



*Good News*  
**Bible Reading Program**

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— August 2004 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-5 Aug	Prophecy against Judah's neighbors; the Messiah's two comings	Zechariah 9:1-10:1
6-10 Aug	God will save and restore Israel and Judah	Zechariah 10:2-12
11-15 Aug	Desolation of Israel; False shepherds; 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11
16-20 Aug	Future siege of Jerusalem; Judah to devour surrounding peoples and be saved; Mourning for the One they pierced	Zechariah 12
21-25 Aug	End of idolatry; Shepherd stricken and sheep scattered	Zechariah 13
26-31 Aug	The Lord destroys His enemies and rules over all the earth; All nations to observe the Feast of Tabernacles	Zechariah 14

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**NOTE TO ALL BIBLE READING PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS**

Following the August 2004 issue of the Bible Reading Program, we will be replacing regular Scripture readings with supplementary literature until December 1, at which time regular readings will resume. Some of the supplementary material has been referenced in the program before, but we know that not everyone has had an opportunity to read through it. And there will be some material we have not referred to previously. Even if you have gone through some of the items before, you may find them worthwhile to review. In any event, we apologize for the coming temporary delay in regular Scripture readings and, given the breaks we have already had, any impression that the program is losing steam. Indeed, we hope that the insertion of this extra material over the next three months will allow us to resume a regular schedule of one Bible and commentary reading per weekday after this temporary delay.

You have of course noticed that there have recently been, as alluded to above, far more breaks and stretching of material in the program than usual. This is due to a persistent production schedule problem that has been difficult to resolve—made worse of late by other urgent projects and the amount of research needed on recent sections covered. Regrettably, the breaks and stretching of material used recently in attempts to alleviate the problem have not helped enough. We hope that the publication of the supplementary material for the next three months will give us the time needed to catch up on regular commentaries—and eliminate the need for all but the planned festival breaks in the year. September, October and November seemed the best time for this course correction because of the long Feast break that would fall in this period anyway.

Please bear in mind that keeping on schedule requires writing about one commentary each weekday. As you can imagine, this is a rather tall order, so your prayers for God's direction and empowerment are certainly needed and appreciated.

For those who filled out the Bible Reading Program survey, we are grateful for your input. The fall program change will also give us time to evaluate that input and use it to refine the program where warranted when regular readings resume.

Thanks to everyone for your patience and understanding—and for your continued participation. We will yet make it to the end!

### Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

#### **Prophecy Against Judah's Neighbors (Zechariah 9:1–10:1)**

**August 1-5**

Chapters 9-14 of Zechariah contain two undated oracles. They may have been written years after chapters 1-8. Some have suggested a time in the prophet's old age, perhaps later than the Persian conflict with Greece around 480 B.C. since Greece appears in this section as a dominant power—though this is not a requirement, as God well knew that Greece would emerge as such a power. The focus of this section of prophecy is predominantly on the end time, with 18 occurrences of the phrase “in that day.” And it is a heavily messianic section, referring to both the first and second comings of the Messiah.

Verses 1-2 of chapter 9 label the first oracle as a message against the land of Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre and Sidon (and verses 5-7 add the cities of Philistia). Hadrach was in Syria, “north of Hamath on the Orontes River, southwest of Aleppo” (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 1). Verses 3-4 describe destruction to come on Tyre, reminiscent of Ezekiel's prophecies against Tyre in Ezekiel 26–28. As explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on those prophecies, destruction of both ancient Tyre and its end-time counterpart appears to be intended. The greatest ancient destruction of Tyre was accomplished by Alexander the Great—as the unwitting agent of God—when he rebuilt an ancient causeway out to the island fortress, breached its towering walls and set the city ablaze. And this was a forerunner of the destruction God will bring against end-time Tyre—that is, the global power bloc also referred to in prophecy as “Babylon the Great” (see Revelation 18).

Many see Zechariah 9:1-8 as descriptive of Alexander's march down the eastern Mediterranean coastline, as he subdued the Persian territories there. “His successes,” commentator Charles Feinberg states, “are recounted in verses 1-7, and verse 8 notes the deliverance of Jerusalem. After the Battle of Issus, Alexander quickly conquered Damascus, Sidon, Tyre (after seven months it was burned), Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron. The course of his victories in 332 BC was from northern Syria south by the valley of the Orontes River to Damascus, then along the Phoenician and Philistine coast” (*The Minor Prophets*, 1990, p. 314). This was more than a century after Zechariah lived.

Verses 5-6 says, “The king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. A mixed race [‘bastard’ in the King James Version here is an inaccurate translation] shall settle in Ashdod.” In Alexander's conquest, “Ashkelon lost its population, and Gaza was reduced after a siege of a few months.... Special mention is made by a contemporary of Alexander that the king of Gaza was brought alive to the conqueror after the city was taken; the satrap, or petty ‘king’ of the city, was bound to a chariot and dragged around the city to his death.... Ashdod was to lose its native population during this invasion, being replaced by a...mongrel people. It was Alexander's policy to mingle different conquered peoples” (p. 316).

Notice that verse 1 mentioned the eyes of all people, especially “all the tribes of Israel” being on the Lord—that is, on Him carrying out His will against these nations. The scattered tribes of Israel, on the northern periphery of the Persian Empire, experienced a measure of liberation through the conquests of Alexander. Yet this could also signify all the Israelites of the end time witnessing the coming of the Lord to deliver them—as described later in the chapter (see verse 14).

Verse 7 describes the removal of unclean and idolatrous practices from the Philistines—and apparently their conversion, as their remnant will be *for* God. This will be fulfilled at the return of Jesus Christ, demonstrating that the earlier verses in this prophecy are likely dual—applying to both ancient and future times. Ekron, probably representative in verse 7 of all the Philistines who are left, “will be like the Jebusites [the former inhabitants of Jerusalem] in a good sense. When David conquered Jerusalem, he did not destroy the Jebusites; instead, they were absorbed into Judah (e.g., Araunah in 2 Sam 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:18). So it will be with a remnant of the Philistines” (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 5-7).

Verse 8 further shows the end-time element of this prophecy, as God promises to never again allow a foreign oppressor to tramp through His people's land. Since the time of Alexander, other

oppressors have clearly afflicted the people of God. So the prophecy must refer to the time beyond Christ's return.

### The Messiah's First and Second Comings (Zechariah 9:1–10:1)

Aug. 1-5 Cont'd

Zechariah 9:9 contains the prophecy of the saving Messiah arriving on the colt of a donkey. This was fulfilled when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on such a donkey colt a few days before His crucifixion (Matthew 21:2-7; John 12:12-15). "The donkey was the mount of princes (Judg. 5:10; 10:4; 12:14) and kings (2 Sam. 16:1, 2)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Zechariah 9:9). God had forbidden Israel's kings from multiplying horses to themselves (Deuteronomy 17:16). Horses would have been a symbol of exaltation and conquest. Notice that Zechariah 9:10 shows horses and chariots as war implements. The donkey was to symbolize humility and peace—and Israel's anointed kings were to represent the future Messiah who would humble Himself in the cause of ultimate peace.

Yet Jesus' first coming is not the primary focus of the remainder of the chapter. Verse 10 will not be fulfilled until Christ's second coming. Note the reference to Ephraim, as representative of the northern tribes. The end of the verse describes the Messiah's global dominion. In the remaining verses, we see that God will deliver His people.

Yet though Christ speaks peace to the nations (verse 10)—and indeed has done so through Scripture for nearly 2,000 years—they hatefully reject Him. He must therefore subdue them through means of war (verses 13-15). God will even use the returned captives of Ephraim (representative of the northern tribes) and Judah to fight their enemies. This is not a contradiction of the peaceful donkey imagery. Rather, it exactly parallels an ancient prophecy given about the Messiah by the patriarch Jacob: "The scepter [symbol of kingship] shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [i.e., the Messiah] comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. *Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes*" (Genesis 49:10-11). "The imagery in this verse describes the warfare that the Messiah will wage to establish His reign (Ps. 2; 110; Rev. 19:11-21). Wine recalls the color of blood" (*Nelson*, note on Genesis 49:11-12).

Notice in verse 13 that the Israelites fight against the sons of Greece. The first part of the chapter (verses 1-8) seemed to indicate the Greco-Macedonian ruler Alexander the Great as typical of the coming of the Messiah. Yet here we see Greece as the *enemy*. Some have attempted to link verse 13 with the Jewish fight in the days of the Maccabees against the Seleucid Greek overlords of Syria. Yet, while there may have been a forerunner in that divinely assisted struggle, the verse here clearly mentions the presence of not just Judah but also Ephraim, as representative of the northern tribes—and they were *not* present during the Maccabean period.

The actual Hebrew word for Greece is *Yavan* (written in English as Javan). And the sons of Javan could refer to the nationalities listed in the table of nations in Genesis 10. "The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim" (verse 4). Javan is generally understood to represent the Greeks. Elishah is typically equated with Cyprus. Tarshish is often thought to denote southern Europeans of the western Mediterranean, such as Spain (site of ancient Tartessus). Kittim, denoting western lands, could refer to people of Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, Italy and perhaps other western Mediterranean areas. Dodanim (spelled "Rodanim" in 1 Chronicles 1:7) may correspond to the Rhodians and other Aegean peoples. So southern Europeans could be intended in Zechariah 9:13 by Javan and his sons. Interestingly, this is where the descendants of ancient Tyre and Sidon may be found today—as well as the descendants of ancient Babylon. So the end-time Babylon, centered at Rome, may well be in mind in Zechariah 9:13. Indeed, as this latter-day system descends from ancient Greece—as from ancient Persia and Babylon before it—those who are part of it can rightly be described as descendants of Greece.

Yet the reference here may also be to the Hellenization (spread of Greek culture) begun under Alexander. By the time of Jesus' first coming, the Jews regarded all non-Jews as "Greek"—a term frequently used in the New Testament for any and all gentiles. Foreseeing this divide, God in Zechariah 9:13 may simply be contrasting the Israelites with their gentile enemies. Even today, Greece is reckoned as the birthplace of Western civilization.

The returned exiles of Israel and Judah, though reduced to mainly slingstones for weapons, will fight together against their foes—and will miraculously gain victory as Christ returns in power and glory to save them (verses 13-16). In verse 15, "Zechariah describes the victory banquet of God's people in celebration of His victory over the nations and securing of Jerusalem. The people will be filled with drink like sacrificial basins were filled with blood, and they will be filled with meat like the corners of the sacrificial altar (see Ps. 110)" (*Nelson*, note on verse 15).

This mighty deliverance will come “in that day” (verse 16)—the Day of the Lord. And the people of God will experience great blessing and prosperity (verses 16-17). In 10:1, “the latter rain (Deut. 11:14) refers to the rain that comes in late spring and is essential for an abundant grain harvest” (note on Zechariah 10:1). The rains signify all blessings, both physical and spiritual. God’s people will pray for these—and He will answer their prayers in abundance. Just as thunder and lightning precedes a shower of rain, so will the lightning, trumpet and whirlwind of Christ’s coming (9:14) precede a shower of blessings—the greatest blessing being the pouring out of God’s Spirit.

This oracle continues through the remainder of Zechariah 10 and chapter 11—our next two readings.

### **Israel and Judah Saved (Zechariah 10:2-12)**

**August 6-10**

As verse 1 of chapter 10 stated, God’s people are to pray to Him for their blessings—and He will abundantly provide. Yet Israel has often failed to seek God—looking vainly to idols, fortunetellers and other occultists for guidance. Interestingly, this situation did not characterize the Jews of Judea in the time of Zechariah. But it did aptly describe the far-flung scattered Israelites—as it still does today.

Indeed, psychics, astrologers and mediums remain popular. That’s because “there is no shepherd” (verse 2)—that is, there is no adequate leadership among the people. The “shepherds” with whom God is angry in verse 3 may be a reference to false spiritual leaders such as the occult practitioners mentioned. It could also simply denote those who have failed to lead the people so as to keep them away from such evil. However, based on what follows in the next verses, the shepherds here could be foreign oppressors. “While Israel lacked national leadership, there were plenty of tyrants seeking to rule God’s people” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 3). These are also referred to in the same verse as “goatherds” in the NKJV—“goats” in the KJV.

The Lord will make Judah as His royal warhorse against the oppressing enemy nations (verses 3). This will be accomplished through His coming as Israel’s long-awaited, much-needed Shepherd, the Messiah. “The cornerstone, the battle bow, and the nail [or tent peg] are figures of the Messiah to represent His qualities of stability, dependability, and strength. The cornerstone speaks of the ruler or leader on whom the building of government rests figuratively. (See Judg 20:2; 1 Sa 14:38; and Is 19:13.) It is a well-known symbol of the Messiah. (Cp. 1 Co 3:11 and 1 Pe 2:6, quoting Is 28:16.) The nail [or peg] refers to the large peg in an Oriental [i.e., Middle Eastern] tent on which were hung many valuables. On the Messiah will rest the hope and trust of His people. He will be the worthy support of the nation, the altogether dependable One, the true Eliakim. (Note Is 22:23-24 [and the Bible Reading Program comments on these verses].) The battle-bow stands for all implements of war and might. Messiah is the great military commander of His people; He is the Man of war (Ex 15:3). This will be clearly and openly manifest when He comes to rule (Ps 45:4-5)” (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 321).

With Jesus Christ’s help, the Jews will overcome their enemies in the battle—infantry overcoming cavalry (verse 5), perhaps in an end-time setting signifying men on foot overcoming those in war vehicles such as tanks and the like.

Verse 6 again makes the end-time setting clear, as we see here the deliverance and return of the house of Joseph—representative of all the northern tribes of Israel. In verse 7, the name of Joseph’s son Ephraim is used in the same sense. God says He will “whistle” for His scattered people (verse 8), thus continuing the figure of the shepherd—signaling his flock.

God will bring His people back to their land—Gilead (east of the Jordan) and Lebanon (west of the Jordan) both being in the area of the former northern kingdom (verse 10). Lebanon could also denote the whole Promised Land (compare Joshua 1:4). God will deliver the Israelites from their end-time captivity in Egypt and Assyria (verse 10)—enabling those returning from the south to miraculously cross the Red Sea again on dry ground and those from the north to cross the Euphrates River in like manner (verse 11). Some identify “the River” here as the Nile, but this moniker is typically applied in the Old Testament to the Euphrates—the northern boundary of the Promised Land. The mention of Assyria in context makes this even more likely. These same events are described in Isaiah 11:11-16. Note particularly that Assyria again will be a national power in the last days (see Zechariah 10:11). As the representative northern power of the end time, the Assyrians will evidently constitute part of the final European empire known as Babylon. The scepter of Egypt departing may parallel the defeat of the final king of the South in Daniel 11. Yet, since Egypt is also figurative of this world of sin and captivity in general, this could denote the rule of sin and Satan coming to an end.

Israel, God tells us in Zechariah 10:12, will at last walk in His ways as His fitting representatives. Notice in this verse that the “LORD” (the Eternal) is referring to *another* as the “LORD”—that is, God the Word (who would become Jesus Christ) is referring to God the Father.

### **Two Staffs, Worthless Shepherds and 30 Pieces of Silver (Zechariah 11) August 11-15**

The wonderful high point for the Israelites at the end of chapter 10 is followed by a description of the lowest point of all. Whereas chapters 9-10 concerned the awesome deliverance and restoration to the Promised Land that the Messiah would bring, chapter 11 speaks of the nation rejecting that Messiah and the resultant dire consequences.

The first three verses of chapter 11 tell of destruction to befall Lebanon, Bashan and the Jordan Valley—that is, most of the Promised Land. Commentator Charles Feinberg notes: “The context of the rest of the chapter is determining and it points unmistakably to the judgment which resulted from the rejection of the Shepherd of Israel, that destruction which overtook the land and people [at the hands of the Romans] in AD 70” (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 325). Yet this is likely also to be understood as a forerunner of end-time destruction, as we will see.

“In the Talmud the Jewish rabbis identified Lebanon here [in verse 1] with the second temple, ‘which was built with cedars from Lebanon, towering aloft upon a strong summit—the spiritual glory and eminence of Jerusalem, as the Lebanon was of the whole country’” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 1-3). The mighty trees of the land, besides being literal, could also symbolize the principal men of the nation (the “shepherds” of verse 3). The roaring lions of verse 3 would seem to represent the ravaging conquerors.

The reason for this terrible situation then follows. “In Hebrew style an effect is often stated first, then the cause is presented afterward. So it is here. The cause of the judgment, the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, is now elaborated upon. The charge is to the prophet [Zechariah] who performed in vision what was commanded. He acted representatively for the Messiah in whose personal history these transactions took place” (Feinberg, p. 325).

Actually, it is not entirely clear who is speaking in verse 4, saying, “Thus says the LORD my God...” As we saw in Zechariah 10:12, the preincarnate Jesus Christ was speaking of the Father. It appears that Christ is still speaking in verse 4 of chapter 11—as what follows describes, in figurative language, His experience when He came to earth as a human being. Yet, as the commentator above and others contend, it may well be that Zechariah was to literally take shepherd implements and act out the role of the Good Shepherd. Indeed, this seems likely given the instruction to later take the implements of a foolish shepherd in verse 15—since that does not seem to be something Christ Himself did in any sense.

The Messiah was to “feed the flock [headed] for slaughter” (verse 4). In verse 5 we see the abuse and oppression of the people under foreign overlords, to whom their own leaders had essentially sold them out for the sake of their own position and comfort. In verse 6, God says that he will give every one into his neighbor’s hand (indicating an internally divided, faction-ridden nation, which Judah was in Christ’s day). God also says that He will give the people over to their king. In John 19:15, the crowd that cried out to have Christ crucified said, “We have no king but Caesar!” Thus it would be into the Roman emperor’s hand that they would be given.

Verse 7 describes the Messiah feeding the flock—that is, giving the nation spiritual nourishment through His teachings. It is particularly the “poor” of the flock who are fed—those of lesser means and those who are lowly and humble of spirit. The NIV has “oppressed.” Jesus quoted Isaiah in describing the commission God the Father gave Him: “He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the *poor*; He has sent me to heal the *brokenhearted*, to proclaim liberty to the *captives* and recovery of sight to the *blind*, to set at liberty those who are *oppressed*” (Luke 4:18).

The two staffs may have been literal implements taken up by Zechariah with symbolic meaning—or the reference could be altogether figurative. “Two staves are taken because the shepherd in the East carried a staff to protect against wild beasts [i.e., a club], another to help the sheep in difficult and dangerous places [i.e., a crook]” (Feinberg, p. 327). One staff, probably that of protection, is named “Favor” or “Grace” (“Beauty” is apparently an imprecise translation here). The other, probably the one used to keep the flock together, is named “Unity” or “Union” (as “Bonds” here, according to verse 14, connotes bonds of brotherhood). Christ’s shepherding work was to care for and protect His people and to keep them together.

Verse 8 says, “I dismissed [KJV has ‘cut off’] the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.” Many explanations have been offered here, and there is no way to be certain which is correct. “‘In one month’ has been taken to refer to (1) a literal month,

(2) a short period of time, and (3) a longer period of indefinite duration” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 7-8). The presence of the definite article “the” (Hebrew *ha*) with “three shepherds” would seem to indicate that these shepherds have been referred to already. If so, they would be synonymous with the shepherds of verse 5—that is, the nation’s leaders in general. This would seem to support the contention of many that the terminology here specifies not three particular individuals (though that is of course possible), but three classes of leaders among the people. Most suggest civil magistrates, priests and prophets. “Others understand it of the three sects among the Jews, of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, all whom Christ silenced in dispute (Mt. 22) and soon after *cut off*, all in a little time” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, note on verses 4-14). Still others, seeing the reference as denoting individuals, suggest Eleazar, John and Simon, the three Jewish faction leaders during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Again, there is no way to be sure.

“In v. 9 the Good Shepherd terminates his providential care of the sheep, so that they even ‘eat one another’s flesh.’ According to Josephus, this actually happened during the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans.... [One commentator] remarks: ‘By withholding his leadership the shepherd abandoned the people to the consequences of their rejection of him: death, and mutual destruction. He simply let things take their course’” (*Expositor’s*, note on verses 8b-9). In verse 10, He takes the staff representing divine favor on His people—the one with which He fended off the nation’s enemies—and breaks it. This signals “the revocation of his covenant of security and restraint, by which he had been apparently holding back the nations from his people” (note on verses 10-11).

The “poor of the flock” (verse 11) or “afflicted of the flock” (NIV) who watch, or look to, the Messiah denote “the faithful few who recognize the word of the Lord, who know true authority [in the pronouncement of national punishment] when they see it in action’.... At least part of the fulfillment of these verses is to be found in Matthew 23 (note particularly vv. 13, 23-24, 33-39 [when Jesus excoriated the nation’s religious leaders and declared His work among the people over because of their unwillingness to accept Him, saying, ‘See! Your house is left to you desolate’ and telling them that they would see Him no more until they at last recognize Him at His glorious return.]). Faithful believers discern that what happens (e.g., the judgment on Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70) is a fulfillment of God’s prophetic word—a result of such actions as those denounced in Matthew 23, which led to the rejection of the Good Shepherd” (same note).

In Zechariah 11:12, the Messiah declares His job as the nation’s shepherd officially at an end, saying in effect, “Okay, I’m done here so it’s time to pay Me what you owe Me for My work—or just forget it.” The appropriate wage, Feinberg comments, would have been “their love, their obedience, and their devotion to God and His Shepherd. But it was not to be a matter of compulsion; if they were so minded, they could refrain from any manifestation of their evaluation of His ministry. They were prepared, however, to indicate their estimate of Messiah and His work. They gave Him thirty pieces of silver (money) for His wage. According to Exodus 21:32 this was the price of a gored slave. A freeman was considered twice that amount. Think of the insult of it!” (p. 328). God’s designation of the sum in verse 13 as a “princely price” was evidently given in sarcasm (see *Expositor’s*, note on verses 12-13). “The price was so disgraceful that it was to be cast to the potter who busied himself with things of little value. Casting a thing to the potter may have been proverbial for throwing away what was worthless” (Feinberg, p. 328).

Casting the money *into the temple* for the potter seems odd on the face of it. Why would money be cast into the temple if it were to be for the potter? Remarkably, the specifics of this prophecy were fulfilled in detail. The nation’s leaders weighed out 30 pieces of silver to Judas, Jesus’ moneykeeper, to have Jesus turned over to them (Matthew 26:14-16). Later remorseful, Judas flung the money into the temple—but the chief priests, not willing to put “blood money” into the temple treasury, gave it to a potter to purchase his field (27:3-10). Matthew cites Jeremiah rather than Zechariah in relating the prophetic significance of these events, though no such reference occurs in the book of Jeremiah. It is likely that Jeremiah had earlier spoken a similar prophecy. (We will consider this further when we come to Matthew 27 in the Bible Reading Program.)

In Zechariah 11:14, the second staff, representing the unity of God’s people, is broken—and is interpreted as breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. While this might seem strange since these two were already divided and remained so in Christ’s day (and in fact remain so today), we should understand it in the context of the prophecy of Israel and Judah’s national restoration in the previous two chapters of Zechariah. “The rejection of the messianic shepherd...meant that the [prophesied] national unity the Israelites hoped for would not be achieved at this time. But one day

the two nations Judah and Israel will be united (Ezek. 37:16-28)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Zechariah 11:14).

With the rejection of the Messiah, the nation would be given over to foolish, worthless shepherds (verses 15-17). In verse 15, the implements of a foolish shepherd, as distinguished from a good shepherd, would seem to refer to personal attributes as expressed through behavior and the quality of food (spiritual nourishment) provided. In verse 16, a look at what the worthless shepherds will *fail* to do tells us exactly what proper spiritual leaders *ought* to do: 1) care for the lost or those who are in the process of being destroyed; 2) care for the young and inexperienced or, as the word here may alternatively be understood, the scattered; 3) heal those who are hurt; and 4) feed the healthy who, though they stand, need regular spiritual nourishment to keep them from falling. The bad shepherd will do none of these things. Instead of feeding the sheep, the end of verse 16 says he will feed *on* them. And when times get tough, he will abandon the flock (verse 17). As Jesus explained in John 10:11-12, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.” God ends Zechariah 11 with a special warning directed against such worthless shepherds. They will not escape the consequences of their failure to properly shepherd God’s people.

There are a number of similarities in Zechariah 11 to earlier prophecies in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34. It would be worthwhile to review those passages and the Bible Reading Program comments on them in light of the present reading.

Finally, in the Zechariah 11 prophecy of the rejection of the Good Shepherd and the calamitous results we should recognize a parallel between events of Jesus’ day and those of the end time. The Jewish nation did not accept Jesus when He came. On the other hand, the modern nations of Israel today, led by the United States and Britain (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*), profess to be Christian. Yet these nations are awash in growing anti-God sentiment and godless legislation. Moreover, while many among them accept Jesus in name, they have not really accepted the true Jesus—that is, all that He taught and stood for. Their civil and religious leaders oppose Jesus’ message, as the religious leaders of His own day did—and the people follow suit. So they remain under the “care” of worthless shepherds. Moreover, the continued rejection of the Good Shepherd by the nations of Israel and Judah will result in the greatest time of calamity ever—of which the events of A.D. 70 were only a forerunner.

Sadly, Jesus even spoke of servants given charge of His spiritual household, the Church, in the last days who would abuse their fellow servants—and warned that they will pay the price for their callous misdeeds (see Matthew 24:45-51).

## **All Nations to Come Against Jerusalem (Zechariah 12)**

**August 16-20**

Chapter 12 begins the final oracle in the book of Zechariah. Verse 1 in the New King James Version refers to it as the burden of the word of the Lord “*against* Israel,” but this is evidently an inaccurate translation. The King James Version and J.P. Green’s Literal Translation both have “*for* Israel.” The New International Version has “*concerning* Israel.” While there is mention of punishment to come on Israel and Judah in this section, the primary focus is obviously on their deliverance and judgment being visited on the nations.

The prophecies in chapters 12-14 for the most part concern the end time. Of the 18 occurrences in the last two oracles of the phrase “in that day”—referring to the future Day of the Lord—16 appear in the second oracle. Monumental, earth-shaking events are depicted in this section. At the outset, God is declared to be the great Creator—both of the physical universe and the spiritual component in human beings (12:1). It is He who is able to bring these awesome, civilization-altering events to pass.

God says that Jerusalem will be as a cup of wine or strong drink causing drunkenness to all surrounding peoples (verses 2-3). Perhaps this implies national enemies being totally irrational about trying to control the city, as is certainly the case today. Yet the cup is also a metaphor for God’s wrath, as would-be conquerors are turned into reeling and collapsing men, incoherent and confused as if drunk (compare Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 13:13; 25:15-28; 51:7; Ezekiel 23:33; Revelation 14:10; 16:19). The next several verses of Zechariah 12 make it clear that this is exactly what is going to happen.

What is the time frame of the siege of Judah and Jerusalem described here? After Zechariah wrote, the next time the land of Judah would experience invasion and siege was during the time of the

Seleucid Greek rulers of Syria. The Jews under the Maccabees would eventually succeed in pushing the Seleucids out. And it could be that the prophecy referred in small measure to those events. Yet the circumstances of those events were vastly different than the details given in the prophecy. “The fact is, no such coalition of nations (not even in the Roman war of the first century) against Israel has ever occurred in the past” (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 330). Like most of the rest of this section, this prophecy is for the future—to be fulfilled “in that day” (verse 4), the Day of the Lord. The mention of “all peoples” here (verse 3) corresponds to God bringing “all nations” down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat in Joel 3:1-2. They will come to fight against the returning Jesus Christ—and will suffer utter defeat.

In the final battle, God says He “will strike every horse with confusion, and its rider with madness...every horse of the peoples with blindness” (12:4). Seeming to parallel this, Zechariah 14:13-15 tells us that God will send a “great panic” among the attacking nations, causing them to slaughter one another in the ensuing confusion. While there may well be cavalry in the final battle over Jerusalem, perhaps horses in the end-time setting of Zechariah 12:4 refers more broadly to military vehicles. In the context of modern warfare, “blindness” and “confusion” among tanks and other war vehicles could perhaps refer to electronic sensors and guidance systems malfunctioning—leading to a flurry of “friendly fire incidents” sparking uncontrolled infighting. Of course, God can use other supernatural means to turn His enemies against one another—just as He did to ancient gentile forces that came against Judah in the days of Kings Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah (see 2 Chronicles 20; 2 Kings 18–19).

A remnant of Judah, rising from the oppression of the Great Tribulation, will be miraculously invigorated. Even though Jerusalem will have been occupied by enemy forces from the beginning of the Tribulation period, it is evident from Zechariah 12 that the Jews will retake the city and its surrounding territory shortly before Christ’s return—perhaps when forces of the end-time Beast power depart from Jerusalem to meet the Eastern forces arriving at Armageddon (Mount Megiddo) in northern Israel (see Revelation 16:12-16).

God says He will make Judah’s leaders “like a firepan in the woodpile, and like a fiery torch in the sheaves” (Zechariah 12:6)—that is, “a firepan used to carry hot coals for the purpose of starting a fire, and...a fiery torch that could quickly ignite a field of cut grain” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 6). The Living Bible paraphrases verse 6 this way: “In that day I will make the clans of Judah like a little fire that sets the forests aflame—like a burning match among the sheaves; they will burn up all the neighboring nations right and left.” This ties back to the prophecies in Zechariah 9:13-15 and 10:3 and verse 5 of God using Ephraim and Judah to fight their enemies at Christ’s return—as well as the very clear statement in Zechariah 14:14: “Judah also will fight at Jerusalem” (see also Isaiah 41:14-15; Micah 4:13; Jeremiah 51:20-24). Of course, deliverance will come through the Lord Himself arriving to destroy His people’s enemies (Zechariah 12:7-9).

Verses 7-9 are quite remarkable in that they mention the “house of David” as a recognizable factor in the end time. This refers not to the Messiah (the returning Lord Himself), but to human beings in need of His deliverance and salvation. The dynasty of David did not end with the death of Jeconiah and Zedekiah in Babylon. Rather, it has continued through human rulers over the people of Ephraim in Great Britain. (To learn more about this, refer to our free online publication *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future*.)

According to verse 8, “every ability will be enhanced, so the least individual will be like the undefeated warrior, David, and the royal line like the Angel of the Lord [here clearly equated with God].... While the hyperbole is intended to emphasize God’s enablement, it may have prophetic significance, for Christ, David’s descendant, is also the Lord” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verse 8).

### **Mourning Over the Pierced One (Zechariah 12)**

**Aug. 16-20 Cont’d**

Verse 10 makes the end-time context of the events of the chapter clear. It is the time of the pouring out of God’s Spirit—starting with the people of Judah. “The prophet sets forth, as nowhere else in Scripture with such vividness and power, the conversion of Israel to the Lord. Nothing in Israel’s past history can be interpreted as the fulfillment of this passage. In that coming day of Israel’s national atonement, the Lord will pour upon the royal house and all who dwell in Jerusalem, then throughout the whole nation, the spirit of grace and supplication” (Feinberg, p. 332).

Of that time, the Lord makes this incredible statement: “They will look on [or ‘to’] Me whom they pierced.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* states: “The most common meaning of the Hebrew preposition translated ‘on’ is ‘to’ (NIV mg.), and there is no good contextual reason to

depart from it here. The emphasis, then, is not on looking ‘on’ (or ‘at’) the Messiah literally but on [at last] looking ‘to’ the Messiah in faith (cf. Num 21:9; Isa 45:22; John 3:14-15)” (note on Zechariah 12:10). Yet it could well be “on,” especially given the specific reference to this time in Revelation 1:7: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.”

Regarding the pierced Messiah, Zechariah says of the people of Judah, “Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” They will finally realize what God meant through David in prophesying, “They pierced My hands and My feet” (Psalm 22:16)—that is, the nailing of the Messiah to the cross as part of His atoning suffering and death. They will at last recognize that Jesus Christ was indeed the true Messiah—that the very One they worshiped as God was made flesh and that His flesh was pierced with scourge, thorns, nails and spear for the sake of their sins and those of all humanity.

Early on the Jews understood the Pierced One here as a messianic designation, yet they found it difficult to reconcile with other messianic references to the coming conquering King. “The Talmud pronounces peace upon one who refers the passage to [the supposed] Messiah the son of Joseph, yet to be slain. The theory of two Messiahs, one to die and one to reign, is an invention of the rabbis without foundation in Scripture to explain the passages which present the Messiah as suffering and as ruling. The answer is to be found in the two advents [comings] of the one Messiah, as proved by this very passage under consideration. It is not some unknown martyr of whom Zechariah is speaking but of the coming Messiah Himself. The oldest interpreters of the passage, both Jewish and Christian, so understood it” (Feinberg, p. 333).

Sadly, “Jewish commentators [now] often regard this as a corporate reference to the Jews killed in the defense of Jerusalem (12:1-9)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 10). That is, “they will look to Me whom they pierced” is reinterpreted to mean “they will look to Me *about those* whom they [the enemy] pierced.” The Jewish Tanakh says, “They shall lament to Me about those who are slain, wailing over them as over a favorite son...” This alteration is a rather convenient way of sidestepping the whole issue. Interestingly, the Tanakh has a footnote on this verse stating, “Meaning of Heb[rew] uncertain.” One day these Hebrew speakers will understand what their own language is telling them here. And when they do, they will greatly mourn over their failure to recognize their Messiah sooner and over their sins, which necessitated His atoning death.

The reference to the prior “mourning at Haddad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo” (verse 11) is uncertain. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* takes “Hadad-Rimmon as a place name (containing the names of ancient Semitic fertility gods) near Megiddo. So understood, the simile in v. 11 refers to the people of this town mourning the death of King Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:20-27; see v. 22 there for the plain of Megiddo and v. 24 for the mourning)” (note on Zechariah 12:11). Feinberg agrees: “The calamity referred to was Pharaoh-Necho’s slaying of the godly Josiah, the only ray of hope of the nation between Hezekiah and the fall of the Jewish nation.... Even Jeremiah wrote special dirges for the occasion” (p. 333). This seems rather likely, especially given that 2 Chronicles 35:25 says that mourning over Josiah became “a custom in Israel”—perhaps one that was still known in Zechariah’s day.

As in the former occasion, the whole nation will suffer intense sorrow and grief. The mention of the house of David alongside the house of Nathan is interesting. Judah’s kings were of the line of David’s son Solomon. Yet it is from David’s younger son Nathan that Jesus Christ came. Perhaps the idea is that all the families of David, from the highest to the lowest, will mourn. Again, this means that there will be a recognizable Davidic royal family to speak of at the time of Christ’s return. Listed next, “the house of Levi speaks of the priestly family; Shimei was of the family of Gershon, son of Levi (Num 3:17, 18, 21). Different priestly classes are comprehended here. The leaders, who are pointed out, and the common people of the land will engage together in the lamentation, each in his individual place” (p. 334).

Note the mourning of each family “by itself, and their wives by themselves” (Zechariah 12:13-14). “These words are quoted in the Talmud as an argument for separating men and women in worship. But the verse seems to [simply] indicate that each mourner will face his or her sorrow alone, without the comfort of companionship” (*Nelson*, note on verses 12-14). Feinberg correctly notes: “The prophet means that the mourning will be so intense as to transcend even the closest ties of earth, those between husband and wife. Each will want to be alone with God in that hour” (p. 334).

And in the face of this great and heartfelt repentance, God, in His great mercy, will pardon the transgression of His people. Indeed, their contrition of spirit is actually from Him. As He stated up

front in verse 10, this is not a time of condemnation, but rather the awesome pouring out on His people of His wonderful Spirit of grace. We will see more about this in the next chapter.

### **Idolatry Cut Off; Shepherd Stricken and Sheep Scattered (Zechariah 13) August 21-25**

The prophecy of chapter 13 continues right on from that of the previous chapter. The phrase “in that day” at the beginning of verse 1 shows that what is described here will accompany the events of chapter 12—that is, the return of Jesus Christ to defeat the enemies of Judah, the Jewish people’s recognition of Him as their Messiah and their heartfelt repentance over their sins. Verse 10 of chapter 12 explained that the “house of David and...the inhabitants of Jerusalem” would receive the “Spirit of grace and supplication.” They would beseech God in prayer for mercy and forgiveness.

Now, in verse 1 of chapter 13, we see what God will do in response. He again mentions the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying that a fountain will be opened for them “for sin and for uncleanness.” The fountain imagery shows that this provision for cleansing away sin will be abundant and overflowing. Some see the fountain as representative of the shed blood of the Messiah. Revelation 1:5 says that Jesus “washed us from our sins in His own blood.” This atoning agent through which sin and uncleanness is forgiven will be opened to the entire nation of Israel at the time of Christ’s second coming. Yet the fountain could also signify the Word of God, as Jesus “gave Himself...that He might sanctify and cleanse [His people]...with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). Only after Christ’s return will Scripture truly be opened to the understanding of the Israelite nation as a whole—teaching them the way out of sin and uncleanness. Then again, the fountain could symbolize the Lord Himself as “the fountain of living waters” (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13; see also Psalm 36:8-9). The living waters in this figure depict the Holy Spirit, which will be given to Israel and then all nations to empower them to depart from the way of sin and uncleanness. Indeed, not only will the guilt of iniquity be expunged, but iniquity itself will be removed from the land—though not all at once of course and not entirely until all mankind is later glorified.

Zechariah 13:2 states that God will cut off the names of the idols from the land so that they will no longer be remembered. This shows idolatry coming to an end. As noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Zechariah 10:2, idol worship was not a problem in Zechariah’s day. Yet God showed the prophet that it would yet be a problem among God’s people. This verse might also mean that the names of false gods will be removed from the language of the people. For instance, the fifth day of the week will no longer be called by the English name Thursday after the god Thor. A bowl of cereal will not be referred to as such, as the word comes from the Roman goddess Ceres. Even in Hebrew, the fourth month is named after the false Babylonian god Tammuz. This will apparently no longer be the case when God gives His people a “pure language” (Zephaniah 3:9).

God also says that He will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land (Zechariah 13:2). Prophets here evidently refers to *false* prophets, as God will still inspire human beings to proclaim His truth and even to have visions—indeed more at this time than in all history (see Joel 2:28). The term “unclean spirit,” used a number of times in the New Testament, occurs only here in the Old. This refers obviously to demons—the fallen angels behind much of false religion (see 1 Corinthians 10:20). They and their leader Satan will be imprisoned at Christ’s return (see Revelation 20:1-3).

Any human beings who then lie in claiming to speak for God will face the death penalty (Zechariah 13:3). “In that future day, if anyone dares to utter false prophecies (‘lies,’ v. 3), his own parents—in obedience to Deuteronomy 13:6-9—will take the lead in executing him [though apparently not by stoning as in ancient Israel]. The Hebrew for ‘stab’ [in the NIV and ‘thrust...through’ in the NKJV] is the same verb as ‘pierced’ in [Zechariah] 12:10, thus indicating that the feelings and actions shown in piercing the Messiah will be directed toward the false prophets” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on 13:2-3).

Those who were false prophets before—including the false preachers of nominal Christianity—will cast off their religious-looking garb. Out of fear of humiliation and punishment, they will seek to hide their past occupation by claiming to be average, everyday workmen from their youth (verses 4-5).

Verse 6 is understood by most commentators to refer to the former false prophets lying about how they received ritual, self-inflicted wounds, such as those the prophets of Baal inflicted on themselves in the contest with Elijah (see 1 Kings 18:28). While possible, there is no mention of any self-inflicted wounds prior to this point in Zechariah 13—and it seems a stretch to bring them into the account. In fact, it is just an assumption that the wounds of verse 6 are self-inflicted. It is also only an assumption that the description of where the wounds were received is a lie. Furthermore,

given the end-time context of this prophecy, we should consider that false ministers do not typically cut themselves in religious ritual today.

A better explanation of this verse seems to be the minority opinion that this is a messianic reference—that the mention of wounds ties back 10 verses to the earlier appearance of the Pierced One in Zechariah 12:10 (and that the verses in between, 12:11–13:5, are parenthetical). Such an interpretation creates a more logical segue to the certain messianic reference in verse 7.

Dr. Merrill Unger, author of *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, takes this view of verse 6 in his commentary on Zechariah: “The boldness and daring of this Messianic prophecy and the dramatic abruptness with which it is introduced have frightened most expositors away from its true import on the supposition that it is inseparably connected with verses 2-5, and therefore, still has the false prophet in mind, and [that] to introduce the Messiah is flagrantly to ignore the context. But...the context is not actually violated. The entire section 13:1-6 constitutes a prophecy of Israel's national cleansing.... Verse 6 logically and forcefully presents the revelation of the Messiah as the cleanser from idolatry....

“The grammatical structure of verse 6 does not [rule out] a Messianic reference. While the...[‘him’ in the phrase] (‘Then some one will say to *him*’) apparently refers to the same person (the false prophet) as in the preceding verse; yet grammatically *it may not*, and the author may conceivably have another person in mind. That he *does* so and resumes the subject broached in 12:10 (‘They shall look unto me whom they pierced’) is suggested by the *evident connection between these two passages* (the intervening context being parenthetical...[describing] the effect of Israel's exercising faith in the Pierced One)... The prophetic Scriptures offer numerous illustrations of such extended parentheses....” (*Zechariah: Prophet of Messiah's Glory*, 1970, p. 228).

Unger further contends: “The verse [13:6], accordingly, is *not* united to what immediately precedes [it] (an *illustration* of the main subject), but to the main subject itself, *Him whom they pierced*, for whom they are to mourn and by whom they are to be cleansed when they realize the wounds ‘between His hands’ [as the Hebrew literally reads], i.e., ‘in His hands,’ are those which He received on Golgotha's cross. The *wounds in the hands* are thus in harmony with the piercing of Zechariah 12:10 which *precedes* [13:6], and the smiting of the Good Shepherd, which *follows* [13:6].... Unsuccessful attempts have been made to make *between thy hands* mean something other than ‘in thy hands’—between the shoulders (Rashi), the breast between the hands (Wright), the breast or chest (Feinberg, who cites II Kings 9:24 as an analogous case...but II Kings 9:24 is ‘between the arms’ and is not the same as ‘between the hands’”) (pp. 229-230).

In explaining the messianic interpretation of Zechariah 13:6, Unger says that Jesus Christ “with infinite grace and majestic pathos will reply to the heart-rending cry of His repentant people, *with these I was wounded* {smitten} *in the house of my friends* (*me'ahavay*, [literally] ‘in the house of those who loved Me’). It is to be carefully observed He does *not* say, ‘With these I was wounded by those who loved Me,’ for this was not true. The Jewish leaders who [sought to] put Him to death, on the contrary, hated Him diabolically. [And the Romans who carried out the execution had no love for Him.] But it was dramatically, even pathetically true, that His wounds were those with which He was wounded ‘*in the house of those who loved Him*,’ for it was ‘the house of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,’ yes, of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Zechariah himself who loved Him, looked for Him, and foretold His coming. It was the house of Simeon, Anna, His own mother Mary who bore Him and tenderly nursed Him, of Joseph who lovingly provided for Him, and the house of Peter, James, and John, who although they denied and forsook Him in the hour of supreme trial, nevertheless passionately loved Him, despite their human failure and weakness” (p. 230).

Verse 7 brings us to the time of that trial. It explains how the Pierced One came to receive His wounds—a logical transition from verse 6 if that verse is understood in a messianic context. God the Father is now speaking of His Companion whom He has appointed Shepherd over His people. This is a clear reference to the Messiah, and Jesus specifically applied this verse to Himself (see Matthew 26:31). It may be shocking to read in Zechariah 13:7 that God actually commands the sword to strike the Messiah. Yet like Isaiah 53:10 and the symbolism of Israel's sacrificial system, this verse shows that the death of Jesus Christ was no accident but was divinely determined—even required—in His plan to redeem humanity from sin and its consequences (see also Acts 2:23).

“When the Shepherd is struck, the sheep (cf. 10:3, 9) are scattered, in fulfillment of the curses for covenant disobedience (Deut 28:64; 29:24-25)... [One commentator] maintains that the thought is that the Lord ‘will scatter Israel or His nation by smiting the shepherd; that is to say, He will give it up to the misery and destruction to which a flock without a shepherd is exposed ... The flock, which will be dispersed in consequence of the slaying of the shepherd, is the covenant nation...the

flock which the shepherd in [Zechariah 11:4]...had to feed.' This part of [chapter 13] v. 7 is quoted by Jesus not long before his arrest (Matt 26:31; Mark 14:27) and applied to the scattering of the apostles [on the night He was delivered over to the authorities] (Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50), but they are probably intended to serve as a type of the Diaspora [i.e., Dispersion or Scattering] that occurred [when the Romans invaded] in A.D. 70 and following [—the greatest fulfillment to come in the end time]. Some take 'I will turn my hand against {or 'on' or 'over'}' in a negative sense, others in a positive one... [One commentator] strikes a balance: 'For correction, but in mercy, ver[ses] 8, 9. Comp[are] Is[aiah 1:]25 ['I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy']. 'The little ones' are the remnant (vv. 8-9)" (*Expositor's*, note on Zechariah 13:7).

The scattering of the national flock and the refining of the remnant is the subject of the next two verses—verses 8-9—which constitute the end of chapter 13. The Roman destruction of Judea in A.D. 70 may have been partially in view here. But the context of what follows in chapter 14 makes it clear that the end time is the primary setting. The "two thirds" and "one third" of 13:8 probably refers to parts of the entire national flock, including the northern tribes of Israel, not just Judah. The prophecy of this verse parallels that of Ezekiel 5, which shows that in the end time one third of the nation will die of famine and pestilence, one third will die from military weapons and one third will be taken into foreign captivity. (You may wish to review the Bible Reading Program comments on Ezekiel 5 at this point.)

At the end of Zechariah 13:8, the phrase "one third shall be left in it" can be misleading, as it seems to imply that after two thirds of the people are killed, one third remains in the land (rather than going into captivity). Yet the phrase is better comprehended as "one third in it shall be left"—that is, one third of those who are in the land to start with will be left alive and not immediately killed (not that they will necessarily still be in the land). In verse 9, God says He will bring this remaining third through the fire—the fiery trial of the Great Tribulation. As Ezekiel 5 and other passages show, they will be taken into captivity. Yet of these, we learn elsewhere that only about a tenth will survive (see Amos 5:3; Isaiah 6:11-13, Living Bible).

In the imagery of refining silver and gold through the smelting process, we see again the theme of God purging His people of iniquity—purifying them. And this process is not for the physical, national Israelites alone. The spiritual people of God, those of His Church, go through trials to produce patience and a perfected character (see James 1:2-4). Indeed, similar language to that of Zechariah 13 is used of some of God's spiritual people of the end time who will have to endure the suffering of the Great Tribulation. God tells them, "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be [truly] rich" (Revelation 3:18). Those of both national Israel and the Church who are purified during the Tribulation will in the end be part of the true people of God.

### **The Lord Will Come in Power to Reign Over All the Earth (Zechariah 14) August 26-31**

Chapter 14 continues the prophecy of the previous two chapters and concludes the book of Zechariah. It portrays the coming of the Lord to take over the rule of the world.

The time frame is addressed right from the outset: "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming..." (verse 1). Actually, the literal Hebrew has "A day of the LORD" here (see NIV). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes: "Although 'a day of the LORD' is not the usual construction for 'the day of the LORD,' it doubtless means the same thing; 'that day' occurs throughout the context (chs. 12-14). Perhaps this particular construction is used here to emphasize the fact that the 'day' is distinctively the Lord's" (note on verses 1-2). That is, the nations are having their day now, but a day is coming that will belong to God.

The Day of the Lord designates the time of God's intervention in human affairs to bring judgment on the nations and assume rule over the entire earth. In one sense, it denotes the final year prior to Christ's return—"the day of the LORD's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion" (Isaiah 34:8; compare Revelation 6:17). In a broader sense it represents the Lord's millennial rule—which is the sense given in Zechariah 14:8. And in the broadest sense it means that and eternity beyond.

The gathering of all nations to battle against Jerusalem (verse 2) ties directly back to the prophecy of 12:2-3. This concerns the final siege of Jerusalem, evidently coinciding with the time of the Lord's coming. The rest of Zechariah 14:2 seems to refer back to the beginning of the Great Tribulation of 13:8-9—perhaps to review the horrible events that have led up to this final siege. During the Tribulation, "the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city" (14:2, NIV).

This final point here does not necessarily mean that half of Jerusalem's Jews will be exiled and half will remain. For consider that of the current Jerusalem population of 600,000, only 400,000 are Jews. Using such figures, perhaps 300,000 Jews (half the city but three fourths of the Jewish population) would be evicted, leaving 100,000 Jews in the city. (If the percentage of Jews in the city's population changes drastically before the Tribulation, the percentages evicted and remaining would of course change as well.)

In response to the final siege against Jerusalem at the beginning of verse 2, God will powerfully intervene on behalf of His people, as shown in verse 3. "Just when it seems that all hope is gone, 'then the LORD' himself appears as 'divine warrior' and delivers his beleaguered people.... But who is this 'LORD'? When one compares this scene, including v. 4, with [that of the coming of Jesus Christ in] Acts 1:9-12 and Revelation 19:11-16, it would appear certain that 'the LORD' here is ultimately the Messiah" (*Expositor's*, note on Zechariah 14:3-5). Acts 1:11-12 shows that Jesus ascended to heaven from Mount Olivet—the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem—and that He would return in like manner. This seems to allude to the prophecy in Zechariah 14:4 that "His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives."

The mention of this rise overlooking the Temple Mount and Kidron Valley in between would have been important symbolically to Zechariah's immediate audience, as they already had the imagery in Ezekiel of the glory of God departing from the temple by route of this mountain (see Ezekiel 11:23). The divine presence, they are now informed, would return by the same route. Interestingly, the hill's soil "is well suited to the growth of olive trees which thrust their roots down into the brittle rock. Hence, in the Mishna and Talmud it is called the Mount of Anointing" (*The Illustrated Family Encyclopedia of the Living Bible*, Vol. 8, p. 98, quoted in *Expositor's*, note on Zechariah 14:3-5). Recall that the figure of olive trees and olive oil as a representation of anointing with the Holy Spirit occurs earlier in the book of Zechariah (see chapter 4).

When the returning Jesus Christ stands on the Mount of Olives, it will split in two, one half moving north and the other half moving south, thus creating a new valley running east to west between the two halves (14:4-5). The site of Azal to which the valley will reach has not been identified. It may be somewhere in the desert east of the summit of the Mount of Olives. On the other hand, it could be a place that will not exist until the valley is created. This new valley will provide a means of escape for the besieged remnant of God's people. Recall that God enabled His people to escape from ancient Egypt by parting the Red Sea for them. Now God will enable His people to escape their end-time oppressors by parting a mountain of solid rock! This also allows them to escape from the destruction God is about to bring on the besieging forces of the nations.

Note also the reference, "...as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah" (verse 5). The prophet Amos dated his book with reference to that former earthquake (see Amos 1:1). As mentioned in the Bible Reading Program's introductory comments on Amos, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus says that this earthquake happened when King Uzziah sinned in attempting to offer incense (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 9, chap. 10, sec. 4), thus dating the former earthquake to about 751 B.C. This was around two and a half centuries before Zechariah 14 was written, so the former earthquake and the resultant evacuation of the people from Jerusalem must have been a rather monumental event for it to have lingered so long in the national memory (especially given the deportations of both Israel and Judah in the intervening years).

Zechariah 14, while making a comparison with the former earthquake, does not directly state that there will be an earthquake at the time of Christ's return. But the splitting of the mountain will surely cause one (or be the result of one otherwise brought about by God). We do know from elsewhere in Scripture that there will be an earthquake at the time of Jesus' second coming, and it could well parallel the events of Zechariah 14. Notice Revelation 16:18: "And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth." Interestingly, the Jordan River Valley, a few miles east of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, lies along a major fault line, so the whole area has long been a significant earthquake zone.

At the end of Zechariah 14:5, we are told that God—again, in the person of Jesus Christ—will come with "all the saints." The word *saints* literally denotes "holy ones" and includes both God's holy angels and the spiritually converted human beings of this age resurrected to divine glory at Christ's coming.

Verses 6-7 describe a period of persistent darkness across many days, signifying the time of judgment. This parallels Joel 2:1-2: "For the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (see also Isaiah 13:9-10; Amos 5:18, 20; Zephaniah 1:14-15). But then the darkness will be broken and light will shine even at night. We

should understand this both literally in the sense that God will clear the debris of global catastrophe from the atmosphere and figuratively in that the light of God's truth and character will be manifested and taught to mankind. Indeed, Jesus Himself is described in Scripture as the Light of the world—as are His followers.

Zechariah 14:8 describes living waters flowing from Jerusalem toward the eastern sea (the Dead Sea) and the western sea (the Mediterranean). “In contrast with the seasonal streams that flow only during the rainy season, these streams will irrigate the land in both summer and winter” (*Nelson*, note on verse 8). This parallels the description of the river of healing waters flowing from Jerusalem in Ezekiel 47 and Joel 3:18. While literal, the reference is also figurative of the Holy Spirit and salvation flowing from the divine Messiah (see Jeremiah 2:13; Isaiah 12:3; 44:3; 55:1; John 7:37-39; see also Revelation 22:1-2). It's also interesting that the city of Jerusalem was founded on a hill atop the Gihon Spring, a freshwater source that has provided the city with water for many centuries. Also, not very far away to the east, water flows out of the solid rock at the desert oasis of En Gedi, where David and his men at times hid out while being pursued by Saul. The limestone hills around Jerusalem are clearly underlain by underground water sources, so little stretch of the imagination is required to see God bringing these prophecies to pass.

Verse 9 foretells the hope of all God's people who pray, “Your Kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10)—the time when Jesus Christ will at last become King over the entire earth.

Verse 10 reveals some major topographical changes that the land of Judea will experience. The land around Jerusalem is to be leveled and the city itself raised. “*Geba* was six miles northeast of Jerusalem. *Rimmon* was about 35 miles southwest of Jerusalem. *Benjamin's Gate* was most likely the gate in the north wall of the city. The *First Gate* has not yet been identified. The *Corner Gate* probably marked the northwest limit of Jerusalem. The *Tower of Hananel* was probably a defensive fortification on the north wall” (*Nelson*, note on verse 10; see also Jeremiah 31:38). “The royal wine-presses were just south of the city” (*Expositor's*, note on Zechariah 14:10-11). Verse 11 gives the comforting message that Jerusalem will be reinhabited with its citizens secure, the great destruction of the last days having come to an end.

Verse 12 returns to the theme of the final battle over Jerusalem at Christ's return. God will send a “plague” to strike the enemy forces. The word *plague* today is often equated with disease and sickness, but it simply connotes a divine striking with judgment. Consider the 10 plagues that God brought on ancient Egypt, most of which were not sicknesses. The description of people's flesh dissolving while they stand on their feet in Zechariah 14:12 seems similar to that of the effect of a nuclear- or neutron-bomb explosion. But the main point is who causes the effect—“the LORD will strike all the people.”

Verse 13 describes a great panic among the enemy forces that will lead to them attacking each other. As noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Zechariah 12:4, this appears to be related to God's statement there that in the final battle He will strike every horse with confusion and blindness and their riders with madness. As previously mentioned, this could refer to a malfunction in the electronic sensors and guidance systems of modern war vehicles, leading to “friendly fire” instances among the enemy, sparking uncontrolled infighting. However it occurs, this will parallel ancient instances where God turned enemy troops besieging Jerusalem against one another (see 2 Chronicles 20; 2 Kings 18-19).

Zechariah 14:14 states that Judah will fight at the time of the final battle, then seizing the spoil of the defeated enemies. Yet ultimate victory will come not through force of arms but through the awesome, supernatural intervention of Jesus Christ already mentioned. The plague of verse 12 is referred to again in verse 15 as consuming enemy transport animals and livestock.

### **All to Keep the Feast of Tabernacles and Be Holy (Zechariah 14)      Aug. 26-31 Cont'd**

Verse 16 brings us to the time when the smoke of war has cleared and the reign of the Messiah has been established. The nations will have suffered severe judgment but the people among them who remain to this time will be given the opportunity, along with Israel, of enjoying a close relationship with the Almighty King of all the earth.

All nations will be required to observe the annual Feast of Tabernacles. This clearly proves that this festival, along with God's other feasts listed in Leviticus 23, are not just for the Israelites but are, rather, for all humanity. Indeed, the Feast of Tabernacles pictures this wonderful future period pictured in Zechariah 14—the time when all nations will be brought under the reign of Christ to experience joy and peace for 1,000 years. (To learn more about God's feasts and our duty to observe

them today, send for or download our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*)

The nations going up annually to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles does not mean that every person in every nation is to go to Jerusalem every year. Rather, the Feast will be observed globally, with each nation sending a representation to Jerusalem. The point of verse 16 is to draw a contrast. Those of the nations who came *against* Jerusalem will now come to worship there. Just as God in formerly bringing “all nations” against Jerusalem did not bring every single person among them there, so the nations going to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast does not mean every single person among them will go there each year.

God “next unfolds what will happen to the recalcitrant nations that refuse to send delegations on this annual pilgrimage to worship the King in Jerusalem: The blessing of rain will be withheld from them (v. 17; according to Deut 28:22-24, this was one of the curses for covenant disobedience). [One commentator] relates v. 17 to 9:11-10:1, ‘where an adequate rainfall is connected with the prosperity of the Messianic era.’ Unger...observes: ‘In Ezekiel 34:26 the word {‘rain’} is used figuratively of spiritual blessing, and Zechariah’s usage, while literal, does not exclude the spiritual connotation.’ This principle is illustrated in v. 18 with Egypt” (*Expositor’s*, verses 17-19). Some read verse 18 as saying that Egypt would receive a different plague for noncompliance than lack of rain since it depends not on regular rainfall but on the annual flooding of the Nile. Yet this inundation itself requires sufficient rainfall upstream—and verse 19 appears to say that Egypt and other nations will receive the same punishment if they disobey, pointing back to the lack of rainfall in verse 17.

Such measures will be for the ultimate good of those afflicted. It will wake them up to understand who Christ really is. Also, even though they may go to learn from Him unwillingly at first, they will nevertheless be afforded an opportunity to learn that they would have unwisely denied themselves. Eventually, most will be grateful for this discipline and will freely and enthusiastically join in the worship of God.

As *Expositor’s* notes on verses 20-21, they “may be summed up like this: There will be holiness in public life (‘the bells of the horses,’ v. 20), in religious life (‘the cooking pots in the LORD’s house,’ v. 20), and in private life (‘every pot in Jerusalem and Judah,’ v. 21). Even common things become holy when they are used for God’s service. So it is with our lives. ‘*Holy to the Lord*’ was engraved on the plate of gold worn on the turban of the high priest (Ex. 28:36) as an expression and reminder of his consecration, but it was meant to be true of all Israel (Ex. 19:6; Je. 2:3)’.... So God’s original purpose for Israel (Exod 19:6) will be fulfilled....

“While the Hebrew for ‘Canaanite’ can also mean ‘merchant’ (cf. NIV mg.)—possibly referring either to 11:5 or to the kind of activity condemned by Jesus in Matthew 21:12-13 (cf. John 2:13-16)—‘Canaanite’ seems the better translation for this context [—not in the sense of physical descent but in contrast to holy purity]. ‘Canaanite’ would then represent anyone who is morally or spiritually unclean—anyone who is not included among the chosen people of God (cf. Isa 35:8; Ezek 43:7; 44:9; Rev 21:27).” Indeed, God appears to be drawing a parallel between the establishment of His Kingdom in Zechariah 14 with ancient Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land of Canaan. When the ultimate Joshua (Jesus) leads spiritual Israel to victory over the nations of spiritual Canaan (this evil world)—to dispossess them from the Promised Land of this whole earth—there will be no more spiritual Canaanites (rebellious, idolatrous nations) left to defile the house of the Lord. Instead, all will be holy.

The end-time and millennial prophecies that God gave through Zechariah must have been wonderfully encouraging to the Jews in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and they are certainly sobering and inspiring for all of us who look forward in faith to their fulfillment. We hope the fulfillment will be soon!