to a faithful remnant who were working to rebuild the temple and the city. Wouldn't we expect them to become discouraged by this message? The city you are rebuilding will be destroyed; the temple you are rebuilding will be destroyed; many of your children will rebel against God, will be judged, and will perish in the war.

That is not a happy message! But that is not the entire message. Once again, God will remind them of the wonderful Messiah who was to come. What the people

were doing now was vital to God's plan to bless the world, and although their earthly city would not be eternal, the Messiah's kingdom would be eternal.

What is the big question at the end of verse 6? The big question is *why*. Why are the formerly faithful people of God now instead the enemies of God? Why is their city being destroyed? Why is their temple being destroyed? Why are they being killed with God doing nothing to save them? Why? We will find out soon.

ZECHARIAH 11:7

7 And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.

One of the many challenges in Zechariah 11 is to follow the personal pronoun "I." Sometimes God is speaking, and sometimes Zechariah is speaking. In verse 6, for example, God was speaking, but here in verse 7 it seems that Zechariah is speaking.

Zechariah was commanded in verse 4 to "feed the flock of the slaughter," and here in verse 7 Zechariah says that he will do that: "And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock." Also, in verse 7, Zechariah describes the symbolic actions he is about to perform involving two staves, one named Beauty and one named Bands. What does this all mean?

Let's start with feeding the flock of the slaughter. As we discussed with verse 4, that command to Zechariah was a message from God that the leaders of the people had failed. They were not feeding the flock, but instead were leading the flock to slaughter. And so God commanded Zechariah to do what the leaders were not doing.

At the beginning of verse 7, Zechariah says that he will do what the Lord has told him to do. But Zechariah restricts his attention to the poor of the flock. The poor of the flock would have been the most abused sheep, abused by both the leaders and by the other sheep.

Who are the poor of the flock? The poor of the flock are the faithful remnant. This small group of poor sheep remained faithful to God even when most of the other sheep did not, and God makes symbolic provision for them here through the prophet Zechariah. God would continue to provide comfort and protection for this group of sheep. How do we know that Zechariah is not feeding the entire flock? Because verse 9 will soon tell us that.

The second half of verse 7 shows Zechariah feeding this small faithful flock, but he does so while holding two staves, one named Beauty and the other named Bands.

A shepherd usually carried both "a rod and a staff" (Psalm 23:4). With the rod he would fend off wild beasts, and with the staff he would guide his flock and rescue the straying sheep. Zechariah has two staves, and the two staves are given symbolic names.

The first staff is called "Beauty." To the rest of the world, the poor of the flock were the *least* beautiful sheep, but to God they were the *most* beautiful. God is calling for the remnant to see themselves as he sees them, and that is something God wants the remnant today to do as well. God's faithful people are always beautiful in his sight. And what about the so-called beautiful people of this world? What about those people that the world considers beautiful?

Luke 16:15 – For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

In Jesus' day there was one particular group who thought they were beautiful, and who appeared beautiful to the world, but of whom Jesus had a very different view.

Matthew 23:27 - Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

These poor sheep are beautiful to God.

The second staff is called "Bands." Those bands are the bands holding the people of God together. Once again, we have a reminder that God's people are a unified people. And we are reminded of the mission of the one true shepherd.

John 10:16 - And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

God's people are beautiful in the sight of God, and they are unified - one fold led by their one shepherd.

In verse 7, Zechariah is symbolically acting out the role of the good shepherd. We are not told whether Zechariah fed actual sheep in acting out this lesson, but most likely he did, while using the two actual staves.

The command to Zechariah to feed the sheep reminds us of another time when that command was given. Three times in John 21, Jesus commanded Peter to "feed my sheep" or "feed my lambs."

Jesus is the good shepherd who "giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11), and Jesus is the chief shep-

herd who will appear again to give us a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:4). But between those two events – his death and his return – Jesus wants leaders who will feed his sheep. Whether those leaders are apostles in the first century or elders in any century, the command is the same: "feed my sheep!"

Again, keep in mind the importance of the word "shepherd" in these chapters of Zechariah. We see the good shepherd, and we see faithful sheep. Jesus talked about these faithful sheep.

John 10:14 – I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

But in the verses that follow we will also see evil shepherds and unfaithful sheep being led astray both those evil shepherds.

ZECHARIAH 11:8

8 Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul lothed them, and their soul also abhorred me.

Verse 8 is one the most difficult verses in the Bible.

Who is speaking here? Most likely, the speaker in verse 8 is once again God, as in verse 6. Zechariah will speak again in verse 9, as he did in verse 7. We seem to be having a back and forth conversation in these verses between God and Zechariah.

Some commentaries say that Zechariah is also speaking here in verse 8. That may be true, but it doesn't really make much difference because even if Zechariah is speaking, he is just relaying the words of God. But it is difficult to see how Zechariah would be symbolically acting out verse 8, so it seems more natural to view verse 8 as a commentary by God on what Zechariah is doing in the other verses.

Who are the three shepherds in verse 8? Commentaries are all over the place about the meaning and identity of the three shepherds. One commentary rightly noted that the phrase "three shepherds also I cut off in one month" in verse 8 stands as one of the most enigmatic statements in the entirety of the Old Testament.

As with all difficult prophetic verses, let's start by asking about the time frame. These verses are explaining *why* most of God's formerly faithful people had by this time been rejected by God, and why God had used the Romans to destroy their city and their temple in AD 70 as Jesus would later foretell in Matthew 24.

So whatever we decide about these three shepherds, our explanation needs to make sense in an AD 70 time frame, either because these three shepherds were around in AD 70 or because something these three shepherds did explains why the destruction in AD 70 occurred.

The second half of verse 8 is an important clue. Whoever these three shepherds were, they were opposed to God, and God was opposed to them. They abhorred God, and God loathed them.

We don't usually think of God intensely disliking certain people, but this verse tells us that such can happen. In fact, it was this mutual antagonism that caused these three shepherds to be cut off in one month.

Before we tackle the question of identifying these three shepherds, let's ask two other questions. Is the number *three* being used symbolically here? Is the *one month* symbolic?

When the number three is used as a symbol, it is typically symbolic of God, but it is also sometimes used to denote those who put themselves in the place of God. (We see a similar symbolic use of the number three in the book of Revelation, with the three-fold

repetition of sixes in 666, for example.) The number three may be used to denote religious authorities who thought they were doing the work of God but who were in fact opposed to God. That may be the case here, but we should, at least for now, leave open the possibility that three is instead being used literally in verse 8.

What about the one month? I think that is almost certainly being used here as a symbol, or more accurately as a figure of speech or an idiom meaning a short period of time. These three shepherds would be cut off *quickly*.

And as for the three shepherds, we know what a shepherd represents. Shepherds are used in this text to denote leaders.

So, if that is all correct, then we are looking for three leaders (either a literal three leaders or perhaps any number of *religious* leaders) who were cut off in a way that explains the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

I think there are two leading candidates for those three shepherds – keeping in mind that the intention behind these verses is to explain *why* the judgment of AD 70 occurred.

The first possibility is that these three shepherds represent the religious leaders who worked together to discredit and ultimately kill the good shepherd during his earthly ministry. Those leaders include the scribes, the Pharisees, the Chief Priests, and possibly also the Herodians. The Pharisees and the Herodians sought to destroy Jesus in Mark 3:6. The scribes and the Pharisees sought to accuse Jesus in Luke 11:53–54. The chief priests were instrumental in Jesus' betrayal in Matthew 26:14–15 and crucifixion in John 19:15. And we could go on and on with additional verses.

If three is literal, then the most likely candidates are the scribes, the Pharisees, and the chief priests. If the three shepherds are symbolic for religious leaders, then the Herodians could also be included, although it is not clear that they were religious leaders. If we exclude the Herodians, then three in this case could be *both* literal and symbolic.

But that opposition to Jesus occurred long before AD 70, right? Yes, but there is a direct connection between that opposition around AD 30 and the judgment that occurred forty years later in AD 70. It was the rejection of Christ by those religious leaders that led to the judgment of AD 70.

What we see in this chapter are *three* crucial time periods. First, in the opening verses, we see the time frame of 63 BC when Rome first marched on Palestine. But we also see the time frame of AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem, and we see the time frame of the earthly ministry and death of Christ. Those three time periods are all connected, and this chapter explains *how* they are connected.

Another possibility is that these three shepherds represent not Jewish leaders but *Roman* leaders. If so, who would they be? That answer is easy. After Nero died, and just before Vespasian became emperor, leaving his son Titus behind to destroy Jerusalem, three emperors came and went in a matter of months. AD 69 has been called the year of four emperors: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and finally Vespasian (who managed to live into the next year, and in fact reigned for about ten years). These three "cut off" shepherds may be Galba, Otho, and Vitellius - and if so, this is a particularly remarkable prophecy, having been given six hundred years before those emperors briefly came to power. We see these same three emperors in Daniel 7:8.

So which is the better view? A point in favor of the religious leaders is that the next verse also mentions those who were "cut off," and the next verse seems to be focused on those in Jerusalem who were experiencing its destruction. That would not apply to those three Roman emperors.

Another point in favor of the religious leaders is that verse 8 describes the antagonism between the three cut off shepherds and the good shepherd. That was certainly true of the religious leaders, but much harder to see with the three short-lived emperors of AD 69, who had very little time to persecute the church or anyone else.

Yet another point in favor of the religious leaders being the three shepherds is that the purpose of these verses is to explain why Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Again, that fits well with the religious leaders, but it is harder to see with those particular Roman emperors.

A point in favor of the Roman emperors is that later in this chapter we will see the title "shepherd" being used to describe another Roman emperor. Another point in their favor is that they were certainly cut off in a short period of time - they all reigned and died within a single year.

So which answer do I think is better? If this verse were lifted out of its context, I would lean toward the three Roman emperors who reigned between Nero and Vespasian. Why? Because it would tie in nicely with Daniel 7:8. But when viewed in context, I think the better view is that these three shepherds are the religious leaders who rejected Christ.

But how were those religious leaders cut off in one month? Listen as Jesus answers that question in a parable that is a divine commentary on what we are reading here in Zechariah 11.

Matthew 21:33-45 – Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and

Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were cut off when they rejected their long promised Messiah – when "they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him." And that happened quickly, just as verse 8 says. That cutting off took only as long as it takes for a stone to drop on someone and grind him into powder! That stone which the builders rejected is the good shepherd, and those "builders" who rejected Christ are, I believe, the religious leaders of verse 8.

ZECHARIAH 11:9

9 Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.

Zechariah is speaking again in verse 9, and he has a very tough message for someone. But for whom is that message intended? To whom is verse 9 addressed?

Verse 9 is addressed to the sheep that are not the poor sheep. The poor sheep were fed in verse 7, but the sheep here in verse 9 are not being fed. And the poor sheep will be comforted later in verse 11, but these sheep in verse 9 are not being comforted. So who do these sheep in verse 9 represent?

If the poor sheep represent the faithful remnant, then these other sheep represent everyone else. These sheep are those who rejected Christ and who failed to believe in him and obey him.

Verse 9 is a very sad verse. Zechariah is telling us that God will not feed this group of sheep but will instead leave them to their fate – either to die, to be cut off, or to eat one another's flesh. What does

it mean to be cut off? Paul answers that question in Romans 11.

Romans 11:19-22 - Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

The natural branches were the Jews, and those who were not faithful to Christ were pruned from the tree; they were cut off. That cutting off is a spiritual action by God, but the activities did not end there. Those who died refers to those who died during the siege of Jerusalem. And as for eating one another's flesh, Josephus tells us that cannibalism literally occurred during the siege of Jerusalem in the days leading up to its destruction in AD 70.

In leaving them to their fate, God was leaving them to experience both spiritual death and physical death. Again, as I said, this is a very sad verse. These people were once the faithful people of God, but now they have been cut off and rejected by God. And how does the good shepherd feel about that?

Matthew 23:37-38 - O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her

wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

"How often would I have gathered thy children together ... and ye would not!" Another very sad verse.

So where are we at the end of verse 9? We saw a dramatic change with verse 6 – the people of God had somehow become the enemies of God. And we saw the outcome of that transformation in verses 7–9. While God would continue to feed and protect the faithful remnant, which was called the poor of the flock in verse 7, the religious leaders would be cut off (verse 8), and those other sheep led astray by those religious would also be cut off (verse 9). Verse 10 continues describing how the unfaithful sheep and their leaders were cut off.

ZECHARIAH 11:10-11

10 And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. 11 And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the LORD.

Zechariah's action lesson continues in verse 10. He takes one of the two staves, the one that he earlier named Beauty, and he cuts it into pieces to represent the breaking of God's covenant with the people.

That old covenant had always been conditioned on the people's faithfulness to God, and their complete lack of faithfulness was evident now that they had crucified their promised Messiah. That old covenant was no more. It had been replaced by something better.

Hebrews 8:13 – In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

The Old Testament days of second chances for the Jews were over. Why? Well, why had they been given all of those second chances over the years? Why had their repeated acts of faithlessness not already led to their total and final rejection by God? Why had God done so much to preserve a faithful remnant among them? God had done that so that he could fulfill his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that he would bless the world through Abraham's seed. That prophecy was fulfilled in Christ. God no longer needed to preserve a faithful remnant of the Jews to bring that promise about – that promise had come, and, sadly, when it came most of the Jews rejected it.

Verse 11 focuses our time frame down to a single day – the day on which that old covenant was broken by God. What day was that?

Colossians 2:14 – Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

Hebrews 9:16–17 – For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

The day in verse 11 is the day Jesus died on the cross. It was on that day that the old covenant was broken – broken by God in replacing it with the new covenant and broken by the people when they crucified their long promised Messiah.

And where on that day were the poor of the sheep who were waiting upon God? Some of them were gathered around the foot of that cross, but very soon they would all be turning the world upside down. Why? Verse 11 tells us. Because the events on that day and on the days that followed would let them know that it was all done by the word of the Lord. The faithful sheep were viewing these events through the eyes of faith. And soon they would see their resurrected Messiah.

Also, later in AD 70, the faithful sheep who had listened to Jesus' warnings in Matthew 24 would be able to flee the city in time and not be killed by the famine or by the Roman invasion. That escape may also be in view here in verse 11, although the verse is focused on the day of the crucifixion.

How do we know for sure that this prophecy is focused on the death of Christ? If we stopped reading at verse 11, then I think we would have enough evidence to be very confident of that conclusion, but the next few verses raise that confidence level to absolute certainty.

And throughout this chapter we have been wondering *why* these judgments from God were happening to those who were once the faithful people of God. Why was the covenant broken by God? Verses 12 and 13 will conclusively answer that question. The people had made a choice, and they were now suffering the consequences of that choice. They had been given a wonderful opportunity, and they had turned their back on it. What was that choice? What was that opportunity?

ZECHARIAH 11:12-13

12 And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. 13 And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a

goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.

The book of Zechariah is full of remarkable prophecies, but perhaps none is more remarkable than this one. We see its fulfillment in Matthew 26 and 27.

Matthew 26:14-16 - Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

Matthew 27:3-10 - Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave

them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

Before we discuss verses 12-13 in detail, let's first consider a difficulty from the prophecy we just read in Matthew 27. Notice again the final two verses:

Matthew 27:9-10 - Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

Those verses from Matthew 27 seem to attribute the quote about the thirty pieces of silver to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah. How do we explain that?

One possible explanation, and my favorite explanation, is to note that Matthew 27 mentions the field as well as the 30 pieces of silver. Zechariah 11:12-13 does not mention the field at all. So perhaps Matthew 27 alluded to Jeremiah with regard to the field, and if so it was probably to Jeremiah 19.

Jeremiah 19:11 - And shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.

The mention of only one source when the allusion is to two sources would not be unique to Matthew. Mark 1:2-3 refers first to Malachi, then to Isaiah, but Mark ascribes both prophecies to "Isaiah," the major prophet. Jeremiah likewise may have just been given precedence over Zechariah in Matthew 27.

Another possibility has to do with how scrolls were often referenced. The rabbis often referred to a collection of books by the name of the first book in the collection. In the Jewish Tanakh, the prophetic books were in a different order than in our Bible, even though they are all there. The first listed book in the collection of the Prophets was Jeremiah, not Isaiah. Thus, a citation of Jeremiah could be used to refer to a quotation from Zechariah in the scroll of the prophets.

Another possibility is that Jeremiah and Zechariah both made this same prophecy, but only Zechariah wrote it down. Jesus in Matthew 27 would then be telling us that Jeremiah spoke this same prophecy. This would be similar to Jude's citation to what Enoch said in Jude 14 (which was later written down in the non-canonical book of Enoch). Note that Matthew 27 does not say that the prophecy was *written* by Jeremiah, but rather that it was *spoken* by Jeremiah.

Now let's turn back to verses 12-13 in Zechariah 11. Why is this particular prophecy in Zechariah so amazing? Because it was given over five hundred years prior to Christ's betrayal - and it gives the exact amount paid by the chief priests to Jesus' betrayer!

Zechariah, it seems, is performing these actions as part of the action lesson that he is teaching to the people in this chapter. In verse 12, Zechariah, acting as the good shepherd, asks the flock to give him his wages. Here is how the ESV translates that verse: "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them."

Here was the people's opportunity to show their gratitude to God for all that he had done for them. Here was the time for the people to choose - would they follow God or would they not?

What did they owe the good shepherd? That was the question. What was the response?

The flock responds to the good shepherd by weighing out thirty pieces of silver. What was the significance of that amount? It was the price of a slave.

Exodus 21:32 – If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

That was all the good shepherd was worth to them. Their response is full of mockery and ingratitude. In Zechariah's day this was just an act performed by Zechariah and intended to teach the people a lesson, but in Jesus' day it was no act.

When Jesus came to this earth and asked the people to pay him his due, they responded with a literal thirty pieces of silver, which they paid, not to Jesus, but to Jesus' betrayer. And what was Jesus' due? To what was Jesus entitled?

Revelation 5:12 – Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

But that is not what Jesus received from most of his flock. Instead, they offered Jesus mockery, ingratitude, suffering, and death. "And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (Matthew 21:39). That is what they offered the good shepherd.

And the good shepherd's response to their offer? We see that in verse 13. He rejects their offer, and he rejects them. He refers to their offer with sarcasm as "a goodly price that I was prised at of them," and he orders it to be cast unto the potter. Here is how the ESV translates that verse: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter' – the lordly price at which I

was priced by them." Again, we have a remarkable prophecy because Matthew 27 tells us that the actual thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas was later used to buy a potter's field.

But why was the money thrown to a potter? What does that mean? Some suggest that the phrase "throw it to the potter" was a proverbial expression, something like the modern idiom "throw it to the dogs." But there is not much evidence for that view.

Another view is that since the potters were artisans who worked within the temple area ("in the house of the LORD," as verse 13 says), that means they worked under the oversight of the religious leaders. Thus, throwing the money to the potters was in effect throwing the money back toward the religious leaders. But that view doesn't explain why the potters were singled out.

I think the best explanation is that the reference here to a potter is intended to draw the reader's attention back to Jeremiah 19, which we read earlier.

Jeremiah 19:11 – Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again.

With that verse in mind, casting the thirty pieces of silver to the potter in the house of the Lord would be a symbolic action foretelling the impending destruction of Jerusalem. Because of their rejection and betrayal of Christ, Jerusalem would be broken as one breaks a potter's vessel. That view fits very well with the context of Zechariah 11, and perhaps provides the best explanation for why Matthew 27:9 refers to Jeremiah rather than to Zechariah.

ZECHARIAH 11:14

**14 Then I cut asunder mine other staff,
even Bands, that I might break the
brotherhood between Judah and Israel.**

Zechariah's action lesson continues in verse 14. He now cuts up the the staff, the one that he had earlier named Bands, and he says that it depicts a break in the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

We first saw that staff named Bands back in verse 7, where it depicted the bands that were holding together the people of God. The people in view here are no longer the people of God, which means that those bands are no longer needed or provided.

In our historical review of the destruction of Jerusalem, we saw how internal strife and civil wars killed more people than did the Romans. The people turned on each other, and that is what is being shown here by the breaking of this staff named Bands.

But why was their former unity described as the brotherhood between Judah and Israel? That language is a vivid reminder of the great disunity that occurred after the death of Solomon when the kingdom was split into a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. That split led to great apostasy and idolatry, to the eventual destruction of the northern tribes, and to the eventual exile of the southern tribes.

That split after Solomon was very bad, but the splits that would occur here would be much worse. These splits would lead to the destruction of the city and to the death or enslavement of the people. And worse, this destruction would be God's final word on the subject.

Matthew 21:43 – Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken

from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

With the cutting up of these two staves, the history of Jerusalem as the city of God and the history of the Jews as the chosen people of God came to an end. That breaking occurred at the cross, and the final sentence against them and their city was carried out in AD 70 as Jesus had foretold in Matthew 24, and as Daniel and Zechariah had also foretold.

Before, when the people had fallen away and had been punished, God would send them comfort. Will that happen here? No. Instead, God will send them a foolish shepherd in place of the good shepherd they rejected.

In Matthew 23:38, Jesus told Jerusalem, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." What we are about to see in the closing verses of Chapter 11 is the complete finality of that utter desolation.

ZECHARIAH 11:15-16

15 And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. 16 For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces.

Before we identify this foolish shepherd, who will also be acted out by Zechariah as part of his teaching actions, let's ask a question – what has led up to this point? Why would God raise up a foolish shepherd?

The prophetic events in these closing verses in Chapter 11 can all be traced back to a specific event in

the life of Christ. We often say that the unbelieving Jews rejected Christ as their King – and that is certainly true. But – and this is the key point – the Jews did not reject the idea that they were ruled by a king. They simply rejected the idea that Jesus was their king. How do we know that?

John 19:15 – But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, **We have no king but Caesar.**

Only six words in English, but what an incredible and unbelievable statement to have ever come from the mouths of those who were once the people of God, and who thought they remained so as they made that statement! **"We have no king but Caesar!"**

- Remember the crowns that Zechariah placed on the head of Joshua the high priest in Chapter 6? These people did not.
- Remember the promise to David in Psalm 89:36? "His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me." These people did not.
- Remember the promise in Jeremiah 33:17? "David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel." These people did not.
- Remember the great Messianic prophecy in Psalm 45:6? "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." These people did not.

Instead what we hear from these people is the statement, "We have no king but Caesar."

Did you ever stop to think about how awful that statement must have sounded to God? One of those Caesars would be the "man of sin" prophesied in Daniel and in

2 Thessalonians 2:3. **What that means is that these chief priests were choosing the son of perdition over the son of God!**

So where are we? We are faced with a people who want Caesar as their king rather than Jesus. And, as God so often does, God is about to give them exactly what they want. And often that is the worst punishment of all – when God gives someone exactly what he asks for!

In verse 15, Zechariah is told to take up the instruments of a foolish shepherd. These instruments would include the rod and the staff as well as other items typically carried by a shepherd. We are not told exactly how Zechariah would use these items to show himself as a foolish shepherd.

Verse 16 says that God would raise up this foolish shepherd in the land. That the foolish shepherd is raised "in the land" suggests he would rule over a larger area than just Jerusalem, or what remained of Jerusalem.

Verse 16 also tells us what the foolish shepherd would do and what he would not do. In short, the foolish shepherd would do the opposite of what a wise shepherd would do in caring for his sheep.

- Instead of comforting those who were cut off, the foolish shepherd would not even visit them.
- Instead of seeking those sheep that are the most vulnerable and the most endangered, the foolish shepherd would not seek the young one.
- Instead of healing those sheep that had been injured, the foolish shepherd would not heal those that were broken.
- Instead of feeding the sheep, the foolish shepherd would not even feed those that were standing still, which were the easiest to feed.

- Instead of caring for the sheep, the foolish shepherd would feed himself on the sheep.
- Instead of leading them to green pastures, the foolish shepherd would lead them over places so rough that their hooves would be broken.

In short, this foolish shepherd would care nothing for the sheep, but would seek only to use the sheep for his own advantage.

Who is the foolish shepherd? We can approach that question in two ways. We could ask, who was the leader who ruled that area at and after the destruction of Jerusalem? Or we could ask, who was the leader that the Jews chose over the good shepherd? Both questions have the same answer – Caesar.

The Roman Caesar when Jerusalem fell and for a decade afterward was Vespasian. He is the foolish shepherd, possibly along with his two sons, Titus and Domitian. Titus stayed behind and destroyed the city after Vespasian left for Rome, and Titus later became emperor after his father died. His brother, Domitian, became emperor after Titus died. Together they were known as the Flavian Dynasty, named after Vespasian's grandfather, Titus Flavius Petro.

Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian – I believe that either Vespasian alone or more likely those three together are the foolish shepherd of Zechariah 11. The time frame fits, and the description fits.

Although the Jews may have thought they had no king but Caesar, Caesar cared nothing for them. In fact, two of these three emperors were directly responsible for destroying Jerusalem. The third, Domitian, persecuted the Jews as he did the Christians, and he built the Arch of Titus (which stands to this day) to celebrate the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of his brother.

The key point is this: the unbelieving Jews chose Caesar the foolish shepherd over Christ the good shepherd, and so God gave them what they wanted. And the result? Caesar destroyed their city and killed or enslaved them.

So what happened to that foolish shepherd?

ZECHARIAH 11:17

17 Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.

The KJV uses the phrase "idol shepherd." (For those listening, note that it is *idol* shepherd rather than *idle* shepherd.) Other translations have "worthless shepherd."

Why does the KJV use the word "idol"? Because the Hebrew word used there (which does mean "worthless") is most often used in the Old Testament to describe idols and false gods. This shepherd is worthless in the same way that an idol or a false god is worthless.

This description here in verse 17 is a big clue that we are on the right track in identifying this foolish and worthless shepherd with Caesar. Domitian minted coins in which he described himself as the son of god, in reference to his father Vespasian. This (I believe) is how the Apostle Paul described Domitian.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 – Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

These Caesars were false gods, and they demanded worship, which set themselves up as idols. They were, as verse 17 describes them, idol shepherds.

And verse 17 says that this foolish and worthless shepherd would suffer along with those he persecuted. Yes, this foolish shepherd was carrying out a judgment determined by God, but that did not mean this foolish shepherd would not be punished for the evil he had done to them.

In fact, as Paul explains in Romans 9-11, the Jews were in the same boat. God used their rejection of Christ to bless the entire world, but that did not mean the Jews would not be punished for that rejection. Also, as we see the book of Revelation, this punishment of Caesar was also due to Rome's persecution of the *church* as well as the destruction of Jerusalem.

What is the punishment against Caesar? "The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened." In short, he and his two sons would die.

The arm and right eye in verse 17 are likely the two sons of Vespasian. Suetonius tells us that Vespasian died of diarrhea in AD 79. Suetonius also says that Titus died of natural causes in AD 81, but most suspect he was poisoned by his loving brother Domitian. Allegedly, Titus' last words were, "I have made but one mistake" - and most likely that one mistake was not killing Domitian before Domitian killed him! Domitian died in AD 96, stabbed to death by his court officials.

Domitian thought he was a god, but Domitian was neither a god nor a son of a god. He was instead the son of a foolish and worthless shepherd, and he and his

dynasty came to a brutal end in AD 96, just as Zechariah 11:17 had foretold 600 years earlier.

And, with that, Chapter 11 comes to an end. After the frightening and devastating message of Chapter 11, what do the people need to hear next? Comfort! And that is what the next chapters provide for the faithful people of God.

CHAPTER 12

Chapters 12–14 are some of the most difficult chapters in the entire Bible. There are many different interpretations, and I have tried to find the one (or the ones!) that makes the most sense in the context and time frame of these chapters and makes the most sense in the context of the entire Bible – but my view is certainly not the only possibility.

While we very often can be dogmatic about what these verses are **not** saying (premillennialism, for example), we cannot always be dogmatic about what they are saying – often there are several possibilities, none of which violates other Scriptures.

We can avoid some common traps by taking what I believe is a very common sense approach to these difficult chapters. I do not believe that God would isolate and bury an important doctrine about the new covenant in these obscure chapters. If we are ever tempted to reach a conclusion about the gospel from these chapters, and if that conclusion is found nowhere else in the Bible, then I believe we should be very hesitant to reach such a conclusion.

These chapters were intended to give the people of Zechariah's day a glimpse of what was coming prior to its full and complete revelation. That full revelation has now occurred and is now available to us in the New Testament. These chapters are a glimpse of what we find in the New Testament.

If what we think we see here in these difficult chapters some truth about the New Testament that is found nowhere in the New Testament, then almost certainly we are not viewing these chapters correctly. These chapters are a glimpse of the New Testament, and so whatever we see here should be seen more fully and clearly in the New Testament. That important guideline will help us not go astray in our interpretation.

ZECHARIAH 12:1

1 The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

Chapter 12 begins a new section in the book of Zechariah, and what some may be glad to know is the final section of the book!

We know from the opening words that we are in a new section of the book, "the burden of the word of the Lord," which is the same phrase that we saw in the opening verse of Chapter 9. As we said in Chapter 9, the word "burden" here just means "divine utterance." This is a message from God directed to a specific object, which in this case is "Israel."

The major issue in interpreting this section is to determine what is meant here by Israel. Is it literal, physical Israel? If so, when? In AD 70? At the end of the world? Some other time? Or is it figurative, spiritual Israel? If so, what group corresponds to spiritual Israel, and when?

We just looked at some verses that were directed to physical Israel, and so it might seem natural to conclude the same about these verses (as many do). But there is an immediate problem with that – the previous section brought God's interactions with physical Is-

rael to an end. They rejected his son, and so, as Jesus told us, the kingdom was taken from them and given to another. And then the king they wanted in place of Christ, Caesar, came and destroyed their city. Their house was left desolate. Nothing in Chapters 9-11 suggests in any way that they will be provided another opportunity.

And let's look at that question from another direction. Why would anyone expect to see physical Israel provided another opportunity unique to themselves? Their Messiah has come, and he has established his eternal kingdom. In that kingdom, "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12). The Jews have an opportunity in the present age, but it is not an opportunity unique to them as we saw so often in the Old Testament. Instead, their opportunity is everyone's opportunity - to hear and obey the gospel of Christ.

And for all of the premillennial preachers and commentators out there, one important threshold question remains unanswered by them - **why?** Why would God need a special plan for the Jews in the end times? And what would such a special plan apart from the gospel say about the sufficiency of the gospel? And how could we ever reconcile such a plan with Paul's clear statement that there is no difference between Jew and Greek in the church?

God promised Abraham that he would bless the entire world through his seed, and that happened when Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, came into this world. God had promised that his new kingdom would be universal; we have seen that promise many times in Zechariah. Why would God back up? Why would God, having created a universal kingdom in which Jew and Greek are one, back up and again create a special plan just for the Jews?

The unbelieving Jews rejected the mission of Christ; in all kindness, I must ask – how are premillennialists any different? Doesn't premillennialism also reject the mission of Christ when the premillennialists come up with another plan apart from the gospel?

Mark 16:15–16 – Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Does that apply to the Jews or not? Does "every creature" include everyone or not? Premillennialists say no, but the Bible says otherwise.

Physical Israel is not being discussed in this section. Instead, physical Israel was dealt with in the previous section. This section instead turns to spiritual Israel, and it provides a message of comfort and hope to those who must have been very disturbed by reading the fate of physical Israel in the previous chapters.

So what is spiritual Israel? **That definition has never changed!** Spiritual Israel has always been the faithful remnant! That was true in Zechariah's day, and it is true in our day.

Romans 2:29 – **But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly;** and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Galatians 6:16 – And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon **the Israel of God.**

Hebrews 12:22–23 – But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the

living God, **the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

Revelation 21:2 – And I John saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem**, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The only difference between our day and Zechariah's day is that the faithful remnant today is living under the new covenant after Jesus has come in the flesh rather than under the old covenant prior to the incarnation of Christ – but that remnant is still the faithful people of God, and those people have always been spiritual Israel.

How do we know for certain that the focus in these chapters is on spiritual Israel? We will know that for certain as we read the text of these chapters and we will see how this Israel is described and how those descriptions compare with what we read in the New Testament.

What else does verse 1 say? It reminds us of the power of God. God "stretcheth forth the heavens, God layeth the foundation of the earth, and God formeth the spirit of man within him." God tells us all of that for one reason – so that we will listen.

God created us and everything around us, and so as his creation we should listen carefully to our creator. The message that follows will be very important, and God wants us to pay very close attention.

So what then are we about to see in this message? We are about to see four things: a great siege (Zechariah 12:2–9), a great salvation (Zechariah 12:10–13:6), a

great smiting (Zechariah 13:7–9), and a great deliverance (Zechariah 14).

ZECHARIAH 12:2

2 Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem.

Verse 2 looks like what we saw in the previous section – Judah and Jerusalem are under siege with people arrayed all round about them. But there is a huge difference between verse 2 and what we saw before – with this siege, God will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling to those who would seek to destroy her. Far from rejecting Jerusalem and leaving the city to its fate as we saw before with physical Israel, God says here that he will protect Jerusalem and cause the attackers to tremble.

Verse 2 alone should be enough for us to see that the focus of this section has changed to God's *faithful* people from the *unfaithful* people that were described in the previous section.

Although God's faithful people were not the focus in those previous chapters, they were mentioned in the previous section – they were the poor of the flock that Zechariah was told to feed in 11:7. These final chapters are their story!

But we still have some questions remaining with verse 2 – who has brought this siege, and when?

Remember our time frame – the last chapter ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Who at that time was the great persecutor of the faithful people of God? Rome – the same group that besieged *physical* Israel was also besieging *spiritual* Israel. Nero (pri-

or to AD 70) and Domitian (after AD 70) were, in particular, fierce persecutors of God's people. History tells us that Peter and Paul were killed by Nero.

Would Rome win? Would the faithful remnant be destroyed? Would God's plans be frustrated? I don't want to give anything away for those who haven't read the book, but the cup of trembling in this verse is a big clue as to how this will all turn out for Rome!

Rome may have thought that the church was just a good glass of fine wine that Rome could quickly enjoy and finish off – but that is not at all what Rome would find. Instead, Rome would find a cup of trembling.

Rome thought that Rome was the eternal kingdom and that the church was just a very small bump in the road, but in fact the opposite was true. Rome was the road bump! And didn't we know that already? What had Daniel said?

Daniel 2:44-45 – And in the days of these kings [*the Roman emperors*] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom [*the church*], which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms [*including Rome*], and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands [*the church*], and that it brake in pieces the iron [*Rome*], the brass, the clay [*also Rome*], the silver, and the gold.

So if we are on the right track with this, then perhaps we should expect to see this spiritual Israel described as a **stone** somewhere in these verses.

ZECHARIAH 12:3

3 And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.

Daniel described the church as a stone that would break Rome into pieces. Verse 3 describes Jerusalem as a stone that would cut in pieces all that gathered against it. Do we need any more evidence than that? This Jerusalem in verse 3 is the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21:2, the bride of Christ. This Jerusalem in verse 3 is the heavenly Jerusalem of Hebrews 12:22. This Jerusalem is the Israel of God in Galatians 6:16. This Jerusalem is the church. And Daniel 2:44-45 and Zechariah 12:3 are saying the same thing about the church – the church would conquer Rome!

And this verse also helps us with our all-important time frame. Notice how verse 3 begins – "in that day." What day? The same day we have been looking at in these chapters, and the same day as in Daniel 2:44 – "in the days of these kings," which pointed to the first century establishment of the church. Zechariah 12:3 is focused on that same time frame – the first century.

And does that surprise us? Are we shocked to see so much focus on the first century?

- Jesus was born in the first century.
- Jesus lived and taught in the first century.
- Jesus died on the cross in the first century.
- Jesus rose from the dead in the first century.

- Jesus ascended back to heaven in the first century.
- The church was established in the first century.
- Jerusalem was destroyed in the first century.
- Rome, the most powerful force on earth, tried to destroy the infant church in the first century.

And all of this was happening as prophesied many years earlier. How can anyone be surprised that the focus here is on the first century?

Notice that last phrase in verse 3 - "though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it." Doesn't it seem like that is the case today? Doesn't it seem like the entire world is opposed to God and to his church - and that they have all gathered together against it - against *us*?

Yes, and that has always been the case. But there is only one eternal kingdom, and that one eternal kingdom is not a kingdom of this world (John 18:36). The eternal kingdom is the kingdom of Christ, his church - the church of Christ. The entire world can gather against us, make war against us, vote against us, hurl insults against us, and do whatever they want against us - it will not change the outcome in any way. The church is a burdensome stone that will cut every other kingdom of this world into pieces.

And I love that phrase in verse 3 - "burdensome stone"! We are like a rock in the world's shoe! They can't ignore us, and they can't get rid of us! They may shut their ears and gnash their teeth when the word of God is proclaimed to them, but we will proclaim it! We are the salt of the earth! We are "a burdensome stone for all people"!

ZECHARIAH 12:4

4 In that day, saith the LORD, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness.

So what else happens in that day? Verse 4 tells us that in that day God will open his eyes upon the house of Judah. That means that God will notice their plight. God will see what is happening to them, he will have compassion on them, and he will come and act on their behalf.

What action will God take? In this verse, God creates confusion among those who seek to harm his people. He confuses the riders and their horses so that they cannot accomplish their intended purpose of harming God's people.

Should we be concerned that God, who is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), is in this verse creating confusion? Not at all. That statement in 1 Corinthians was directed to the church - "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." God has long used confusion as a punishment. For example, God confused the languages of men back in Genesis 11:9. And David prayed for a judgment of confusion against his enemies.

Psaln 35:4 - Let them be **confounded** and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to **confusion** that devise my hurt.

Isaiah described the difference between those who are God's people and those who are not when it comes to confusion.

Isaiah 45:16-17 – They shall be ashamed, and also **confounded**, all of them: they shall go to **confusion** together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: ye shall **not** be ashamed nor **confounded** world without end.

Here in verse 4, God confuses those who seek to harm his people.

ZECHARIAH 12:5-6

5 And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God. 6 In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem.

The prior verses told us that spiritual Jerusalem would be secure. So what does that security mean for the *leaders* of spiritual Jerusalem? Verse 5 tell us – it means that the leaders are *confident*.

The leaders have strength in the Lord, and that strength comes from the strength of the people they are leading. This is a **very** different picture from what we saw about the leaders in Chapter 11. Those leaders were out only to slaughter and sell the flock. Not so with these leaders. These leaders are working in unity with those they lead, and they are strengthened by those they lead.

Who are these confident leaders? We don't have too many possibilities from which to choose. Either these leaders are the apostles of the first century or they are the elders of any century, or they are both. Those two groups (apostles and elders) are the only earthly leaders of spiritual Israel under the new covenant. The phrase "in that day" that opens verse 6 suggests that the focus here may be on the first century apostolic leaders of the church.

Another possibility is that these governors of Judah are leaders, not of the church, but of the individual families in the church. The Hebrew word translated "governor" can simply mean "leader of a clan." But I prefer the view that the first century apostles or possibly the elders in any century (or both) are being described here.

What does verse 6 tell us about these leaders? They will be "like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left." What that means is that they will be in a fight, but they will prevail.

But that can't apply to Rome, can it? History tells us that Peter and Paul were killed by Rome. John was exiled by Rome. That means Rome was winning, and the apostles were losing – right? Wrong!

James 1:12 – Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: **for when he is tried,** he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Revelation 2:10b – Be thou **faithful unto death,** and I will give thee a crown of life.

Revelation 2:26–27 – **And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the**

end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

1 John 5:4 – For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and **this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.**

Do we believe that? We certainly sing about it.

Encamped along the hills of light, ye
Christian soldiers, rise,
And press the battle ere the night shall
veil the glowing skies.
Against the foe in vales below let all
our strength be hurled;
Faith is the victory, we know, that
overcomes the world.
His banner over us is love, Our sword
the Word of God;
We tread the road the saints above With
shouts of triumph trod.
By faith, they like a whirlwind's
breath, Swept on o'er every field;
The faith by which they conquered death
Is still our shining shield.
To him that overcomes the foe, White
raiment shall be giv'n;
Before the angels he shall know His name
confessed in heav'n.
Then onward from the hills of light, Our
hearts with love aflame,
We'll vanquish all the hosts of night,
In Jesus' conqu'ring name.

Faith is the victory! Christians conquer this world by remaining faithful to the end. Every day that you live faithfully to God, you are conquering this world. Each

time you are tempted and tried, yet stand firm in your faithfulness to God, you are conquering this world. "Against the foe in vales below let all our strength be hurled; Faith is the victory, we know, that overcomes the world."

Never doubt for a second that the church of Christ conquered the mighty Roman empire! Daniel said it would happen, and Zechariah said it would happen. It happened!

And what of those who were conquered? Their world would be destroyed, and they would be eternally lost. No worse defeat could be imagined.

And the church? Read the end of verse 6: "Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem." The church would not be harmed. The church would not be moved. The church is the eternal kingdom that destroys the kingdoms of this world, not vice versa!

Hebrews 12:28-29 – Wherefore we receiving a kingdom **which cannot be moved**, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: **For our God is a consuming fire.**

Amen! That's the message of verse 6!

ZECHARIAH 12:7

7 The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah.

The next few verses tell us more about God's deliverance of his people in that day. The focus here is on the first century deliverance from the hands of Rome,

but the description could apply to any deliverance by God of his people at any time. This is how God always delivers and protects his faithful people!

What does it mean that God would save the tents of Judah first? The poorest and most vulnerable people lived in tents. They usually didn't have the protection of the city, perhaps even living outside the walls of the city. If anyone perished in the conflict, it would be the people who were living in tents.

But verse 7 says that, not only will they *not* perish, they will be the *first* people God protects! God is not going to protect first those who are the richest and most powerful, but rather God will protect first those who are the poorest and most vulnerable. That's very different from how most kings operate!

Why does God do this? Verse 7 answers that question. God does this so that "the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah." That is, God does this to teach the rich and powerful an important lesson – God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Not only is there no difference between Jew and Greek in his kingdom, there is also no difference between rich and poor. There are no dividing walls inside the kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:14).

And another lesson we see here is that God's kingdom is not run like the kingdoms of men. Earthly kingdoms almost always put the interests of the rich and powerful over those of the poor and powerless. Not so with God's kingdom.

James 2:1-5 – My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile

raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

That is the message of verse 7. When God delivers his people, he does not start first with the rich and the powerful. God starts first with the poor and the powerless.

ZECHARIAH 12:8

8 In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD be-fore them.

Verse 8 tells us something else about how God delivers his people. God strengthens them so that they can do mighty things on his behalf.

Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

That is the message of verse 8. On our own we are feeble, but through Christ we can be as King David. Through Christ we can topple even the mighty Goliath, and that is just what happened when the church in its infancy came up against the mighty Goliath called Rome. Rome, no doubt, was just as confident as Goliath, but Rome fell just as Goliath fell. And I sus-

pect that both Goliath and Rome fell with a look of total shock and surprise on their faces!

Who would have predicted such an outcome? Daniel did. Zechariah did. When God says that something will happen, then that's the end of it – that thing will happen. No matter how unlikely it may seem from human eyes, it becomes an absolute certainty as soon as God declares it so.

The "house of David" in verse 8 is the church, and the promise is that the church "shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them." As we have discussed many times, the Angel of the Lord here is most likely a reference to Christ, who, as God the Son, is a divine messenger from God the Father.

If we are ever tempted to doubt the *power* of the church, the *strength* of the church, the *importance* of the church, or the *beauty* of the church – then we need to read verse 8. The church of Christ shall be as God and as Christ! And that shouldn't surprise us in the least.

The church of Christ is the *body* of Christ (Colossians 1:18)! The church is "the habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). God hears and answers the prayers of the church (James 5:16). And what can prayer accomplish? Prayer according to God's will can accomplish anything that God can accomplish!

1 John 5:14–15 – And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Never doubt the power of the praying church! That is how mountains are moved!

Matthew 17:20 – If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

And is that how God delivered his people from Rome? Revelation 8:8 describes Rome as a "great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea." God moved the mountain of Rome because of the prayers of the saints (Revelation 6:10).

But then verse 8 sounds like the church has God-like powers – is that true? Of course it's true! That's how prayer works! We ask in faith, and God responds.

Psalms 82:6 – Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.

John 10:34–35 – Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken.

The church is powerful! We have the power of God and of Christ. God dwells in us, the body of his son. How could we ever doubt the *power* of the Lord's church? The church is the most powerful organization on earth, and that has been true ever since the day the church was established in Acts 2. That is the message of verse 8.

ZECHARIAH 12:9

9 And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

Notice the key phrase in verse 9 – "in that day." Verse 9 confirms our first century time frame. This

verse is not looking at the end of the world but is instead looking at the first century. How do we know that? Because Zechariah 12:9 is once again saying the same thing we see in Daniel 2:44.

Daniel 2:44 – And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

The phrase "in that day" here in verse 9 is the same as "in the days of these kings" in Daniel 2:44. Which kings are they? The emperors of Rome, the fourth kingdom made of iron and clay in Daniel 2 that followed Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece.

Verse 9 is a wonderful promise for the church! No kingdom of this earth will ever destroy the church! But instead they will all be conquered by the eternal kingdom of Christ.

But how does the church conquer those earthly kingdoms? Not with carnal weapons.

2 Corinthians 10:4 – For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

We conquer those earthly kingdoms by remaining faithful unto death.

1 John 5:4 – For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Revelation 2:10 – Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

The church conquered Rome by remaining faithful unto death, and that is how we will conquer the vast array of worldly forces that daily seek to overthrow our faith.

Is that how the world sees victory? Is that how we see victory? How can victory involve death? Doesn't death mean defeat? We can answer that question with another question – was Jesus defeated at the cross?

Colossians 2:14-15 – Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Jesus triumphed over his enemies at the cross, and we likewise triumph over our enemies by remaining faithful unto death. That is how we obtain the crown of life.

God delivers his faithful people through their faith. And the kingdom of God's faithful people will destroy and outlast every kingdom of this world. That is the message of Daniel 2:44, and that is the message of Zechariah 12:9.

If there is any doubt that we are reading about the church in these verses or that the time frame of these verses is the first century, those doubts should completely go away with the next verse.

ZECHARIAH 12:10

10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications." When did that happen? Did that happen in the first century or is that something reserved for the end of the world? Let's listen as Peter answers that exact question.

Acts 2:16-17 – But **this is that** which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.

Did you hear him? "This is that." *This*, the first gospel sermon preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, is *that*, the fulfillment of the prophecy from Joel that God would pour out his spirit upon all flesh. That is the same prophecy we see here in Zechariah 12:10.

So the question for the premillennialists is simple – *is this that, or is this not that?* Peter says *this is that* – and for those who believe the word of God, that is that!

We are looking here at a first century event. And the second half of verse 10 confirms it – "and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and

shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." When did that happen? We once again have an inspired answer as to the date of that prophecy's fulfillment.

John 19:33-37 - But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. **And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.**

Is someone really going to tell me that all of Zechariah 12 is talking about the end of the world except for the second half of verse 10? Does that make any sense at all?

And notice something wonderful about the prophecy in verse 10 - "and they shall look upon **me** whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for **him**." Did you see it? They shall look upon **me** whom they have pierced - and they shall mourn for **him**. They pierced God the Father when they pierced God the Son!

But verse 10 says that those who pierced Christ would mourn for him - did the Roman soldiers mourn for Christ? The Roman soldiers did not, but verse 10 doesn't say that they would. Those who mourn in verse 10 are those that **look** on the one who was pierced. And those who *look* upon the one who was pierced are those who look at him and understand who he is and understand what caused him to die on that cross.

We see a wonderful example of this looking in the same chapter from Acts that we read from a moment ago – Acts 2.

Acts 2:36-37 – Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

In verse 36 of Acts 2, they *looked* upon the one whom they pierced, and in verse 37 they *mourned* because of what they saw. That's the same sequence of events that we see here in verse 10.

And notice that the ones who mourn in verse 10 are the ones who did the piercing. "They shall look upon me whom **they** have pierced." They did not literally drive the spear through Christ's body, but they pierced him. How? They pierced Christ the same way we all do – by our sin. Jesus died on that cross because of our sin. Our sin put him there, and it is because of our sin that Jesus was pierced. That is why we look and mourn.

John 8:28 – Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he.

1 Peter 2:24 – Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Verse 10 is focused on Acts 2. The prophecy in the first half of verse 10 was fulfilled in Acts 2, and the prophecy in the second half of verse 10 was fulfilled in Acts 2. But that's not all – that second-half prophecy is also fulfilled every time someone

hears the gospel and mourns after he understands what his sin has caused.

This mourning in verse 10 is the godly sorrow of 2 Corinthians 7:10. It is described here as the most intense mourning – the mourning one would have for an only son, or the mourning one would have for a first-born son. No greater blow could befall a family in the days of Zechariah or perhaps in any day. The great intensity of this mourning over sin is further described in the closing verses of the chapter.

ZECHARIAH 12:11

11 In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.

Again we have a time frame in verse 11 – "in that day." That's the same time frame we have had for the prior verses – the same time frame that we see in Daniel 2:44 (which is the same time frame we see in verses 3 and 9), the same time frame we get from Acts 2 (which describes the events in the first half of verse 10), and the same time frame we get from John 19:37 (which quotes the second half of verse 10 and applies it to the first century).

We are still in the first century. That is when this mourning occurs, but, as we said before, that does not mean the mourning *ends* in the first century. We also mourn today when we think about what our sin has caused.

What is meant in verse 11 by "the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon." The valley of Megiddon is where Josiah, one of the most beloved kings of the Old Testament, met his untimely death at the hands of Pharaoh Necho. His death caused great mourning.

2 Chronicles 35:24-25 – His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations.

Verse 11 also mentions Hadadrimmon. What is that? Most commentators think that it was a small village near the city of Megiddo itself. Some identify it with the village Rummaneh that is about four miles southeast of Megiddo. In 2 Chronicles 35:22 we read that Josiah fought in the valley of Megiddo, and Hadadrimmon may have been the actual place where he was mortally wounded. (He was later taken to Jerusalem, where he died.)

The description of the mourning continues in verse 12.

ZACHARIAH 12:12-14

12 And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; 13 The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; 14 All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.

These three verses make the same point, but they do so using the technique of *emphasis by enumeration*. All

of these families would be among God's faithful people who would mourn. Even the wives are mentioned, which further emphasizes the point that no one would be left out of this mourning. Verse 14 drives that point home - "every family" will mourn.

Why are these specific families mentioned - David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei? Nathan was the son of David (Luke 3:31), and Shimei was the grandson of Levi (Numbers 3:17-18). The house of David was the ruling family, and the house of Levi was the priestly family. So these four names, along with the phrase "all the families that remain" include all of the royal family and all of the priestly family.

But what does this description mean? We have seen it before. These four names show a *combined royal priesthood*, which we know is the church (1 Peter 2:9). These verses are saying that everyone in the church - all families in the royal priesthood - would mourn because of their sin when they looked upon the one "whom they have pierced."

What does it mean that they will mourn "apart"? That means they would understand their personal responsibility for their sin, and their mourning would be personal. This description is not an image of the church mourning as a whole; this description is an image of each person in the church personally mourning because of his own sin and what his own personal sin has caused.

Five of the fourteen verses in this chapter are used to describe the intense mourning of God's people over their sin and what it caused. There is a lesson here for us. Do we mourn over our sin as we should? Do we truly understand what our sin cost God? Or are we sometimes flippant and dismissive of our sin? Sin is serious, and we need to make sure we always treat sin seriously. Sin is treated with the utmost seriousness in the Bible.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

1 Peter 3:18 – For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

Zechariah 12 tells us what our reaction should be when we look both at our sin and at the cross of Christ.

CHAPTER 13

Before we look at Zechariah 13, let's go back to Acts 2, which helped us understand verse 10 of Zechariah 12. Acts 2 told us *when* the pouring out of the spirit in verse 10 was fulfilled, and Acts 2:36–37 gave us an example of the mourning that was also described in verse 10.

Acts 2:36–37 – Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

What happens next? Peter was asked that question at the end of Acts 2:37, and we know how he responded.

Acts 2:38 – Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

How does Zechariah answer that same question? What happens next?

ZECHARIAH 13:1

1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

We sing about a fountain:

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

Is that the fountain we see here? A fountain filled with blood? Or do we see a fountain filled with something else? Let's forget the lyrics of that song for a moment and ask this question: with what do we expect a fountain to be filled?

Jeremiah 2:13 – For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Jeremiah answers our question, but we didn't need Jeremiah to tell us what we already knew – fountains are filled with *water*. And this fountain in verse 1 is no different.

I'm not criticizing that song. (Believe me – if I started criticizing songs I wouldn't start with that one!) It is simply using poetic language to correctly link the waters of baptism with the blood of Christ – but fountains are filled with *water*, not with blood. When we see a fountain, we should think *water*, not blood. So what then is verse 1 telling us?

What is the time frame? Verse 1 refers to something that would occur "in that day." That's the same time period that we saw in Chapter 12 – the first century.

In that day – in the first century – a fountain would be opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. What is that fountain? Well, what was provided in the first century that involved water and was for sin and for uncleanness? Didn't Peter answer that question in the verse we just read from Acts 2?

Acts 2:38 – Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be **baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Zechariah 13:1 **links water and sin** in the first century. Acts 2:38 **links water and sin** in the first century. Each verse follows mourning over the death of the good shepherd. Perhaps this book of Zechariah is not as difficult as some commentaries make it out to be because that seems pretty straightforward to me! **Zechariah 13:1 is an Old Testament depiction of baptism for the remission of sins!**

But verse 1 says that this fountain would be opened "to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." Does that mean that baptism is for those already in spiritual Israel? I thought that baptism was how one became part of spiritual Israel in the first place. The answers to those questions are yes and yes.

First, baptism is how one becomes a part of spiritual Israel, the church. How do we know that? This verse right here in Zechariah tells us that – this fountain is for sin and uncleanness. No one can enter the church until they are made clean, and that cleansing occurs at baptism.

Ephesians 5:26-27 – That he might sanctify and cleanse it with **the washing of water** by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, **not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;** but that it should be holy and **without blemish.**

But the efficacy of baptism does not end there. Baptism continues to cleanse those who remain faithful to God. How do we know that? John tells us that the blood of Christ continues to cleanse us from sin.

1 John 1:7 – But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

And Paul tells us how we come in contact with that blood.

Romans 6:3-6 – Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were **baptized into his death?** Therefore we are **buried with him by baptism into death:** that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been **planted together in the likeness of his death,** we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that **our old man is crucified with him,** that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Baptism is how we enter the kingdom, and that same baptism is how faithful children of God remain in the kingdom. Baptism makes us clean, and that same baptism keeps us clean.

That baptism is the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5. That one baptism is water baptism (Acts 8:38). And it is water that fills this fountain here in Zechariah 13:1. There is no other water in the first century or in any century since that is for sin and uncleanness.

Acts 22:16 – And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Can we find the gospel plan in the Old Testament? Yes! We have seen it right here! We saw faith when we saw those who looked unto the pierced one. We saw repentance when those same people mourned over their sin and over what it had caused. And we just saw baptism in this fountain for sin and uncleanness.

The links between Zechariah and Acts 2 are amazing! In Zechariah 12 and 13 we have seen the outpouring of God's spirit, we have seen those who look at the one they pierced and finally understand what they have done, we have seen those same people mourn over their sin and no doubt wonder what they must do, and we have seen the answer: wash in the fountain for sin and uncleanness.

What else would happen in that day? Keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 13:2

2 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.

Verse 2 has the same time frame as verse 1 – "in that day," which is the first century. Verse 2 tells us

that three things would happen in that day. First, idols would be cut off out of the land. Second, prophets would pass out of the land. And third, unclean spirits would pass out of the land.

What does it mean that the names of the idols would be cut off out of the land? We could view that statement broadly as just a general statement about idolatry (as most commentaries do) or we could view that statement more narrowly.

I think the narrower approach is better. Why? Because there is a link between this verse in 13:2 and a verse that we studied earlier in 11:17 – "Woe to the **idol** shepherd that leaveth the flock!" That verse in Zechariah 11 used a Hebrew word for "worthless" that was usually reserved for idols and false gods, but that verse used the word to describe first century Roman emperors. I think Zechariah 13:2 is describing the same thing.

Those Roman emperors, and especially Domitian, thought they were gods and demanded worship as gods. Every emperor called himself "divus" or "sebastos," which means divine. On his coins, Nero referred to himself as "The Savior of the World." The emperors took as their title the Latin word "dominus," or its Greek equivalent "kurios," which means Lord, and which is used in the Bible as a title for Jesus.

But, of course, those emperors were not gods. Instead, they were false and worthless idols. Domitian was assassinated in AD 96. He was cut off out of the land. His name was not remembered, meaning that he was not remembered as a god, which is how he had wanted to be remembered. It also means that his name was not honored after his death, which history confirms. Upon Domitian's death, we are told that the Roman Senate was:

Overjoyed ... and assailed the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outcries ... Finally they passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated.

And who did this to Domitian? Who cut him off? Verse 2 answers that question – God cut him off along with his fellow emperors. Here is how Paul described that same first century event.

2 Thessalonians 2:8-9 – And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.

But was that the cutting off of an *idol*? Read what Paul wrote a few verses earlier.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 – Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

That is what the first half of verse 2 is describing. What about the rest of verse 2?

What does it mean that prophets and the unclean spirits would pass out of the land? I think that means just what it says. During the first century time period, the office of prophet would cease, and the ability of unclean spirits to invade and possess people would come to an end.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 we read that prophecies would come to an end, and that same verse tells us *when* that

would happen – when that which is perfect is come (1 Corinthians 13:10). I think that which is perfect there is the perfect word of God, which we know was completed in the first century.

And doesn't that make sense? What would a prophet tell us today? That Jesus is coming? He has already appeared the first time, and we already know he will appear a second time, so why would we need a prophet when we have the Bible to tell us these things? The office of prophet came to an end in the first century when there was no longer any need for a prophet, and that is something this verse in Zechariah is telling us.

What about the unclean spirits? They would also pass out of the land in the first century. There is no demon possession today, and there hasn't been since the first century. And, again, doesn't that make sense? Although there is much we don't know about the subject of demon possession, it seems to have been part of God's plan in the first century to confirm the word through signs and wonders.

Mark 1:27 – And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

Mark 16:20 – And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.

Matthew 12:28 – But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Today, we have the complete word of God. We don't need a continuing demonstration of signs and miracles to

confirm it. And we have the sign of the resurrection – if men fail to believe that, what other sign or miracle would convince them? Isn't that what Jesus said?

Matthew 12:39–40 – An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Demon possession went away in the first century, and that is what verse 2 is telling us would happen.

But *why* is verse 2 telling us these things? Because of what we saw in verse 1 and in the preceding chapter. Because the promises have been fulfilled in Christ and in his church. Because God loves and provides for his faithful remnant. Because the eternal kingdom of Christ has the perfect word of God.

And those false gods that sought to destroy the church? They are cut off. And prophets? We have no need for them. And unclean spirits? They are cut off and will no longer afflict the people of God.

So what if someone today were to tell us that they were a prophet sent by God? How should we handle that situation? Verse 3 answers that question.

ZECHARIAH 13:3

3 And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat

him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.

Verse 3 is the logical conclusion of verse 2. If prophets have ceased in the land, then logically it follows that if anyone tells you he is a prophet, then he must be a false prophet.

Joseph Smith, the infamous false prophet of the Mormons, thought he was mentioned in the Old Testament, and you know what, he was right! He is being discussed right here in Zechariah 13 along with every other false prophet since the first century!

Verse 3 makes its point in a very graphic manner. If someone tells his parents that he is a prophet, then his parents will know he is lying, and they will thrust him through and kill him. Although that all sounds very harsh to our ears, this verse is simply restating what the old law had to say about false prophets.

Deuteronomy 18:20 - But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

And the reference to one's own parents reminds us of a similar passage from the old law.

Deuteronomy 13:6-9 - If thy brother, the son of thy mother, **or thy son, or thy daughter**, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; ... But thou shalt surely kill him; **thine hand shall be first upon him to put him**

to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.

So what is the point being made here for the new covenant? Are we to kill false prophets? No, and we know from the rest of the Old Testament that few false prophets met that fate even under the old law. The point being made here for the new covenant is the same point that was being made under the old covenant, and it is the same point that Jesus made in Luke 14.

Luke 14:26 – If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

And it is the same point that Jesus made in Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:33 – But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The kingdom of God must come first. If someone is harming that kingdom, then we must expose and correct that person – **no matter who it is**. If even the parents of a false prophet are to have this attitude toward him, then what does that say about our attitude? If a man's own parents reject his false prophecies, then what does that say about how we should respond to that false prophet? The Bible says that the kingdom must come before everything else – even our own families.

But having that attitude will cause conflict in the home! That attitude will divide up our family! You mean like this?

Luke 12:53 – The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter,

and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

Did Jesus say, seek ye *second* the kingdom of God? Seek ye *third*? No. We either put the kingdom of God *first*, or we reject it entirely. Those are the only two options.

ZECHARIAH 13:4-5

4 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive: 5 But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.

These verses look at some false prophets (certainly not all false prophets) who recognize their error and are ashamed because of it.

The point here is that the understanding that prophecy had ceased would be so widespread that people would be ashamed to ever make a pretense of being a prophet. That is certainly the attitude that we in the Lord's church have about modern-day prophecy, but that cannot be said for many religious organizations around today. We see people on TV every day who have no shame at all in calling themselves a prophet! We see large religious groups following modern-day false prophets and leading people to their ruin!

Why does verse 4 mention "a rough garment"? Elijah had been "a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins" (2 Kings 1:8). Apparently Elijah's dress had by Zechariah's day become a costume worn by pretenders who wanted others to see them as prophets.

That is the deceit we see in verse 4, and deceit such as that would also come to an end once everyone understood that prophecy had ceased. Once everyone knows that prophecy has ended, it becomes very hard to convince people that you are a prophet! Even dressing up like Elijah won't help!

Verse 5 gives another illustration of this dramatic change. Those false prophets who saw the error of their way would readily admit to not being a prophet. Instead, they would admit that they were instead just a farmer or one who cares for cattle. They would be exposed for what they really are.

Verses 4 and 5 are intended simply to make the point that everyone in the remnant will know that prophecy has ceased, and so they will not be easy prey for false prophets and other pretenders. And if a false prophet rises up in their own midst, they will deal with him appropriately. not by killing him, but by completely rejecting him and exposing him.

ZECHARIAH 13:6

6 And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.

To whom is verse 6 addressed? We really have only two choices – either verse 6 is addressed to the Messiah, or verse 6 is addressed to the false prophet described in verses 3-5.

If it is the latter, then verse 6 is pointing back to verse 3, and the wounds in the false prophet's hands are the wounds inflicted on him by his parents because of his false prophecies – that is, wounds inflicted by his family members (his friends).

Or perhaps those wounds are ritualistic wounds inflicted on him by his fellow false prophets (his friends), such as those inflicted by the Baal worshippers in 1 Kings 18.

1 Kings 18:28 – And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.

Or perhaps the answer in verse 6 is a lie – the people see evidence of the ritualistic wounds that characterized false prophets, and the false prophet falsely responds that he got those wounds in a brawl with his friends.

If verse 6 is addressed to the false prophets, then verse 6 is just a continuation of the same thoughts we saw in verses 3–5 – namely, that false prophets will be recognized as such by all.

The alternate view (and a view that is much less popular among commentators) is that verse 6 is describing the Messiah, and, in particular, is describing the wounds he suffered on the cross.

A big criticism of this view is that it requires the pronoun "him" in verse 6 to point all the way back to the one who was pierced in Zechariah 12:10. But Zechariah has frequently bounced back and forth from some topic to the Messiah, and so we could be just seeing another example of that here. And this bounce need not be all the way back to Zechariah 12:10 – Zechariah was describing the work of the Messiah just a few verses earlier in Zechariah 13:1.

It's true that no New Testament writer ever points back to this verse in reference to Christ, but the very next verse is a Messianic prophecy, and so we cannot argue against a Messianic reading of verse 6 based solely on context. The real question is whether verse 6 belongs with verses 3–5 or instead belongs

with verse 7 (which we know is in reference to Christ).

The most popular view is the verse 6 is still describing the false prophets, and last week we looked at several different ways to understand verse 6 in that way.

But there is an alternate view – that verse 6 is describing the Messiah, and, in particular, is describing the wounds he suffered on the cross.

And as for being wounded in the house of his friends, one commentator argued that Jesus was not wounded *by his friends*. But that is not what the text says – it says that this person was wounded *in the house of his friends*. That house could be the house of Judah. Or the verse could be referring to Psalm 41:9, which is quoted in John 13:18.

John 13:18 – I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.

Which is the better view? It's a close call, and either view could be correct, but I lean toward verse 6 being Messianic.

Modern commentaries are *very* confident in their opinion that verse 6 is *not* Messianic, and perhaps they are correct. But I think they may have been much too quick to dismiss the possibility that verse 6 is a Messianic prophecy.

I would likely lean the other direction on this question if it weren't for verse 7, which we know is Messianic and which the New Testament links to Christ's friends, which makes it very similar to what we see here in verse 6.

And as for taking a view that is opposed by the majority of commentaries, I have usually followed Mark Twain's advice when it comes to studying the Old Testament prophets. He said, "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect."

ZECHARIAH 13:7

7 Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Notice how the good shepherd is described in the opening phrase of verse 7 – the Lord of hosts describes him as "my fellow." The Hebrew word translated "fellow" refers to someone united to another by the possession of common nature, common rights, and common privileges. That reminds us of Hebrews 1:8.

Hebrews 1:8 – But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

And it reminds us of what Paul wrote in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:6 – Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

That is what it means when God the Father refers to God the Son as "my fellow."

Verse 7 confirms that we are correct in understanding the time frame of these verses to be in the first century. How? Because Jesus himself told us that verse 7 was fulfilled in the first century.

Mark 14:27-30 – And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

Peter then declared that he would not be offended even if everyone else was, but Jesus told Peter that he would soon deny him. That New Testament linkage of verse 7 to Jesus' denial by a friend adds some weight to the view that verse 6 is also Messianic.

The inspired explanation of verse 7 found in Mark 14 adds an important pronoun. Zechariah 13:7 says, "smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered," which leaves open the question of who does the smiting. Mark 14 answers that question – "**I will smite the shepherd,** and the sheep shall be scattered."

The speaker in verse 7 is the Lord of hosts, and so God is the one who smites the shepherd. What does that mean? What it means is that the sword that awakes in the first part of verse 7 is then used by God the Father to smite the Messiah. This is what Jesus was referring to in his statement to Pilate.

John 19:11 – Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, **except it were given thee from above.**

It was God's will that Jesus die on the cross. Why? Because it was through that perfect sacrifice that God fulfilled his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that in his seed all the earth would be blessed.

So much deep and wonderful theology is laid open for us in this short verse! What we see here is that God the Father awakens his sword to smite the shepherd who is his fellow, which means the shepherd is also God. We could discuss those concepts for weeks and still not even begin to plumb their depths!

And what happened after this great smiting of the good shepherd? What happened was that the sheep scattered, including Peter! The good shepherd was left to face his accusers standing alone.

He could have called ten thousand angels,
to destroy the world and set Him free.
He could have called ten thousand angels,
but He died alone for you and me.

But even though he was deserted in his time of need, verse 7 ends with a comforting promise: "I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." These little ones are the poor of the flock that we saw earlier. They are the faithful remnant.

John 10:11 – I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

Luke 12:32 – Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

The sheep scattered, but both God the Father and God the Son remembered the little ones. He would gather them again with his hand. It was for those little ones that the first part of verse 7 was taking place. It was for their sake that God the Father smote God the Son.

ZECHARIAH 13:8-9

8 And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. 9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is

refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

Verses 8 and 9 provide more detail on the scattering of the sheep that we saw in verse 7. While that scattering included the desertion by the apostles, it also included much more, as these two verses explain.

First, these scattered sheep included both the faithful sheep (the third part brought through the fire) and the unfaithful sheep (the two parts that shall be cut off and die).

The identity of these two groups of sheep has already been explained to us. The unfaithful sheep are those who rejected their Messiah and clamored for his crucifixion. They were cut off because of that rejection, and they died in the judgement of AD 70 that was caused by that rejection.

And the sheep brought through the fire? They are the faithful remnant who were scattered but then gathered up again by God. They call on God's name, and God hears them. God says to them, "It is my people." And they say, "The LORD is my God." Verse 9 paints a beautiful picture of the remnant, and it is one that we have seen before.

But what is meant by this phrase: "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried"?

That phrase is a promise of great tribulation, but it is also a promise of great deliverance. Remember our time frame – we are still looking at events of the first century. What great tribulation was faced by the faithful people of God in the first century? We have two possibilities.

The greatest and most dangerous threat to God's people at this time was their great persecution by the Roman empire, the most powerful nation on earth. What hope did they have in coming through that fire? How could they ever survive against Rome? The very end of verse 9 answers that question – they came through that fire because of God's loving care for them and because of their faith in God. "I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God."

Another possibility here is that it is describing the deliverance that occurred when Jesus opened a way of escape for his faithful people to flee Jerusalem before its destruction, as we studied earlier. Those who heeded Jesus' warnings in Matthew 24 were able to see the signs and escape the city in time.

Either of these views or both of these views could be correct. I lean toward saying that *both* deliverances are in view here. Why? Because we will see both of these deliverances described in Chapter 14.

CHAPTER 14

Perhaps we should begin our study of Chapter 14 the same way that Martin Luther began his commentary on this chapter: "In this chapter I surrender, for I am not certain of what the prophet treats."

But we don't need to surrender if we proceed carefully, keep the time frame in mind, keep the context in mind, and apply our interpretative guidelines!

Let's look now at what some say is the single most difficult chapter in the entire Bible – Zechariah 14! (I personally would hand that award to Daniel 9, but Zechariah 14 is certainly in the running!)

ZECHARIAH 14:1-3

1 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. 2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

Our first two questions are *what* and *when*? *What* is the Jerusalem under consideration here (physical or spiritual or perhaps both), and *when* would these events occur (first century, the end of the world, or some other time)?

As for which Jerusalem this is, we are immediately faced with a problem in these first three verses.

If we just looked at verse 2, we would think we were looking at *physical* Jerusalem – "For I will gather all nations **against Jerusalem** to battle." But if we just looked at verse 3, we would think we were looking at *spiritual* Jerusalem – "Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight **against those nations.**"

Why is God gathering nations in verse 2 and then fighting against those same nations in verse 3? It's questions like that that cause Zechariah 14 to be considered so difficult.

But is this question really all that difficult? Haven't we already seen and studied in this book the very thing that is being described here? Didn't God gather Rome (which, at that time, represented and included many of the nations of this world) to come in

judgment against Jerusalem? And didn't God later fight against Rome, both as punishment for what Rome had done to Jerusalem and for what Rome was doing to the church? I think the first three verses of Chapter 14 are simply a summary of what we have already seen in the prior chapters.

But we will see an important difference as we continue. These verses will describe these events from the perspective of God's *faithful* people rather than from the perspective of the *unfaithful* people.

The people in Chapter 14 will see God fighting *for* them rather than *against* them. They will see a way of *escape* rather than a way of *death*. They will see what things will be like for them *after* the city is destroyed.

If that is all true, then it answers our question about the time frame. We are still in the all-important first century, where we have been for quite some time in this book.

Everything we have seen in these closing chapters has been focused on the first century. That was when the Messiah came. That was when the eternal kingdom was established. That was when the Messiah was rejected by many he came to save, and that was when those who rejected Christ were judged as their city and their temple were destroyed by the Romans. That was also when Rome sought to destroy the church, but failed.

And how did Chapter 13 end? Chapter 13 ended with a trial by fire experienced by God's people, which occurred in the first century. We should not be surprised if Chapter 14 expands on the theme we saw in the closing verses of Chapter 13.

But most commentaries say that Chapter 14 is describing the end of the world. Are they all wrong? Yes, I think they are all wrong.

And here is the main reason I think they are wrong – they all say that Chapter 14 is describing the great battle that will occur at the end of the world. But do you know what? **There will be no great battle at the end of the world.** We are **not** heading toward some cataclysmic battle between good and evil as so many false prophets proclaim today. There is nothing in the New Testament (or the Old) to support that notion.

And remember one of our guidelines for these difficult chapters – if we think we see in these chapters something that is not more fully revealed in the New Testament, then our view of these chapters is almost certainly wrong.

What does the New Testament say about the end of the world?

- The trumpet shall sound at an unexpected time determined by God (1 Corinthians 15:52, Mark 13:32, Matthew 24:44, 1 Thessalonians 5:2–3).
- Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
- Jesus will bring the spirits of the faithful dead with him (1 Thessalonians 3:13, 4:14).
- The bodies of the dead will be raised, with the dead in Christ rising first (John 5:28–29, Acts 24:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 15:52).
- All will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to bend their knee and be judged, with some receiving eternal life and the others receiving indignation and wrath (2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 2:6–8, Hebrews 9:27).
- Those righteous who are alive will not sleep but will be changed and will meet Christ in the air to join those righteous who were raised, and so shall

we ever be with Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

- The kingdom will be delivered to God (1 Corinthians 15:24).
- The earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10).

Where in that list is a great cataclysmic battle between good and evil? Where in that list do we find the innumerable forces of the antichrist marching into Palestine? Where in that list do we see atomic bombs dropped on the Holy Land? Where in that list do we see an earthly kingdom located in Jerusalem led by Christ for a thousand years? **Nowhere! None of that is in the Bible.**

Why do so many people today teach otherwise? Because they don't know the word of God. Because they haven't taken the time to rightly divide and understand the word of God. Because they have seen "The Omen" more often than they have read the book of Revelation. Because they read books written by authors more interested in having a bestseller than in accurately teaching the word of God. Because they listen to peddlers who sell their false prophecies to a gullible public on the Internet and late night TV (2 Corinthians 2:17).

The Bible tells us what will happen at the end of the world, and "giant cataclysmic battle between good and evil" is not on the list! All that evil people will do on that last great day is rise from their graves, bend their knees to Christ, receive indignation and wrath at their judgment, and then watch as their world is burned up by fire. They will not have an opportunity to wage war against God. The battle was won at the cross! That is what the Bible teaches about the end of the world.

So, with that in mind, let's back up and look more closely at the first three verses.

Verse 1: *Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.*

"Thy spoil" – whose spoil? The end of Chapter 13 was describing the people of God – is it *their* spoil? I don't think so.

The word "Behold" here starts a new section, and the word "thy" is explained in verse 2, which begins with the word "for," suggesting that verse 2 is there to explain verse 1. This spoil is the spoil of those in Jerusalem, which will be divided in the midst of them. Verse 1 says that this day is coming, and it did come in AD 70 when Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed by Rome.

Verse 2: *For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.*

Verse 2 is describing the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Here is how Jesus described those same events.

Matthew 24:21 – For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

That was the day of the Lord in verse 1 that was coming. Many people were killed, and many others were led away as captives to take part in the triumphal procession in Rome celebrating the destruction of their city.

What does that last phrase mean? "The residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city."

It is a difficult phrase, but I think it is best explained by the verses that follow. The word "residue" could be translated as "remnant," a word we have seen before. This group of people not cut off from the city is the group of people that escaped the destruction of the city. They are the ones who heeded the warnings of Christ in Matthew 24 and who escaped the doomed city in time.

If half are taken captive and a remnant escapes, what about the others? They are killed. Although their deaths are not mentioned explicitly here, their deaths are *implied* by the phrase "the city shall be taken." To take a city almost always involved the deaths of large numbers of its inhabitants, so that part would have been understood and expected. The verse then explains that not all were killed - some were taken captive and some escaped.

Verse 3: *Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.*

What happens after the city was destroyed? We already know the answer to that. Jesus came in judgment against Rome, and the book of Revelation describes that conflict. Does Revelation show Jesus going forth to fight Rome? I'll say!

Revelation 19:11-16 - And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in

fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

That is what verse 3 is describing. The first three verses of Chapter 14 are a summary of what saw in the prior chapters about the destruction of Jerusalem and the fates of the faithless and the faithful.

ZECHARIAH 14:4-5

4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. 5 And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Verses 4 and 5 describe the faithful people of God who heeded the warnings of Christ in Matthew 24 and who escaped Jerusalem before the city was destroyed. Before we look at the text of these two verses, let's review what Jesus said about that escape and review what happened when that escape actually occurred.

First, what did Jesus say about that escape?

Matthew 24:15-22 - When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

The parallel passage in Luke 21 provides some additional details.

Luke 21:20-21 - And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.

So what warning signs did Jesus tell his followers to look for? Two things. First, the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, and second, Jerusalem surrounded by armies. To what historical events do those two warning

signs apply? We have already talked about the second one – Jerusalem compassed with armies – so let's start with that one first.

Jerusalem was encompassed by Roman armies twice in this time period – first by Cestius Gallus in AD 66, and then a few years later by Vespasian and Titus. If Jesus' followers had waited for the second Roman army, they would have waited too long. There was no window of escape open at that time. But, as we said earlier, Cestius Gallus surrounded Jerusalem but then inexplicably ordered a retreat. I think Gallus' army was the sign that Jesus told his followers to watch for, and the time period after Gallus' retreat was their window of escape.

But does that present a problem with the other sign – the abomination of desolation? Yes, but it's a problem we can solve.

What is the abomination of desolation? It is a horrible desecration of the temple, and Daniel has two different prophecies about an abomination of desolation.

First, Daniel foretold an abomination of desolation that occurred during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, during the Greek rule of Palestine between the testaments. That desecration was followed by a restoration and purification of the temple, which gave rise to the celebration of Hanukkah still observed today.

Second, Daniel foretold another abomination of desolation that would occur in the first century. It is that second desecration foretold by Daniel that we are seeing here, and it is that second desecration that Jesus was describing in Matthew 24:15, where he referred to Daniel by name.

The big difference is that this second desecration of the temple would *not* be followed by a restoration or a

purification as was the first desecration. Instead, this second desecration would be final.

So what is the problem? The problem is that the abomination of desolation is usually identified with the destruction of the temple in AD 70. But if the people had waited for that sign, it would have been too late for them to escape.

The solution to that problem is to recognize that the abomination of desolation was more of a *process* than a singular event. The destruction of AD 70 marked the *end* of that process.

So what marked the *beginning* of the abomination of desolation? Remember the historical review we had earlier about the Jewish civil wars. What was the focus of their fighting? The temple. One group of zealots occupied the inner court, and another group of zealots occupied the outer courts – and those two groups did not start working together until Titus was breathing down their necks.

Some might think that the Zealots would never desecrate the temple, but that view is wrong. The Zealots were not zealous for the law; they were zealous in their hatred of Rome. Here is how Josephus described the Zealots at this time:

As for the dead bodies of the people, their relatives carried them out to their own houses; but when any of the zealots were wounded, he went up into the temple, and **defiled that sacred floor** with his blood, insomuch that one may say it was their blood alone that **polluted our sanctuary.** (*War of the Jews*, 4.3.1)

These men [the Zealots], therefore, trampled upon all the laws of men, and **laughed at the laws of God;** and for the

oracles of the prophets, they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers; yet did these prophets foretell many things concerning the rewards of virtue, and punishments of vice, which when these zealots violated, they occasioned the fulfilling of those very prophecies belonging to their own country; for there was a certain ancient oracle of those men, that the city should then be taken and the sanctuary burnt, by right of war, when a sedition should invade the Jews, **and their own hand should pollute the temple of God.** Now while these zealots did not quite disbelieve these predictions, they made themselves the instruments of their accomplishment. (*War of the Jews*, 4.6.3)

Josephus tells us that the Zealots polluted the temple. The occupation of the temple by the Zealots was the *beginning* of the abomination of desolation; the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70 was the *end*. If the people were going to use that abomination of desolation as a warning sign, they would need to look for its *beginning*, not for its *end*.

Does the timing work? Yes. Cestius Gallus arrived in AD 66, and the fighting among the Zealots in the temple began the very next year, in AD 67. Those two events were the warning signs that Jesus told his followers to look for – Jerusalem encompassed by an army, and a public desecration of the temple.

When Gallus retreated, the window of escape was open. And what were Jesus' followers supposed to do when they saw those things? In a word, **run!** They were to flee the city.

But that command to flee raises another potential problem. Why were they commanded to leave so quickly?

It took another year or more before the Romans returned and once again encircled the city. Couldn't they take their time in escaping?

Two answers. First, they were to flee quickly because Jesus told them to flee quickly (and do we really need another reason when that is the first reason?). Second, they were to flee quickly because of the horrors they would face if they stayed. Here is how Josephus describes what happened to those who stayed behind in the city:

Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying of famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them. ... Nor was there any lamentation made under these calamities, nor were heard any mournful complaints; but the famine confounded all natural passions; for those who were just going to die looked upon those who were gone to their rest before them with dry eyes and open mouths. A deep silence, also, and a kind of deadly night had seized upon the city ... And every one of them died with their eyes fixed upon the Temple. (*The Jewish Wars*, 5:12:3)

When the Romans were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses ... They then stood on a horror of this sight, and

went out without touching anything. (*The Jewish Wars*, 6:8:5)

Josephus tells us that 97,000 people were taken captive and enslaved, and over one million people died. That is why Jesus told his followers to drop everything and run when they saw the warning signs.

And Jesus opened a door of escape for them by removing the Roman forces for a short time. That is what Jesus said in Matthew 24:22 – "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." The Roman siege was shortened from what it might have otherwise been when Gallus Cestius retreated. It was during that time that the elect were able to escape.

Now, let's go back to the text of verses 4 and 5 to see how Zechariah describes these same events.

Verse 4: *And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.*

Verse 4 uses vivid apocalyptic language to describe the great escape route created by Jesus to allow his people to escape the doomed city. Jesus splits a mountain in half to create a valley through which his people can flee. Did Jesus really split a great mountain in half to create a valley of escape? Absolutely! He split the Roman forces between the armies of Gallus and the armies of Vespasian, and his people were given an opportunity to flee the city in between.

How do we know this language is apocalyptic and not literal? For starters, there is no statement anywhere

in the New Testament saying that Jesus will ever set foot on this earth again, and in fact there is an opposite indication in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. If Jesus were going to come back to this earth and walk around, I don't think that Zechariah 14 is the only place where we would be reading about it in the Bible.

Second, any time you see mountains being split in half you should be on the lookout for apocalyptic language. Mountains frequently appear in such figurative images. Mountains are mentioned, for example, seven times in Revelation, five times in Daniel (including Daniel 2:44-45), and 43 times in Ezekiel. We even see them in Jesus' warning instructions - "Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains" (Matthew 24:16). In fact, that particular warning from Jesus is almost identical to the beginning of verse 5, which is confirmation that we are on the right track here.

Verse 5: *And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.*

Verse 5 looks like it was lifted straight out of Matthew 24, which means that Jesus almost certainly was referring back to this prophecy from Zechariah 14 when he gave his prophecy in Matthew 24.

Verse 5 says that the people will flee to the valley of the mountains. Matthew 24:16 says, "Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains."

Verse 5 says that the people will flee quickly, as they fled from before an earthquake. Matthew 24:17-20 says, "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him

which is in the field return back to take his clothes."

Verse 5 says that the Lord shall come, and all the saints with thee. Matthew 24:30-31 says, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

But that's the end of the world, right? Wrong! Matthew 24:34 places the fulfillment of those prophecies firmly in the first century: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." And they were fulfilled when the Romans marched on Jerusalem and when the people inside the city turned against each other.

The signs of the end in Matthew 24 are signs of the end of Jerusalem in AD 70, not signs of the end of the world. How do we know that? Many reasons. First, Matthew 24:34 tells us that signs relate to the first century. Second, the context tells us the signs relate to Jerusalem. Third, history tells us that the signs happened in the first century with the fall of Jerusalem. And fourth, there will be no signs of the end of the world because it will come as a thief in the night, which means it will come without warning.

Verses 4 and 5 are describing the same events as Matthew 24:4-34, and they are doing so using the same vivid apocalyptic language that Jesus used in Matthew 24. That vivid description continues in verses 6 and 7.

ZECHARIAH 14:6-7

6 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: 7 But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.

"In that day." The time frame has not changed; we are still in the first century. (That time frame will be confirmed yet again later with verse 8.)

So whatever is being discussed here in verses 6 and 7, it is **not** God turning off the sun at the end of time. Instead, it is exactly the same thing that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24:29 - "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." And Matthew 24:34 tells us that Matthew 24:29 occurred in the first century.

Matthew 24:29 and Zechariah 14:6-7 are using vivid language to describe the same thing - a complete upheaval! They are both describing a situation in which everything is turned upside down. It is as if everything had been put in a box and shaken up. Light is not light anymore. At evening time, it is light. The sun and moon are darkened. The stars fall from heaven. It seems that nothing is as it should be.

What does this mean? Let's let Haggai and the author of Hebrews answer that question. In Haggai 2, we read:

Haggai 2:6-7 - For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and

the desire of all nations shall come:
and I will fill this house with glory,
saith the LORD of hosts.

And then turn to Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:26-29 - Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

What is this "shaking" in Haggai 2 and Hebrews 12 describing? Turn back to Matthew 24 once again:

Matthew 24:29 - Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

The great **shaking** in Matthew 24:29, in Haggai 2:6-7, in Hebrews 12:26-29, and in Zechariah 14:6-7 are all describing the same great event - the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in AD 70.

And what replaced that destroyed temple? Hebrews 12:28 just told us - "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved." Hebrews 12:27 tells us that the church cannot be shaken. That immovable unshakable kingdom of Hebrews 12 is the indestructible kingdom of Daniel 2.

Daniel 2:44 – And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

We have already talked about the rebuilding of the physical temple after the exile. That rebuilt temple was never intended to be permanent, but rather Haggai prophesied that it would one day be replaced by something that was permanent and indestructible and immovable – the church of Christ. There is no other way to read Hebrews 12. The church was established in Acts 2, and the Jewish temple was destroyed about forty years later in AD 70, just as Jesus had described in Matthew 24.

One more question about verses 6–7: what is meant in verse 7 by the phrase, "But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night"?

It is a difficult phrase, but in context I think it is simply saying that God would determine the timing of these events, and when they occurred it would figuratively be as if the sun and moon were no longer shining – meaning that one could not tell whether it was day or night. That is exactly how Jesus described this same event in Matthew 24:29.

ZECHARIAH 14:8

8 And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.

"In that day." First century or end of the world? Well, when did living waters go out from Jerusalem?

John 4:10 – Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and **he would have given thee living water.**

Luke 24:47 – And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, **beginning at Jerusalem.**

Isaiah 2:3 – And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, **and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**

John 7:38-39 – He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow **rivers of living water.** (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

Living waters went out from Jerusalem in the first century, whether we view that Jerusalem as physical Jerusalem or we view it as spiritual Jerusalem, the church. Verse 8 confirms that we are on the right track with regard to the first century time frame.

What does the rest of verse 8 mean? "Half of them [half of the living waters] toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be."

When the faithful people of God fled the city of Jerusalem, what did they do? Where did they go? They went everywhere proclaiming the word of God and preaching the gospel. Verse 8 says that they would preach everywhere and they would preach at all times. And what was the result of their proclamation of the gospel? Keep reading.

ZECHARIAH 14:9

9 And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.

Jesus is king over all creation, but verse 9 is talking specifically about Jesus' reign over the church, the eternal kingdom of Daniel 2 – what we sometimes call the kingdom (the church) within a kingdom (the universe).

As the gospel spreads everywhere in verse 8, it follows that the eternal kingdom spreads to all corners of the earth in verse 9. That view is reinforced by the emphasis upon the oneness of the Lord and the oneness of his name in verse 9.

John 10:16 – And there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

Ephesians 4:4-6 – There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The mountain of Rome was split, and the people inside the city of Jerusalem were split. But not so with the kingdom of Christ. They have *one* Lord, and they are themselves *one* body, with Christ as their *one* king.

Once again we are reminded of something we have seen over and over in this book – there is one church. Christ's kingdom is one unified people (both Jew and Gentile) led by one shepherd.

ZECHARIAH 14:10-11

10 All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's wine-presses. 11 And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

Once again, as we saw between Chapters 11 and 12, there is a transition here (and possibly even earlier in verse 8) between *physical* Jerusalem and *spiritual* Jerusalem. How do we know that?

We know that from the description in these verses. Verse 11 says that "Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited." That could not be said about physical Jerusalem after its destruction in AD 70. In fact, Jesus had told his followers to flee the city because Jerusalem could *not* be safely inhabited!

What do the descriptions in verses 10–11 mean? These two verses tell us three things about spiritual Jerusalem, the church.

First, verse 10 tells us that spiritual Jerusalem would be accessible. "All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up."

The Jordan valley is 1388 feet below sea level, making it the deepest depression on the face of the earth. The idea expressed here is that those valleys around Jerusalem would be lifted up and flattened, making the city easily accessible. That is true of the church – entry is available to all who will obey the gospel of Christ. They don't have to climb mountains. Instead, God has done all of the hard work for them already. All they must do is obey the gospel. That's the same point that Paul made in Romans 10.

Romans 10:6-9 – But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

We don't have to travel up to heaven to bring Christ down to save us – God has already done that. We don't have to descend into the deep to raise Christ from the dead – God has already done that. All we must do is obey the gospel. God has made the eternal kingdom accessible to all, and that is something Zechariah prophesied would happen here in verse 10.

Second, verse 10 tells us that spiritual Jerusalem would be an inhabited city.

In fact, we are told that the city would once again occupy her ancient limits, which are given here by five geographical landmarks:

- The "Benjamin gate" was in the northern wall.
- The "first gate" was in the eastern wall.
- The "corner gate" was west of the Benjamin gate.
- "The tower of Hananeel" was the northeast corner of the wall.
- The "winepresses of the king" were probably near "the king's garden" at the southeast corner of the city.

Physical Jerusalem was in shambles, but not so with spiritual Jerusalem – it is inhabited, it is well-ordered, and it is has enough space to hold everyone who would enter. That is all certainly true of the church. It has enough room for all who would obey the gospel, despite what the Calvinists and the premillennialists say.

Third, spiritual Jerusalem would not just be inhabited, but it would be *safely* inhabited. "And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited."

In the days of Zechariah, the population in Jerusalem was sparse, and those few who lived in the city did not live there in safety. In the first century, the city was destroyed, and no one lived there in safety.

But the church is very different. It is *safely* inhabited. There is no judgment of "utter destruction" for sin because those in the church have been cleansed of their sin by the blood of Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). And, unlike *physical* Jerusalem, *spiritual* Jerusalem will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44)! Verses 10–11 are a beautiful description of the church!

With the next verse, God will once again turn his attention back to the enemies of God's people.

ZECHARIAH 14:12

**12 And this shall be the plague where-
with the LORD will smite all the people
that have fought against Jerusalem;
Their flesh shall consume away while
they stand upon their feet, and their
eyes shall consume away in their holes,
and their tongue shall consume away in
their mouth.**

Zechariah 14:12 is famous among the "end-is-near" premillennial commentators. They call it the "Nuclear Prophecy," and the slightly more imaginative among them call it the "Neutron Bomb Prophecy."

What's wrong with that view? After all, doesn't verse 12 look somewhat like what one might experience in a nuclear blast? Perhaps, but to find a nuclear bomb in this verse, one would first have to rip the verse completely out of its context in Chapter 14 and out of its context in the entire book of Zechariah. And, I might add, one would have to toss his or her common sense out the window right along with the word of God.

When read in context, there is no reason to believe that Zechariah has suddenly jumped thousands of years into the future to describe the effects of a nuclear bomb. What would such a prophecy have to do with anything that he has been describing in this book?

When someone somehow finds an atomic bomb in these verses, the only thing that has been atomized is the text! There are 211 verses in Zechariah. If our view of Zechariah 14:12 doesn't make sense when we read the other 210 verses, then our view is wrong. The surest way to misinterpret the Bible is to consider each

verse in a vacuum without any thought for the verses that precede it and follow it.

A second problem – at least for the premillennial crowd – is that verse 12 itself describes what is causing these symptoms, and it is a *plague* rather than a bomb. Why is that a particular problem for the pre-millennial crowd? Because they in particular like to brag that they alone take every word in the Bible literally. What about the word "plague"? Are they taking that word literally when they tell you about the so-called neutron bomb prophecy?

A third problem is a common problem – arrogance. Every generation of mankind likes to think that they are special and that the end of the world will surely come in their own generation. The signs are here! The end is near! The sky is falling!

Yes, Jesus could appear again in the next five minutes, but he could also appear again 10,000 years from now – and each is equally likely from our perspective. There are no signs. We cannot tell by looking around us whether Jesus is more likely or less likely to appear again now as opposed to 10,000 years from now. The only thing that causes some people to think that Jesus' appearance is more likely now is their collective arrogance – the view that our own generation is somehow unique and special – along with their flawed understanding of the Bible.

So what is verse 12 talking about? Let's begin with the same two questions that have carried us through this entire book. What is the context? What is the time frame?

The context is that Jerusalem has just been destroyed, and the people of God living in that city have escaped that destruction by heeding the warnings that Jesus gave them in Matthew 24. Rome, which just destroyed

Jerusalem, continues to persecute Christians as it had under Nero prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

And the time frame? The context that we just described is all happening in the first century. The Messianic prophecies we have seen in these closing chapters were all fulfilled in the first century. The prophecies about the church that we have seen in these closing chapters were all fulfilled in the first century. Our time frame has not changed. We are looking here at the first century.

So with that context and that time frame in mind, what is verse 12 talking about? Rome.

Verse 12 is describing the judgment of Rome, the fourth kingdom made of iron and clay in Daniel 2. Daniel had written in Daniel 2:44 that the church would destroy Rome, and here we see that destruction.

Rome is "the people that have fought against Jerusalem" in verse 12. Verse 12 figuratively shows Rome's judgment and destruction using the figure of an unspecified wasting disease that will destroy their armies. The focus on the eyes and on the tongue is particularly apt for the Romans. They *boasted* loudly of all they could see in their surrounding empire, and they *slandered* the people of God.

Verse 12 is a glimpse of what we see in the New Testament in the book of Revelation. The word "plague" occurs twelve times in the book of Revelation. That's twice more than in any other book of the Bible except for Leviticus and Numbers. Here is one example:

Revelation 18:8-10 – Therefore shall her **plagues** come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with

her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

Those verses from Revelation 18 are describing the judgment of Rome as is verse 12 here in Zechariah 14 using the same figure.

ZECHARIAH 14:13

13 And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the LORD shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour.

With verse 13, we are still "in that day," which means we are still in the first century. That phrase ("in that day") is found twenty times in the book of Zechariah – sixteen of which occur in these final three chapters, with seven of those sixteen occurrences found here in Chapter 14! Do you think the inspired text is trying to tell us something important with the repetition of the phrase "in that day"? I do.

It is almost as if God knew we might be tempted to lift these verses out of their proper context and apply them to situations where they don't belong! Why else does God keep reminding us that these prophecies pertain to events "in that day" and then repeatedly tell us in the New Testament when that day was – the first century – by referring back to prophecies in this book and telling us when they were fulfilled?

Verse 13 presents yet another problem for the rigid literalist. The "them" in verse 13 are those who just

had their flesh, eyes, and tongues rotted away by a plague. If that was a *literal* plague, then how are these same people now creating a great tumult in this verse? Wouldn't they all just be radioactive dust?

So what is going on in verse 13? Verse 13 is describing yet another aspect of God's judgment against Rome – God would create **internal strife** within Rome. Neighbor would turn against neighbor. We saw this earlier in the judgment of Jerusalem, and we are seeing it here in the judgment of Rome.

Was internal strife a problem for Rome? Definitely. In fact, the siege of Jerusalem was an example of internal strife in Rome. In AD 70, Jerusalem was located in a Roman province. Jerusalem's people were under Roman rule. As they themselves had said, they had no king but Caesar. The Jewish rebellion against Rome was an example of internal strife in Rome.

But the internal strife did not end there. Perhaps the most famous set of books ever written about the fall of Rome is *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon. In that lengthy history, Gibbon gives four primary reasons for the fall of Rome: external invasion, inner decadence, **inner strife**, and injury of time and nature. Daniel 2 also described the inner weakness of the Roman empire:

Daniel 2:41-43 – And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, **the kingdom shall be divided**; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, **so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken**. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men:

but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

That description from Daniel 2 agrees with Gibbon's theory as to why Rome fell – the crucial difference being that Gibbon wrote centuries *after* the fall of Rome while Daniel wrote centuries *before* the fall of Rome! Yes, Rome fell in part because of internal strife, just as Daniel and Zechariah had said it would.

ZECHARIAH 14:14-15

14 And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance. 15 And so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague.

Verse 14 is a bit of a shock. Earlier we were told that Jerusalem would be safely inhabited, but here we see the people of God (Judah) fighting at the city of God (Jerusalem). We already know that we are now looking at spiritual Jerusalem, so what we see here is the people of God in the church fighting those outside the church – those called "the heathen" in verse 14.

Some translations have "*against* Jerusalem" in verse 14 rather than "*at* Jerusalem" as we read in the KJV. The Hebrew word can mean either, but the context here demands "*at*" rather than "*against*." At this point in the text, Jerusalem is the church and Judah is the people of God. Their fight is being waged while they are *in* the church as they battle those who are outside the church.

Two questions – what fighting is this, and what *kind* of fighting is this? Let's start with the second question first because that question is easy.

This Jerusalem is spiritual Jerusalem, so we know what kind of fighting this is, and we know what kind of fighting it is not. It is *not* carnal warfare.

2 Corinthians 10:4 – For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

Instead, this fighting is the same kind of fighting we have seen before in this book – the fight to remain faithful to God in the face of persecution. It is through that kind of fighting – and only through that kind of fighting – that the child of God can overcome this world and achieve the victory.

1 John 5:4 – For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

So back then to the first question – what fighting is this? The context and the time frame answer that question – this is the struggle between the church and the mighty Roman empire in the first century. Those Christians who remained faithful in the face of that terrible onslaught were the ones who came out of that struggle victorious. And what was their reward?

Revelation 2:10 – Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Here is how verse 14 describes that same reward: "the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance." The faithful Christians would reap the

spoils of war! Verse 14 reminds us again of Haggai 2, which we quoted earlier.

Haggai 2:7-9 – And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. **The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.** The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

We know that Haggai 2 is talking about the church because that is what Hebrews 12:27-28 tells us. Zechariah 14:14 is also talking about the church.

Verse 15 revisits the plague of verse 12. The idea here is to show that whatever wealth does not fall to God's people as spoils of war will all be destroyed. Again, this language is highly figurative. It is describing the victory of faith that the church had over Rome. And what was the result of that conflict? The Christians were left with everything, and Rome was left with nothing.

ZECHARIAH 14:16

16 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

The "nations" that came against Jerusalem is Rome, which came against spiritual Jerusalem, the church. That Rome is called "nations" rather than "nation" reflects the historical reality – Rome was an amalgam of all the nations it had conquered. When Rome came

against you it was as if all the nations of the world had come against you.

Verse 16 is directed to those in the Roman empire who were left. That is, verse 16 is directed to those in Rome who did not experience the terrible judgments of the previous verses.

Who were those Romans? There can be only one answer to that question, and Jesus gave it in Luke 11:23 - "He that is not with me is against me." The Romans who are left are those Romans who switched sides! They are those Romans who heard and obeyed the gospel.

How do we know that? Verse 16 tells us that when it says that they "shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles." They are worshiping God! These Romans are the Romans who saw the errors of their ways and obeyed the gospel. We know there were such people from the many examples that we see in the New Testament.

But why are they keeping the Jewish feast of the tabernacles? Does that mean that the entire old covenant law will be brought back into force in the end times as the premillennialists teach? Of course not.

As we have discussed before, we know that the old law cannot be in force with Jesus as our King and High Priest (Hebrews 7:12). And we know that the old law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) and has been replaced with the new law of Christ (Hebrews 8:13; Galatians 6:2).

So what is meant here? The language continues to be highly figurative, so we need to ask what is meant by the *symbol* of the feast of the tabernacles. Why would the converted Romans be shown keeping that particular feast?

The feast of tabernacles commemorated the exodus from Egypt when the Israelites dwelt in tents and tabernacles. On the first day of the feast thirteen bulls were offered, twelve on the next day, eleven on the third, and so on until seven were offered on the seventh day – making a total of seventy offerings. The rabbis taught that the number seventy depicted the number of nations in the world, which meant that this feast looked forward to a time when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together.

One of the most important rituals of the feast of tabernacles was the pouring of water in the temple. A specially appointed priest was sent to the pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water from the pool. This water was poured by the high priest into a basin at the foot of the altar amidst the blasting of trumpets and the singing of the Hallel (Psalm 113–118). This pouring of water looked forward toward the outpouring of God's spirit upon all nations as prophesied in Joel 2:28 (I will pour out my spirit on all flesh) and which Peter in Acts 2 says was fulfilled in the first century. That is the same prophecy we saw in Zechariah 12:10.

So what then would this particular feast figuratively depict? It would depict the escape from bondage, the union of Jew and Gentile, and the outpouring of God's spirit upon the first century church. Each of those events is shown in the conversion to Christ of a Roman citizen. They have escaped bondage and death, and they have joined with Jewish believers in the one church. And they were able to do that because God's spirit had been poured out onto all flesh, both Jew and Gentile.

And doesn't that make perfect sense in the context of this verse? Does it make any sense at all to have this verse teach instead that the entire old covenant law will be brought back into force at the end of time? And if that were the case, don't we think we would read something about it in the New Testament some-

where? Do we really think God's description of such an unusual event would be found only in just seven words here at the end of verse 16? And how could we ever square such a view with what the New Testament teaches on the subject of the old law and the end of time?

Instead, let's keep it simple. And verse 16 simply tells us that some Romans would be converted, would escape God's judgment of Rome, and would enjoy the blessings enjoyed by all in the church.

ZECHARIAH 14:17-19

17 And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. 18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, where-with the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. 19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

What about the Romans who are not converted? We have already seen what happens to them, but these verses tell us again. The message of verses 17-19 is simple: those who reject Christ will not receive the blessings promised for the people of God but will instead receive wrath and indignation. Here that wrath and indignation is described as a lack of rain and a plague.

Who receives that judgment? Those who do not come to Jerusalem to worship God and who do not keep the feast of the tabernacles. In short, the judgment will come upon those Romans who are not among the converted Romans described in verse 16. Romans, just as with everyone else, fell into two categories: those for

Christ and those against Christ. Verse 16 describes the first group. Verses 17-19 describe the second group.

But these people aren't Romans – they are Egyptians. Isn't that what verse 18 says? No. Egypt is being used here as a symbol, just as the plague and the rain are being used here as symbols. Egypt is used frequently in the Bible as a symbol for death, oppression, persecution, and captivity. And that is how Egypt is used here to describe Rome. Revelation 11:8 likewise uses Egypt as a symbol for Rome.

And with verse 19, Rome is finished. Nothing more needs to be said. Rome has fulfilled its role in God's plan, and Rome has been judged and found wanting. Every Roman has been dealt with – the many who fought against Christ as well as the few who were converted to Christ. As Revelation 18:2 would later say, "Babylon the great is fallen!"

So how then does the book of Zechariah end? How else? The book ends with a beautiful description of the church.

ZECHARIAH 14:20-21

20 In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD'S house shall be like the bowls before the altar. 21 Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.

What is the time frame of these closing verses? Verse 20 begins with a phrase that we recognize, "in that

day," and verse 21 repeats it. Our time frame remains the first century.

Verses 20 and 21 tell us that the new Jerusalem, the church, is very different from the old Jerusalem. As we saw earlier, old Jerusalem was full of people who cared nothing for God or the things of God, but instead were concerned only about themselves. Their infighting led to the desecration of the temple and the deaths of thousands. Eventually the Romans broke through the wall and destroyed the city and the temple.

And the church, the new Jerusalem? Everything in the church is consecrated to God and to his service, even the smallest things. And there is nothing unclean in the church. In short, the new Jerusalem is the opposite of what old Jerusalem had become at its end. Verses 20 and 21 makes these points with a series of illustrations.

First, the bells of the horses in spiritual Jerusalem would have inscribed upon them the phrase "holiness unto the Lord." These "bells" were small pieces of metal that were hung around the necks of horses as ornaments, and they often had the owner's name inscribed on them. Here they have a phrase that under the old law appeared on the headdress of the high priest, "holiness unto the Lord." (Exodus 28:36) The point here is that even the smallest and seemingly most inconsequential thing in the church would be as consecrated to God as was the headdress of the high priest.

A second illustration points to the ordinary pots that were used in the temple, for example, to remove ashes (Exodus 27:3). Under the old law, such pots were treated very differently from the bowls that were maintained before the altar to hold the sacrificial offering. In the new Jerusalem, there would no longer be any such distinction. Every pot in the church would

be as holy and consecrated to God as were the sacrificial bowls in the old covenant.

Verse 21 expands upon this illustration: "Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see the therein." Under the old law, there were *secular* pots and there were *holy* pots. Not so in the church. In the church, there is no longer a distinction between secular and holy. Everything is holy – even the smallest bell on a horse and even the most ordinary looking pot. They are all dedicated to God.

The phrase "see the therein" means to boil therein. These pots may have been used to cook the meat for the fellowship offering in Leviticus 3 and 7. The fellowship offering was a time for thanksgiving to God, which harmonizes well with the feast of tabernacles mentioned earlier.

The idea here is that old Levitical distinctions in degrees of holiness in society (priests, Levites, people), in the temple (outer court, holy place, holy of holies), and in animals (clean, unclean) would disappear. Instead, everything in the church would be equally holy.

Now, with that description, does it sound to you as if Zechariah was anticipating the return of the old Mosaic system? Many say that he was, but what do you think? Would these closing verses make any sense if the old Mosaic system was ever going to be revived?

Zechariah's message here is that everything will be different in the church. In that respect, these comparisons remind us of the numerous similar comparisons we see in the book of Hebrews. The new covenant replaced the old covenant because the new covenant is better than the old covenant. Why would the old law

ever come back once we have the new? Why would the inferior ever return after we have the better?

The final illustration in this book is that "in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts." The term "Canaanite" is used symbolically here to depict an unclean person. Such will have no place in the new Jerusalem. Revelation makes the same point, also near the close of that book.

Revelation 21:27 – And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The church is the body of the saved. Everyone who is saved is in the church. Everyone who is lost is outside the church. We are added to the church by God when we are saved.

And with that we conclude our study of the wonderful book of Zechariah! This book may be neglected elsewhere, but it is not neglected here, and I am thankful to the elders here for the opportunity I have had to teach it.

TEN LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM OUR STUDY OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson #1: The Bible can be understood.

The book of Zechariah has a reputation as a difficult book. And that reputation likely explains why the book has so often been neglected. But common sense goes a long way in the study of the Scriptures, and common sense is usually enough to let us know that Zechariah was not trying to encourage his sixth century BC listeners by telling them about atomic bombs.

By narrowing our focus to study each verse and each word, but then broadening out our focus to make sure we are keeping the context and the time frame in mind, we were able to navigate and understand this book.

As always, the Bible is its own best commentary, and so we always turned there first to understand a difficult verse in Zechariah. But the Bible has a historical setting, as do the prophecies in the Bible, and so we also needed to study history to understand what was being said.

We also used some interpretive guidelines that proved very helpful, and will continue to do so as we begin studying Daniel next week.

But the main point here is that the Bible is meant to be understood, and we should never be scared off by something that seems difficult or that has a reputation for being difficult. We can understand God's word, and that is a great blessing.

The book of Revelation, for example, is often thought of as being very difficult to understand, and perhaps it is, but it is not impossible to understand. How do I know that? The opening verses of the book tell me that.

Revelation 1:3 - Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

The opening verses provide a blessing to those who read and keep the things written in the book of Revelation. That promise would be empty if we were not able to understand what was written in that book.

Some might argue that Revelation and Zechariah fall into the category of items dealt with by Deuteronomy 29:29.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

But God's word is not a secret thing! God's word has been revealed! We have it in our hands. We were meant to understand the Bible, and we can understand it.

And let me add that if we ever approach a book of the Bible with the thought that it cannot be understood, then it shouldn't surprise us if we have trouble understanding it! We need to have confidence not only in God's word, but also in our ability to properly divide and understand God's word. Yes, there are many different opinions, and yes, many of them are wrong. But God's word was meant to be understood, and if we study it carefully, we can understand it.

Lesson #2: The people of God can become the enemies of God.

This sad truth is on display in the book of Zechariah. The people of God who were listening to Zechariah and rebuilding the temple would, by the time of Christ, largely have become the enemies of God and enemies of the cross. It was for that reason that the great judgment of AD 70 against Jerusalem occurred.

Over and over the people had been given a second chance, but those second chances did not come forever. As we saw in this book, the judgment of AD 70 was God's final word on that subject. Why? Because by that time, Jesus had come and offered himself as a perfect sacrifice to bring about the great promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, and because Jesus had established his eternal kingdom in Acts 2, which is the immovable kingdom of Hebrews 12:27-28 that remained after Jerusalem was shaken.

And this did not come as a surprise to God, as some suggest. This was not a Plan B after Plan A failed, as the premillennialists teach. How do we know that? Many reasons, but an obvious one is that we have seen these things prophesied in Zechariah, so we know that they were always part of God's plan.

The lesson here is that the people of God can become the enemies of God. And we, as the people of God today, should always remember that warning.

If we stray from the right path, even slightly, that departure may create ripples that cause later generations to stray very far from the right path. The people of God do not become the enemies of God in a single step. It is a gradual process, and one that we must constantly guard against.

Philippians 3:18 - For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.

By AD 70, many of those who were once God's people had instead become enemies of the cross of Christ.

Lesson #3: The enemies of God can become the people of God.

We see a wonderful truth throughout Zechariah that is the opposite of the sad truth we just looked at. Instead of the people of God becoming the enemies of God, the enemies of God can become the people of God.

All throughout this book we have seen that the eternal kingdom would include both Jew and Gentile. That was God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, and it was fulfilled in Christ and his eternal kingdom, the church, which was established in Acts 2.

The promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 was that “all families” of the earth would be blessed. That world wide blessing applied to both Jew and Gentiles, and that blessing could come only through the one eternal kingdom of Christ.

We have seen the unity of the church over and over in this book of Zechariah. It has always been God’s plan that the word that went out first from Jerusalem would then go all throughout the world, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

And we see that one church in the New Testament. Paul tells us that the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), and Paul tells us that there is only one body (Ephesians 4:4).

Having a so-called church on every corner, all spouting different things, has never been a part of God’s plan, and it must never be a part of our plan.

The thought that we can all be one while believing different things and teaching different things is not found anywhere in the Bible. In fact, the Bible teaches us just the opposite.

John 17:20-21 – Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Those verses tell us two important things about our unity. First, our unity should be modeled on the unity between God the Father and God the Son. And second, our unity helps the world believe in Christ. And Zechariah tells us that our unity has always been a part of God’s plan for his church.

1 Corinthians 1:10 – Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

That is God's plan for the church, and it has always been God's plan for the church.

Lesson #4: If God will punish Jerusalem, God will punish anyone.

This is a sobering truth – eventually the second chances ran out for Jerusalem. We may be tempted to think that we will be saved by our heritage, but no one had a better heritage than Jerusalem, and that heritage did not save it.

Paul described that heritage in Romans 9.

Romans 9:4-5 – Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.

But in the preceding verses, Paul tells us that their heritage would not save them.

Romans 9:1-3 – I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

We may have been raised in the church, and we may have parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and on and on who were faithful members of the church, and who were elders and preachers. But that godly heritage will not save us if we are not faithful ourselves to God. In fact, that godly heritage may have the opposite effect if we are unfaithful despite all of those spiritual advantages (2 Peter 2:20-22). To whom much is given, much is required.

Lesson #5: If God will punish Rome, God will punish anyone.

Well, if our heritage won't save us, how about our usefulness? What if we do many wonderful works? What if we send Bibles all over the world to spread the gospel? What if God can use us to do many wonderful things?

Our usefulness will serve us no better than our heritage, if we ourselves are not faithful to God. And Rome is a perfect example of that.

Few nations were more useful to God in spreading the gospel than was Rome. The Roman peace of that time allowed the word to spread to the corners of the known world. And God used Rome to fulfill his promises to judge Jerusalem. And even the Roman persecution played a part in God's plan - it helped the church to remain pure and focused in its early period of growth. Intense persecution has a way of weeding out the half-hearted!

But did Rome's usefulness to God save it from judgment? Hardly. In fact, the book of Revelation is devoted to describing the judgment of Rome (which we have also seen in this book of Zechariah). Yes, Rome played a vital role in the plan of God - but that did not save it.

All throughout the Bible, we see God using man's evil to do something wonderful and good. The greatest

example of that is the cross of Christ, but we also see it with Rome. Paul described it with regard to Egypt and with regard to the Jews in Romans 9.

It reminds us of Joseph's statement after he revealed himself to his brothers.

Genesis 50:20 – But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

Yes, God can turn men's evil into something good, but no, that does not excuse those who commit that evil. That they proved useful to God does not mean they will escape punishment.

Lesson #6: If God can punish Rome, God can punish anyone.

Some may think that they are beyond the reach of God. Some may think that they are secure apart from God, and that God's judgment will never reach them. If so, they are sadly mistaken.

Obadiah 1:3-4 – The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.

That was both Rome's attitude and Rome's fate. Daniel 2 tells us that it was the church that swept Rome away along with the other kingdoms of this world.

But Rome was the mightiest kingdom on earth, some would say the mightiest kingdom that had ever been on earth. If anyone could ever escape the judgment of God

by relying on their own power, it would have been Rome. But Rome could not, and neither can anyone else. If mighty Rome could be brought down to the ground by God, then God can bring anyone and anything down to the ground. We will not be saved by our own might and power.

Lesson #7: God will be faithful to all of his promises.

Why do I emphasize the word "all"? Because God's faithfulness to his promises is something that should be remembered by both his *faithful* people and by *unfaithful* people.

We often sing "standing on the promises," which is a wonderful song, but the wicked are also standing on the promises! The difference is that the wicked are standing with their fists raised up in defiance to God.

But God has promises for the wicked just as God has promises for the faithful. And God will be faithful to *all* of his promises. That is a message of Zechariah.

There is a particularly vocal group today who glory in their shame and who wrap themselves up in a rainbow flag. But I find their focus on the rainbow to be particularly ironic. Why?

Genesis 9:12-13 – This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

That rainbow a sign that God will remember his covenant, and part of that covenant is that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). They, as do

we all, need to remember that God will be faithful to all of his promises, and the rainbow is a reminder of that fact.

Lesson #8: There is one church, and it is a royal priesthood.

We mentioned a moment ago the blessings for the Gentiles that were promised to Abraham and that are a major theme of Zechariah. God's people are one – they are a unified people. The promised kingdom would include both Jew and Gentile, and the enmity between them would cease in the church; there would be peace. And those promises have been fulfilled in the church.

There is one church. And that one church is a royal priesthood. We also see that throughout the book of Zechariah, even to the point that the prophet placed crowns on the head of Joshua, the then-serving high priest.

But why is the church a royal priesthood? Because the head of the church is both King and High Priest – something that could never happen under the old law.

There is no clearer indication anywhere in the Old Testament that the old law was never intended to be permanent and can never return. The old law was designed from the start to end and to be replaced, and the old law was replaced and it did come to an end when it was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

And perhaps I should add that we did not crown Jesus king, God did that (Hebrews 2:7–9). Why do I mention that? Because I think sometimes we get it wrong. We say or sing things about use crowning Jesus or making Jesus king. We do not make Jesus king when we obey him; we obey Jesus because he is already king! Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, which means Jesus is everyone's king and everyone's lord!

And what did Peter say in Acts 2 when his listeners asked what they should do? Did Peter tell them to make Jesus Lord of their life? No. In fact, in Acts 2:36, Peter had just told them that Jesus was already their Lord, and that God had made him so. What they needed to do was obey Jesus because he was their Lord, not make Jesus their Lord.

Jesus is Lord of all. Jesus is King of all. And the Lord of lords and King of kings is our perfect High Priest.

Hebrews 2:17-18 - Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Lesson #9: God loves, protects, and delivers his faithful people.

This wonderful truth is perhaps the central theme of Zechariah. The special love that God has for his people is on display all throughout the Bible, but it really shines through in this book.

Over and over in Zechariah God lifts the curtain to show his people the wonderful things that he was preparing for them. Few books have more Messianic prophecies than does Zechariah.

Why? Why so many? Because God loved his people, and he wanted them to know what was coming. He wanted them to know what had been prepared for them.

And the same is true today, although we now have the full revelation, unlike the people of Zechariah's day. We don't have to wonder about the coming Messiah and

the coming kingdom because both have now already come. If they were blessed in seeing just a glimpse of those things, how much more blessed are we today?

Lesson #10: We were bought with a price.

We have now finished our study of Zechariah. What was your favorite verse? There are many to choose from, but my choice is Zechariah 13:7.

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

In 1 Corinthians 6:20, Paul tells us that we were bought with a price. What was that price? Zechariah 13:7 tells us. That price was that God the Father awakened his sword and smote his fellow – God the Son, the good shepherd – and he did so for the sake of the little ones, that is for our sake. It was by his stripes that we are healed, and those stripes were inflicted by God. It was God's will that Christ should suffer and die on our behalf, and that is the price that was paid for our redemption.

What is the book of Zechariah all about? It is all about Jesus, and what wonderful things we have learned in this book about our Savior!