

Minor Prophets: Zechariah

Introduction

Zechariah speaks in this apocalyptic book about eight visions he had in one night and then moves on to the future of Israel and visions of the Messiah. The book is not easy to understand because of symbolic images and numbers, but Zechariah's visions and prophecies spanned a very short time in written form with verified dates.

About Zechariah the Prophet

Little is known about the personal life of Zechariah, but we can learn much from Nehemiah that might help us piece together his life. He is mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 as the son of Iddo, who was actually his grandfather. Nehemiah 12:4 and 16 have a man named Iddo who was one of the priests who returned with the exiles in 536 BC. Most scholars suggest that Berechiah, his father, died early on and Zechariah was raised by Iddo.

This would mean that Zechariah was of a priestly line. He knows priestly matters well in his prophecies, as we will see and it is most likely that he fulfilled a priestly role once the temple was finished. This would have also given him incentive to see the project through with Haggai and the others. His name means "The Lord remembers" and he was a contemporary with Haggai.

Zechariah in History

Rough Historical Timeline of Exile and Post-Exilic Period

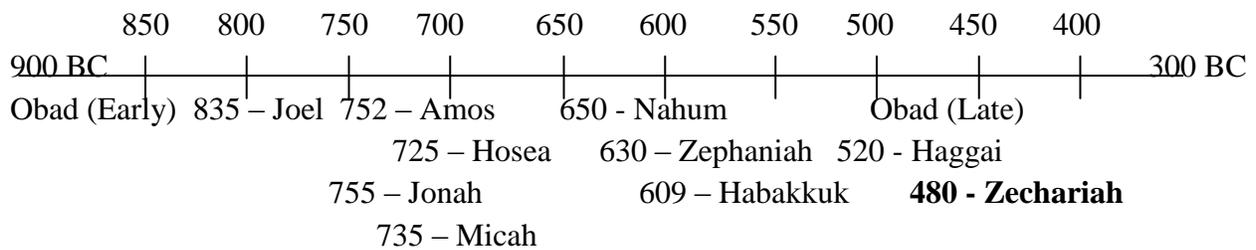
- 608 BC – 70 years from here line up with Cyrus' decree
- 605 BC – Babylonians take a king from Judah in the first of three waves of exile.
- 586 BC – Last wave of Babylonian exile for Judah.
- 539 BC – Cyrus the Great defeats Babylonians.
- 538 BC – Cyrus edict for 50,000 to return and build temple. Foundations laid for temple.
- 536 BC – 7th month – Jews build altar and offer sacrifices.
- 523-520 BC – 15 years of no building.
- 520-516 BC – Temple finished in 4 years.
- 446-444 BC – about 70 years later, Jerusalem wall with Nehemiah and Malachi's prophetic ministry.

Zechariah ministered two months into Haggai's ministry, about November 520 until December 4, 516. The temple was finished in the spring of 515, and he was most likely present. Because of his background, it is most likely that he came to Jerusalem as a young man and served as a priest in the newly built temple. He might have been in his sixties when the Persians failed to conquer Greece in 490 and 480 BC. He could probably see them rising to power then, for he mentions Greece in his prophecies. We must also not discount this as predictive prophecy.

Some would assume that Zechariah was prematurely murdered in the temple courts according to Jesus' statement in Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:51 about how the people had killed the prophets from Abel to Zechariah. Luke and most manuscripts for Matthew do not contain "son of Barachiah," suggesting that this was added as a point of reference by copyists. It is most likely this Zechariah would have been from 2 Chronicles 24:17-22, which would also show that from Genesis to Chronicles, the righteous blood of godly men was spilt (Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew text and Chronicles is the last, suggesting the whole).

Dates and Timelines

* I am using James Smith's Survey of the Minor Prophets as a guide.



Outline of Zechariah

- I. Zechariah receives eight visions in one night and oversees the rebuilding of the temple (1:1-8:23).
 - A. Zechariah calls the people to return to the Lord (1:1-6).
 - B. Zechariah reports the eight night visions of the horseman (1:7-17), the horns and craftsmen (1:18-21), the man with a measuring line (2:1-13), Joshua the High Priest (3:1-10), a golden lampstand (4:1-14), a flying scroll (5:1-4), the woman in a basket (5:5-11), and four chariots (6:1-8).
 - C. Zechariah crowns Joshua the High Priest (6:9-15).
 - D. Zechariah calls the people to justice and mercy (7:1-14).
 - E. Zechariah proclaims the peace and prosperity of Zion (8:1-23).
- II. Zechariah prophesies about the coming of the Messiah and the end of the age (9:1-14:21).
 - A. Zechariah prophesies his oracles against the nations (9:1-8).
 - B. The King of Zion will come and the Lord will save His people (9:9-17).
 - C. Judah and Israel will be restored (10:1-12).
 - D. The worthless shepherd and the slaughtered flock (11:1-17).
 - E. The Lord will give salvation (12:1-9).
 - F. The Messiah will be pierced (12:10-13:1).
 - G. Idolatry will be cut off but the shepherd will be struck (13:2-9).
 - H. Zechariah prophesies about the coming Day of the Lord (14:1-21).

The Prophetic Message of Zechariah

Chapter 1

1:1 In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, it happened that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the prophet, son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying,

The eighth month the King Darius' rule would have been in October or November of 520 BC. This is the time that Zechariah began his prophetic ministry of preaching. This is when the word of the Lord came to him concerning the building of the temple and the things to come in Israel's future. This time would have placed Zechariah as the contemporary of Haggai about halfway through his own ministry. Zechariah is described as the son of Berechiah, who is not mentioned in Ezra or Nehemiah.

However his grandfathered Iddo is indeed mentioned in these books. Iddo was one of the priests who returned to the Promised Land with the exiles in 536 BC and it is most likely that Zechariah is also a priest. The reason most scholars would imagine that Berechiah is not mentioned in the other historical books is most likely due to an early death which placed Zechariah in the care of his grandfather Iddo. It is at this time that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah and its contents are as follows in verses two through six.

The Discipline of Repentance

1:2 The Lord was surely furious with your fathers.

Zechariah begins his ministry and this first word of the Lord by speaking to the remnant about returning to the Lord. He opens by referring to their fathers who did not obey the Lord. The reason that Zechariah gives for the exile is that the Lord was furious with their fathers. The Lord's anger caused Him to exile the Israelites from the land. There is an intensive for furious, essentially the word furious twice, which intensifies the verb. God wasn't just upset. He was ripping mad. The Lord deals with sin and He does not let up until His wrath is filled and satisfied. But the people brought it upon themselves through their sinful actions. Sin always leads to judgment. We must never forget that when it looks so enticing to us!

1:3 So say to them, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Return to Me!" declares the Lord of Hosts, "And I will return to you," says the Lord of Hosts.

The prophet is then commanded to speak to the remnant of Judah and command them to return to the Lord. This is almost like a recommitment of the people to their God, a fixing of the mistakes their fathers made before the exile. It is like starting off fresh and new and embedding in the DNA of the people the changes that their fathers should have made in their society. This

idea of the Lord returning to the people is much like in James where the Lord says that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us.

But this is also part of the relationship of God to His people. Sin means that God cannot exist in the midst of His people. So when He tells them to stop sinning and return to Him, He will then come back and dwell with them in His presence. We have distinct moments of God's presence leaving the temple before the exile, so the Lord promises that if the people return to Him, and repent from sin, that He will come back to dwell in their midst and be their God. Sin is what drives God away from us.

1:4 Do not be like your fathers to whom the former prophets cried out, saying, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, "Return now from your evil paths and from your evil deeds!" But they did not hear nor did they pay attention to Me, declares the Lord.

The prophet then warns the next generation of Israelites, who have returned from the exile, that they must not be like their fathers and ancestors in this new beginning. The prophet offers an example of what the days were like when the fathers did not listen to former prophets. When the prophets would cry out the message of the Lord to them to return from evil ways and deeds, they would shun the prophets and not listen to them. They would ignore the wise word from the Lord through the prophets.

The word for ways is the word for roads or paths. They would choose a path despite the warnings of the prophets and find themselves in exile at the end of those paths. Sin is never a good path to travel. It always leads to death. The path or method or road that we choose can yield evil behavior and deeds. This is what happened to the fathers of the remnant. They refused to hear the message of warning. They didn't pay attention to it or heed its words, so they endured the wrath of the exile as the result of their chosen path.

The consequences of not heeding and paying attention to God's voice are immensely dangerous and deadly. We need to be a generation, a people, who hear and obey the words of our Lord. His words are meant for our betterment. His words are meant for our peace, our encouragement, our discipline. When we blindly ignore the words of our Lord, we walk into the darkness of death and decay. We must stand at attention to the words of our Lord when they are heard. We need to be listening for His voice every moment of every day!

1:5 Your fathers, where are they? And do the prophets live forever?

The result of not hearing the Lord's words through His prophets was devastating. The prophet stands in a crowd of children from the exile, the remnant that returned from a land not their own. They stand on their own soil and he asks the question, "Where are the disobedient fathers now?" The point is not missed on these children of the exile. The answer is simple and profound in the same moment. They didn't listen to the Lord, and they no longer exist. The end of not paying attention to God's voice is nonexistence.

Will the prophets always be there to help them? No. They are mere men as well, but the prophetic office will be there. Zechariah stands in the gap even now for this generation to which he speaks. But there will be a time when the Lord no longer speaks. We know that during 400 years of the intertestamental period, there were no prophets and no word from the Lord was spoken! When the Lord is not heard, why should He speak? Let us take to heart these grave matters before it is too late and the Lord leaves us and moves on to more obedient believers. Let us hold fast to His teaching and hang on every word and put into action every command!

1:6 Indeed, My words and my statutes which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not catch up with your fathers? So they repented and said, “Just as the Lord of Hosts purposed to do to us according to our paths and our deeds, so He has done with us.”

The Lord continues to show that His words would have saved the exiles, but they refused to hear and so endured the wrath beyond the warning. The words of the Lord, sent for that time and that people, went ignored by the exiles. The statutes that He had set up for their success and blessing in the land were pushed aside for momentary passions. Everything that He commanded was laid aside, and the people have suffered these 70 years and have come back to a land that needs so much work in their absence. Is this really what they could have inherited, or could it have been better if their parents had learned obedience?

Every word the word spoke caught up with their fathers. Every warning and every discipline was completed in their exile. The Lord did exactly what He said He would do to them if they did not hear and obey. The word for catch up has the idea of chasing after, of reaching and passing up, or overtaking, its adversary. The result of the prophet’s remembrance of the remnant’s exiled fathers places the people in a place of response.

Unlike their fathers, the remnant repents from their parents’ former ways and trusts in the Lord. Repentance is always a good place to start. The people spoke to Zechariah and were open to the Lord doing just as He purposed to do with them. They would choose their path, and the Lord would deal with them in the same way that He dealt with their fathers. Their fathers chose the evil path. They wanted to start out on the righteous path. And the Lord would deal with them. Just as faithful as He was to their fathers to warn them and then fulfill His word, unfortunately leading to their exile, the choice had always been theirs.

The Lord interacts with us on a personal level. He is still calling for us to choose the paths He has laid out for us. When we don’t choose those paths, He warns us just as He warned an entire nation back then. We need to be different from our old ways as much as this remnant pledged to be different from the exiles. We need not blame the Lord for being faithful to His words of warning and encouragement. He will do what He says He will do. The choice to follow in His path or our own is up to us, but He will hold us to the consequences and rewards of our decisions.

Vision #1: The Horseman

1:7 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, it happened that the word of the Lord *came* to Zechariah the prophet, son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying,

Zechariah dates his visions according to the Babylonian calendar by referring to the month of Shebat. On our calendar, this would be February 24, 519 BC. At this time in the night, Zechariah received from the Lord a vision as the word of the Lord came to him. The method of God's word coming to prophets is varied. Some experienced visions. Others allowed the Lord to speak to them and tell them what to say. Still others spoke through demonstration and example and illustration. Although Nehemiah and Ezra call Zechariah the son of Iddo, in his own writings, he does not fail to address his most likely early dying father Berechiah as part of his lineage.

1:8 I saw in the night, and behold a man riding on a red horse and he was standing between the myrtle trees which are in the depths and behind him were red, brown and white horses.

As the vision began, we don't know how it occurred, whether the prophet slept and had a dream-like vision, an ecstatic vision, being taken away in the spirit like John the Revelator, or in some physical fashion saw these things. He saw a man riding on a red horse. Sometimes in apocalyptic texts, the colors are part of the imagery, but it does not appear that these colors seem to bring any symbolism. The prophet will ask if there is symbolism in the next verse.

We see in the Revelation of John the Apostle several horses with different colors that are symbolic of pestilence and death and war and victory and the like. The rider was stationary in a valley or the depths of a valley among myrtle trees. While some scholars suggest these trees are symbolic of Israel, others have spoken of them being quite numerous in the vicinity of Israel. Then the prophet sees behind the man on the red horse other horses that are red and white and sorrel colored. He does not mention the riders on those horses, which might suggest a significance to the colors at least in Zechariah's perspective. Sorrel is a vine-tendrill color or the word for clusters. Most translators give the color brown or chestnut for this color.

1:9 So I said, "What are these, my lord?" And the angel who spoke to me said, "I will show you what these are."

The prophet is somewhat perplexed by the sight, not knowing anything off hand that would explain what he sees. So he asks the angel who is talking with him and interpreting the vision what they are. This is the first time that we are introduced to an angel that is with the prophet and speaking with him. The angel simply tells him that he will show what they are that he sees.

He will show by allowing the prophet to overhear the conversation between the man and the riders of the varicolored horses. Another note must be made that the word for “lord” here is referring to the angel, not to the Lord God. It is most likely a term of kindness and greeting, much like when we say “Sir” or “Ma’am.” It is the word adonai and can be used to refer to others much like baal is also an address of respect to a stranger.

1:10 Then the man between the myrtle trees answered and said, “These are those whom the Lord sent to walk upon the earth.”

For the second time the man on the horse is referred to only as a man, but we will see that change in verse eleven. He is the one who answers, but most likely is reporting what is going on as part of the events himself. He explains that the setting is that the horses’ colors are not as important as their task. They were sent by the Lord to go about the earth and to patrol it and survey it. This is a reconnaissance mission and the report is coming to the prophet’s ears as well as the leader on the red horse. Their walking upon the earth is a military tactic of observance. They are reporting what they have seen as they have traveled throughout the land.

1:11 Then they answered the angel of the Lord who was standing between the myrtle trees and said, “We have been walking upon the earth and behold, all the earth remains at rest.”

For the first time, we are privy to the man on the red horse being the angel of the Lord. Frequently throughout the Old Testament, it is suggested that the angel of the Lord might be a pre-incarnate revelation of Jesus, a theophany. There is ample evidence to support this. The angel of the Lord is frequently addressed in the same terms that one would address Almighty God, for one piece of evidence. There are several others.

Needless to say, this man is their commanding officer and they are debriefing him, whether he is just an angel or the Lord Himself. We equate the man on the red horse with the angel of the Lord because they are both standing between the myrtle trees, so they are most likely the same person. The other riders on the varicolored horses report that they have completed their mission of walking and patrolling the earth, observing it, and they have found that everyone is resting and at peace with one another.

The word here is shalom for well being and restfulness. This means that there are no wars happening and the land is being inhabited peacefully throughout the world. This is not good news for the people of Judah who are waiting for the Lord to shake the nations as Haggai has most recently prophesied. Judah languishes as its remnant returns. They are still under Persian rule, and things are not getting any better.

There are times in our lives where we must wait on the Lord to fulfill His word. This is a time of tension and we must learn the patience and trust that is required to see that time through in our lives. This is the message that Judah hears from this report of these men on horses.

Perhaps we can learn something from the angel of the Lord who goes right to prayer and asks the Lord to act in His goodness. Prayer is a great way to commune with God and learn His ways.

1:12 Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, “Lord of Hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah which you have cursed these seventy years?”

The angel of the Lord takes on a posture of intercessory prayer and asks the Lord of Hosts, the God who commands all armies known and unknown to humanity, how long He will let things go like this. If this is a theophany, then some commentators have wondered why the divine angel of the Lord would pray to the Lord Himself. We see this when Jesus is on the earth, praying to the Father. Let me suggest that prayer is simply deep communion with God. Jesus was always in deep communication with God. Nothing He did was on His own. Either way, the angel of the Lord here is interceding for the people of Judah, for the remnant.

His question is reminiscent of Revelation where the martyrs are asking God how long He will allow evil to go unpunished on earth from under the altar. God has allowed His rage to flow against Judah and Jerusalem for quite some time. The word used for His anger here is the word for cursing a city. The Lord has been against Judah for about 70 years. This number of 70 is most likely referring to the amount of time between the two temples standing. Solomon’s temple was destroyed in 586 BC and Zerubbabel’s temple is rebuilt and finished in 516/515 BC, almost exactly 70 years! The angel asks the Lord for mercy upon Jerusalem and Judah’s other cities.

Did you know that people and the Lord Jesus are interceding for you? There are so many who lift you up in prayer, from the other saints who know and love you to the Lord Himself at the Father’s right hand. There has always been someone to stand in the gap and intercede for those who are lost or who have suffered the brunt of evil or even the Lord’s momentary anger. Let us all realize how important the position for the intercessor is and be that intercessor for others who need it!

1:13 Then the Lord answered the angel who spoke with me good words, comforting words.

The Lord is immediate in His answer. He doesn’t leave the angel of the Lord waiting. Instead, He immediately responds to the inquiry. We must never forget that God answers prayer. We should expect Him to answer prayer. He doesn’t need time to think about our inquiries. He knows the answer and sends it to us. It can be delayed in other ways, as we find out from the book of Daniel, but the Lord answers our prayers. We can take that as a guarantee.

The Lord speaks good words and comforting words. The word for good can be translated gracious, but the word is literally the word for good. These words will be good for Israel. They are subjectively good for Israel, but not for the other nations as we will hear from the prophet’s own lips. They are words of comfort in this time of trial for Judah and its remnant.

Just when we need the comfort and encouragement of the Lord, He sends His word and it is a good and comforting word. There's nothing like the time where God answers us with love and comfort in the midst of our deepest despair! He encourages our hearts, giving us the medicine that we need when we need it. He is a good and loving God indeed!

1:14 So the angel who spoke with me said to me, “Cry out, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of Hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion I am exceedingly jealous.

The interpreting angel who speaks with the prophet, not the angel of the Lord, now turns to Zechariah and commands him to speak out the prophecy which is the point for this first vision. We don't know if the prophet is speaking the words that the Lord spoke to the angel or if the angel is summarizing the contents of the good and comforting words.

The angel commands the prophet to cry out these words. Crying out is one of the technical terms for what prophets proclaimed. They often said things, reported things, called or cried out to the people, and commanded. So Zechariah obeys and cries out with an authoritative introduction to the word from the Lord, backed by the Lord's name and His signature formula statement.

The title “Lord of Hosts” is very important to what is said afterward because it gives the backing of military power to the word spoken to the people in comfort. The Lord speaks of His jealousy for His city Jerusalem and for Zion. The second reference to jealousy is intensified as the word is given twice as an infinitive and a verb. Zion and Jerusalem can be equated to the same thing, meaning that this is a poetic response to the prayer that the Lord is so intensely jealous for the city of Jerusalem. Zion could also be the people of God or the Temple itself. But context suggests that God is jealous for Jerusalem, and Zion is a reference to Jerusalem again in poetic cadence.

God's jealousy is a doctrine not often spoken of or introduced to us, but it is the reason that God sends the people into exile. He is so jealous for them, so loving, that He can't let them continue in their sins. So He sends them into exile to purify those He is jealous for. His jealousy forces Him to action in the favor of the object of His jealousy, so we are about to see what God is going to do because of His jealousy for His people in Judah.

God is always jealous for His people, willing to fight for us. And He will win the battles He fights! We have such a wonderful Savior. Most would equate this jealousy aspect of God as a righteous jealousy rather than what two men fighting over a woman would define as jealousy. This is often seen by us as a negative attribute, but it is positive here and in other places in the prophets. It calls God to action on account of His people.

1:15 ““And surely I am exceedingly furious with the nations that are carefree while I was a little angry, but they helped the disaster!”

Once again we see intensified verbs here for the Lord's furious rage against the nations. He is angry with them because they helped the disasters that were happening in His judgment of Israel. He refers to the nations as carefree, almost loose cannons who did whatever they wanted, and made sure that life was worse and worse for the Israelites. And God would not defend them because they were experiencing His judgment.

It is hard to say if the words for "a little" are referring to God's anger level or to the amount of time that He was angry. If it refers to His anger level, then God has much higher levels of anger that can be observed and even more destructive. If it refers to the little bit of time that He was angry with Israel, it was quite a bit of time to human beings, but not in the larger scheme of history.

The Lord's anger now is against the nations because their actions, whether originally sanctioned and used by God or not, only served to exacerbate the situation and make it worse than it should have been. For this interference they will pay dearly when He sends His wrath upon them in retribution. They helped the disaster and made it much worse instead of helping the cause of the Lord. They were overzealous in the power He gave them to subdue the evil Israelites, but they will see that the Lord has much more room to become more zealous in His proper judgment and response.

When we are given authority or any mission by the Lord, we must be careful to not go beyond our marching orders. Those who go beyond what the Lord has ordained for them to do in His name will be severely judged by the Judge. These nations have brought the Lord's furious rage and wrath against themselves by acting out of the jurisdiction He gave them. Let us be people of obedience to avoid judgment!

1:16 Therefore, thus says the Lord, "I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; My house will be built in it," declares the Lord of Hosts, "and the line will be stretched out over Jerusalem."

Along with the Lord's judgment of the nations and His wrath coming to them, the Lord also proclaims through the prophet that His presence is back in Jerusalem. He has come to the city with mercy in His arms. The Lord returns not in wrath to Jerusalem, but in mercy and compassion. He will wrap His arms around them not to squeeze like a boa but to comfort and nurture like a mother with her young.

He will build His house, and it is now being built in the prophet's time. He wants His house to be built in His favorite city, in Jerusalem. His presence will dwell there with the people once again. The Lord is returning to the remnant, just as He promised He would in the prophet's command to return to the Lord in the earlier section. His line is stretched out over Jerusalem. This was most likely the measuring line that would be used to measure out properties and lands. This shows the ownership of the Lord and we have seen it in several other prophets, such as the plumb line, and in Revelation when God measures the New Jerusalem, the city of God that is the people of God who belong to Him.

We are the people of God and we belong to God. We are His possession and He will protect us and provide for us. That comes without saying because we belong to Him. We must learn to trust in His provision. He does not always provide every desire, but He does take care of every need that we have. Not only this, but because we are His possession, He chooses to dwell with us! His presence is with us and we are never alone!

1:17 Again cry out, saying, “Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Again My cities will overflow with goodness and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem again.”

Once more the prophet is commanded to cry out and speak for the Lord, so we see the formula “Thus says the Lord” again, and also the most common title for the Lord so far in the book of the “Lord of Hosts.” This would have been of great comfort to an unprotected city like Jerusalem and a nation that has no defense like Judah. The Lord promises the people and the cities more prosperity and hope.

The Lord promises that the former goodness of Israel and prosperity will return to His cities. He grants that the cities will once again overflow with goodness or prosperity. Once again the city of Jerusalem, or Zion, will be comforted by the Lord. And He will choose Jerusalem as His chosen city and special place of His presence. The lack of prosperity will soon be over and the Lord will dwell with His people once again.

When we return to the Lord, the promises of God and our destiny is endless! We can have God’s presence and His comfort and see the prosperity and goodness of God in our lives. We should never return to the Lord just for His blessings. How would you feel if someone you loved stayed with you just because of what you could do for them, but not because it’s you? God is also a person who cares greatly for you and wants you to love Him, not His stuff. He wants you to have both Him and His stuff!

Vision #2: The Horns and Craftsmen

1:18 (H 2:1) Then I lifted my eyes and saw and behold, four horns.

In the Hebrew Bible, the second chapter begins here with the second vision. The second vision in the same night comes to the prophet. Once again we see the standard method of implementing a vision: I saw and behold. This second time, Zechariah lifts up his eyes, or is drawn to and focuses on the new vision. There is a continuity of the same night because no new date is given. This time, the prophet sees four horns. Several different suggestions have come about concerning the four horns. First we must take into account whether we are speaking of the number four as literal or figurative. Those in favor of figurative have said that it is the symbolic number of completeness, as in Israel has been completely destroyed. It is more likely that this is a literal number, speaking of four world powers or empires.

The word horns can signal the horn of a ram, or the horn of an altar, which looks much like the horn of a ram in its basic structure. Horns of an altar were put at the top, usually on the corners. But the horn is also a symbol of power and strength, so it is most likely that horns here, although the prophet in his vision probably sees four horns (most likely ram's horns) would understand power and empires. When it comes to a suggestion of which four powers, several scholars have differing opinions.

- Four directions of the compass: North, South, East and West (Cashdan).
- Four specific national oppressors of Israel: Assyria, Egypt, Babylon and Persia (Wright).
- Four specific national oppressors of Israel from Daniel 7: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome (E. J. Young).

These are all interesting suggestions. We cannot completely be sure about which four world powers are being depicted here, but I would suggest that Wright might be right. This is the most historical understanding that might have been in Zechariah's purview. However, Greece is mentioned later in the book, so perhaps Greece is another option. Historically from our standpoint, there were more than four mighty empires in history, and Greece and Rome and Assyria, :Babylon and Persia can all make claims to that strength. Just like us today wondering what these four horns mean, the prophet is also wanting to know, so he asks the angel in the next verse.

1:19 (H 2:2) And I said to the angel who spoke with me, "What are these?" And he said to me, "These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem."

Zechariah asks the angel who is interpreting the visions what the four horns mean. the angel answers that they are the four horns or powers that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. This could include specifically the Assyrians and Babylonians, who specifically have policies of scattering the conquered in their realms. They purposefully and intentionally dispersed the nations from their native lands in their ruling. Here, Judah and Israel are seen as the split kingdoms of Israel as a whole, and Jerusalem is mentioned because it is God's city where His temple dwells. There's a samek here which might be a small pause before the next event in the same vision.

Just like Zechariah, we don't know exactly all that is happening. We have four horns speaking to world powers, a truly apocalyptic image. We are not always going to understand the visions and things that we encounter. But God shows us not everything we want to see, but what we need to see. We might even ignore what we are given because we are fixating on what we want to be given.

1:20 (H 2:3) Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen.

The four horns are an incomplete picture of the whole vision, so the next part that is revealed contains four craftsmen. It is an assumption that we make when we suggest that the four craftsmen each correspond to the four horns, but that is most likely accurate. These four craftsmen will be explained in the next verse for us, but still leave us with questions, as most of God's answers to us do!

1:21 (H 2:4) And I said, "What are these coming to do?" And he spoke, saying, "These are the horns that scattered Judah *so that no one raised his head*. These have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up horns against the land of Judah to scatter it."

Just like us, the prophet does not understand what he is seeing in his vision, so he asks the angel what it means. The angel provides more answers that explain on a basic level, but leave interpretation up to the prophet and us as well. Just like the four horns, so also the four craftsmen are a mystery to us and several options abound as to what they signify. The only information that we are given is that the four craftsmen are the ones who terrify the horns and cast them down.

Most scholars interpret this to mean that the craftsmen are those who have destroyed the world powers or empires mentioned above. Here are some of the possibilities offered by scholars:

- Four kings that have destroyed empires, such as Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Cambyses, and Alexander the Great.
- Four spiritual leaders of Israel, such as Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah.
- An undisclosed four leaders who should not be figured out. They are all saviors who at one time or another help Israel.

One might suggest that these are world leaders. One scholar has a great insight that they may overlap with their respective empires as well. I would suggest that the last of these is Jesus who takes the kingdoms of this world and destroys them through His Kingdom. Despite the possibilities, we are left with an assurance that God is bigger than the political systems around us and that things happen according to His timetables.

We can get all upset about the persecution of God's people today and we can attempt to be activists against it, but God will raise up leaders to protect His people! We can take comfort in His sovereignty. We can enjoy the fact that God's kingdom is the only kingdom that counts! God is in control and He reigns through every event that we face. He also is working to bring peace to us, His people! We know He is working for us and He is all-powerful, mighty to save and bring down the strongholds that surround us, even when we don't see Him working!

Chapter 2

Vision #3: Man with a Measuring Line

2:1 (H 2:5) Then I lifted up my eyes and saw, and behold a man, and in his hand was a measuring line.

We are introduced to the third vision once again with the familiar vision formula of “I lifted up my eyes and saw.” It is implied that Zechariah saw a vision, and he goes on to describe what he has seen. If we take this vision within chronological context of the previous visions, this is about Jerusalem and God’s people after the exile when God will begin to allow prosperity again for the remnant.

The prophet looks to find a man who is holding a measuring line. Some commentators suggest that the man is an angel, because in the first vision, the man was referred to first as a man and then an angel, but we are not told that this is an angel now. In the man’s hand is a measuring line, which is a device used for building and contracting. It is used to measure how long the building will be and survey where it will be built on the property.

Measuring in the Bible can be taken literally as measuring to build, but it can also be taken as the owner possessing the land or the city or people. So already we have two directions in which this vision could go. It could emphasize that God is going to bring a prosperous time of rebuilding or it can tell us that God owns His people and land and He will defend it!

2:2 (H 2:6) So I said, “To where are you walking?” and he said, “To measure Jerusalem to see what is its width and what is its length.”

Apparently this vision is more interactive than the last two. The prophet can talk directly to the man with the measuring line instead of having to speak to the interpreting angel. He asks the man where he is going and the man answers that he is going to measure the city of Jerusalem and find out its dimensions. Once again, surveying and measuring in the Bible can speak of possession, so that we would see that God is telling the remnant that He owns everything and He will make it prosper for His sake. We can also see that God might be prophesying that Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and He is beginning the work of surveying to rebuild. We must remember that this is before the walls are rebuilt by Nehemiah. It is during the rebuilding of the temple that Zechariah has these visions.

2:3 (H 2:7) And behold, the angel who spoke to me came forth and another angel came forth to meet him

Here is where the vision begins to get a little complicated, mostly because of the vague references to angels and the man and also the pronouns that do not clarify very well for us what

is happening. We are once again introduced to the interpreting angel who speaks to the prophet. Apparently, this angel was not present until after Zechariah asked the man where he was going. But it is not only the interpreting angel that shows up, but also another angel. This means that there are two angels and a man and the prophet. There are now four beings in this vision, and the pronouns will wreak havoc with us in the next verse.

2:4 (H 2:8) and he said to him, “Run! Speak to that young man, saying, ‘Jerusalem will be inhabited as open villages because of the multitude of people and livestock in it.

We don't know who is talking to whom. I would suggest based purely on logical following and context that the other angel speaks to the interpreting angel to run to Zechariah and speak with him. But another interpretation is possible, that the second angel was telling the interpreting angel to run to the man who is carrying the measuring line. I favor the first interpretation because the word for a young man is different than the word describing the man with the measuring line.

The second interpretation means that the prophet will overhear the conversation between the interpreting angel and the man with the measuring line. The man with the measuring line does not need to measure because Jerusalem will not be rebuilt in the same way it was built before. It will be without a wall. The wall of a city protected it from enemy soldiers and wild animals, as well as anyone the people wanted to keep out. Villages were smaller towns and did not have walls.

The first interpretation, which I favor, means that the young man is the prophet Zechariah and that the interpreting angel will be speaking with him about Jerusalem. The only problem with this is that the exclamation to run indicates quickness and a need for immediate response to something going on, suggesting that the second interpretation where the man is about to measure Jerusalem and does not need to measure might fit better. I would suggest within the first interpretation that the reason for the running is to help the prophet understand what is happening. The man with the measuring line is simply a matter of introduction for the prophet of what God is going to do in building Jerusalem again and possessing His people.

Interestingly, whichever interpretation you use to cover specifics and details of the vision, the meaning is the same on both ends. Whether the man with the measuring line is stopped from measuring the city because it will be too large to measure, or the prophet is told this by the interpreting angel, the fact of the dialogue still remains. Jerusalem will be larger than anyone can imagine and it will exceed its bounds, the walls that would be rebuilt. Most favor an explanation of this vision through the church or the millennial age because the walls are rebuilt in Jerusalem by the remnant in Nehemiah's time. But we will get into that explanation after the completion of the dialogue in the next verse.

2:5 (H 2:9) ‘and I will be to her,’ declares the Lord, ‘a surrounding wall of fire and I will be glory in her midst.’”

The Lord then promises that the walls of protection for the city of Jerusalem are unnecessary because of the prosperity that will be poured out on the people and cattle of the city. Beyond this, the remnant has the promise of God's presence, for He declares that He will be their wall and their glory. The Lord is our protection and our glory. He is our light and He is the most paramount Person in all of our life.

The Lord will be a surrounding wall of fire that cannot be stopped. City walls were made of stone and sun-dried blocks and bricks. But the Lord will be an even more impenetrable wall for the people of Jerusalem. There is also a peh that separates these two sections of the third vision. As we come to interpretation and application of the vision so far, some have suggested that since the wall is rebuilt historically, that this is an image of God and His Church or that it is a millennial reign image.

I would agree more with the first than the second option, and suggest that it might even have implications for the eternal city of God in Revelation 21-22. The New Jerusalem is measured by an angel to show God's possession and protection of His people, which would agree with God being the wall for the city Himself. And we know that His glory radiates from the city in Revelation, which is also seen here. It is also a city of prosperity and a large city made for many inhabitants.

But I believe that the best interpretation for us to understand in our day and age is that this is a message about the Church and the Lord! Jerusalem is the city of God where the people of God dwell, and in Revelation 21-22, the city is the people of God. So I would say that the city of Jerusalem literally pictured in this vision is the Church. And the fact that it is measured shows that the Church is God's possession and He will be its wall, its protection. And His glory will fill His Church! That is what draws the unbeliever.

Not only all of this, but the Church has no limits or boundaries or walls. It contains many people from all different cultures and countries and it cannot be hemmed in by any wall. It is too large for that, and yet the universal body of Christ also has local bodies, or villages, of believers. The Church should have no bounds or limits! It is open to all who will accept and obey Christ and live for His glory! Let us not put any limits on the Church of God either!

2:6 (H 2:10) "Up! Up! Now flee from the land of the north," declares the Lord, "for as the four winds of the heavens I have spread you out," declares the Lord.

While the peh presents a hard break, the next verse will have a soft break, the samek. These two verses are for those who are still exiled and living in the places of exile such as Babylon and Mesopotamia. But it bears quite a message of warning for those believers who live in the world rather than in God's Church. We start this new section of the same vision with what is usually a woe in the prophets, but is here more of a warning call. It can be translated as "Hey! Hey!" or any number of attention-getting particles.

This message is for those who are spread out among the earth like the four winds of heaven which go out to the four corners of the earth, much like the cardinal directions. The exiles still living in the exiled lands are called to flee from those lands toward Zion, toward the city of God. Specifically, the land of the north is mentioned. To the immediate north would be Assyria, and to the north east would be Babylon and Persia. The Lord is calling His exiles out of a place that is in danger so that they have safety with him.

Many of the exiles had seventy years to build up their riches and their connections. They did not want to go back to Jerusalem. Only 50,000 returned when they were given the green light to go back. There are so many more exiles all over the world at the prophet's time and the Lord is calling them away from those dangerous places. But since they had made their wealth there and are well established, they don't wish to leave and start over.

There are believers who feel more comfortable living worldly lifestyles than a godly and obedient life with the Church. They find that they are more comfortable in exile instead of with the Lord. These are the people that cringe at having to sing songs and sit through a sermon on Sunday and would rather be sitting around at home or even out partying.

They are referred to as carnal Christians, which has always struck me as a strange term. You are either on fire for God or you are not. You are not both. We are called to live in the world, but to not be of the world. In other words, while we are living here we should look different! Do you look different? I understand that church is not always entertaining, but we're not here to entertain ourselves. We're here to glorify God!

2:7 (H 2:11) "Up! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with Babylon's daughter!"

Once again we get that sound of warning, that particle that is often a woe but is here more of a hurrying warning. They are not only told to flee from the lands to the north but also to go to Jerusalem. Throughout Scripture, Zion can refer to three things. The first is the temple mount where God's presence dwells, the second the people of God, and the third, the city of Jerusalem. Here the context is the city of Jerusalem.

For us, Zion is the people of God, the Church. We as believers belong with God's people. We must work in the world, but we fully live in the glory of the Church, in our gathering together. Those who dwell with Babylon's daughter are those who live in the exiled communities and don't want to return. The daughter of a nation or city is its inhabitants and citizens.

What is interesting is that Babylon is used of the world of sin in the New Testament, especially by John in Revelation and his letters. Babylon stood then for Rome and the kingdoms of this world. We are to be in the kingdom of God and find our joy and peace there, not in the fleeting entertainments of the world. When a believer enjoys the world more than the kingdom of God, his allegiance and his new birth may soon be questioned. We need to find our joy in Christ alone. A samek separates this two-verse warning to exiles from the promise of God's vengeance upon the nations who have plundered Israel.

2:8 (H 2:12) For thus says the Lord of Hosts after *His* glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye,

Verses eight and nine are another little couplet of verses that speak of what God is about to do among the nations. The prophet is explaining that he was sent to the nations that plundered the Israelites with a message about the Lord's response to them. The Lord calls His people out of exile before He exacts His punishment upon the nations that took them into exile. He is the Lord of Hosts who is not afraid to act and destroy with His mighty armies at His disposal.

The prophet gives us the understanding that the nations that plundered Israel will get their judgment soon from the Lord. He states that God protects and avenges His own, almost in a mob-like way. He says that anyone who touches God's people pokes God in the eyeball! Although it is usually translated apple of His eye, the literal meaning says that he who touches you (God's people) touches the eyeball of His eye, or the pupil. When you poke an angry God in the eye, you get His vengeance. By abusing God's people, the plundering nations were earning their own demise by provoking God's judgment.

2:9 (H 2:13) “Indeed, behold! I will shake My hand over you and they will become plunder for those who served them. Then you will know that the Lord of Hosts sent me.

We have now a response from the Lord. He says that He will shake His hand over the nations and they will become the plundered rather than the plunderer. The second person pronoun in these two verses might still be referring to the exiles who did not leave the plundering nations, suggesting that God is giving an explanation for His warning to them. The word for shaking here is the same word used for swinging a sword around. It is most likely a reference to a military victory over the plundering nations that violated Israel. Then the prophet says that the servants will become the masters who plunder their plunderers. God's overturning the tables as part of judgment is quite natural and well attested in the prophets. This is the sign that Zechariah was sent as a prophet, that God will do this for the people of Judah. The exiles should return or they might be swept up in the judgment of God. The first person singulars are hard to distinguish between the two verses. At times they seem to refer to the prophet and to the Lord in this verse where He speaks. It may be that this could be messianic in some way, referring to Jesus bringing judgment to the nations, but it is a little unclear, as many of the pronouns and references in this vision have confusing references. A samek here creates another soft break and the next section will speak to the remnant still in Jerusalem.

2:10 (H 2:14) “Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst,” declares the Lord.

While the warning goes out to the exiles who have stayed in the lands to the north, the remnant in Jerusalem is called to sing and rejoice in the Lord. The daughter of Zion is the people

who live in Jerusalem. The reason for their rejoicing is that the Lord is on His way to bring His presence to them. As we know from the Old Testament history books, the Lord's presence is all that Israel needed for protection and prosperity. When God is with His people, they have no fears or wants that are not assuaged or satisfied.

God has always wanted to dwell with His people in harmony. It was His desire in the beginning when the people followed God in the desert. It was God's desire when the temple was built in the land. He has always wanted to be in our midst. We are the ones to hold Him away with sin and disobedience. God has always wanted us. But we have always been wandering through the many other options the devil offers. Heaven will be a place where we want nothing but our Lord! While on this earth, we must kill every desire other than the one to know God more deeply than we have ever known Him.

2:11 (H 2:15) “Then many nations will attach themselves to the Lord in that day and they will be a people belonging to Me and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the Lord of Hosts sent me to you.

This part of the vision and prophecy seems to be referring to the time of the millennial reign when Jesus will be in the city as King of the whole earth and the nations will flock to His banner because He is the great King. There is also a hint of the New Jerusalem here, for the nations will belong to God and He will dwell among them. The first person pronoun here could refer to the Lord Jesus or to the prophet being the one sent to the people of God, whether they be in the world or in the city. Oftentimes, the words “that day” kick the prophecy into a time of the eschaton. But we cannot be sure about these things. It is most likely this has not yet been fulfilled in its completeness.

2:12 (H 2:16) “Then the Lord will inherit Judah for His share of the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem.”

Through either the millennial reign or the New Creation, the Lord will indeed inherit Judah and will have His share in the land that is holy, set apart unto Him for His possession, and willing to be His possession. I am unsure which era to put this in. There is an attractiveness to the millennial reign, to the Lord fulfilling all of this in human history before the beginning of eternity, but it can also be the case in the New Jerusalem and New Creation. Either way, the Lord is going to do great things soon! We must be ready and prepared for His move! There is also a joy, a euphoria about the Lord once again choosing Jerusalem as His city because He has neglected it for the time of the exile. The Lord will choose us in that end time.

2:13 (H 2:17) Hush all flesh before the Lord, for He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling!

Now the words of the Lord stop, and much as we have had before in the minor prophets, the prophet calls the earth to be silent before the Lord. But it is more of a harsh command than a polite one. That is why I have translated it “Hush” instead of “Be silent.” It’s almost as if the prophet is telling the earth, all flesh, to shut up because the Lord is stirring to do these things in the world!

The Lord in His splendor is about to do these great things which are being prophesied, and the world reacts with silence as it waits upon Him to fulfill His word. This is a moment of holiness as the Lord comes out to do His work. The image here is of God awaking or arousing from His lair or His dwelling place. He is coming out of heaven with a mission that will not be stopped. God does not sleep, but the image shows that God will not wait to fulfill it any longer. A samek closes out the whole of the third vision and we will move on to the fourth vision in chapter three.

Even still God is waiting to fulfill His word in our day. We often pray for Him to come now. We need to be ready for His return and see His glory as He does what He has said. There are many who don’t believe He is coming back soon. We don’t want to be surprised by His coming! The Word has declared it, so I believe it. When He comes, the world will be hushed before Him. Let us be the people of God ready at every moment’s notice for His great return!

Chapter 3

Vision #4: Joshua the High Priest

3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the High Priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right to accuse him.

The fourth vision does not start in the usual formula of “I lifted my eyes and saw.” I would suggest that the scene from the previous vision simply changes, but the prophet is still experiencing a continuation of the last vision. The final verse of the last vision about the man with the measuring line contains a worshipful command to hush before the Lord’s presence. It is quite probable that Joshua is now standing before the Lord’s presence, perhaps even in the temple discharging the duties of the priesthood. So there is a sense of continuity between the two scenes or episodes of this similar vision, yet there is a change in subject matter and in visual metaphors and also in content. So it is clearly another vision even without the vision formula.

This fourth vision concerns the cleanliness and holiness of the high priest Joshua. He has been mentioned many times so far in the book and is absolutely essential to the spiritual life of the remnant in the land again. The priest leads by example into godliness. Today, everyone who believes in Christ is a priest of God, presenting Christ by example to everyone they meet. It is a heavy and high calling that should eclipse anything else in our lives. Zechariah may have also been of the priestly order, so he is very much concerned with the high priest.

Joshua is high priest who goes before the Lord in the Holy of Holies once a year at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and offers a sin offering for the whole nation of Israel. There are many priests who work in the temple, but the High Priest is the most weighty position and the leader of all other priests in Israel. So the epitome of leadership stands before the angel of the Lord.

Some believe that the angel of the Lord at certain times in the Old Testament is a theophany of Jesus Christ preincarnate. If this is true, it is of interest that the current High Priest stands before the ultimate High Priest. But this is not all the prophet sees. There is also Satan, the adversary, standing at his right and accusing him. As Satan accuses the priest, so he accuses the people of the whole nation in their spiritual depravity. The word for Satan is the word in Hebrew for adversary. But a definite article is placed in front of the word adversary, making it a proper noun, the title or name of a being, Satan, the accuser of the brethren. This is how Satan is pictured in the New Testament as well. It is most likely that his accusations have to do with the unworthiness of Joshua to minister before the Lord.

3:2 Then the Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, adversary. And the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is this not a firebrand torn from the fire?”

The Lord speaks to Satan, much like in the beginning of the book of Job. He only has rebuke for the adversary and the rebuke is given twice. Satan has been against everything that is in God's possession since the beginning. He hates God's people and God's city Jerusalem. But the Lord much like He did with Job, points out the High Priest Joshua as one of His people who will stand against his whiles and evil schemes. Joshua seems the best referent for the comment about the firebrand plucked from the fire. He is in the central position and is the central issue in this vision.

The firebrand can be positive and negative in the prophets. Isaiah points to the kings of the north as useless firebrands that will burn out within a certain time. They are hot to the touch and dangerous now, but their power is short-lived (Isa. 7:4). But here, the imagery is positive as it refers to Joshua the High Priest who ministers in the power of the Lord in His temple and stands against Satan the accuser and adversary. Joshua stands against the adversary as one of God's servants, despite his looks or lack of ability. God still sees in Joshua all that He needs to destroy the adversary.

None of us every feel worthy of the call of God or ready to serve Him. We all have sins in our past, skeletons in our closet. But God does not worry about these things as much as we do. And He always sees in us much more than we see in ourselves. We are like Moses giving God the top ten reasons why we should not be chosen. And all this does is anger God who chose us specifically. Joshua is not worthy. And neither are we! But God still picks us. Even in the midst of Satan's accusations, God stands on our side and defends us! Why should we listen to the devil? Let us embrace God's call and the grace and life He has for us and not doddle in our past. It has already been covered!

3:3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel.

Verse three gives us a more apt description of the High Priest, who is the symbol of holiness to the nation. At this time, Joshua was nothing special. He was clothed in filthy garments. The word filthy here is used for excrement as well. As he stands before the angel, it is a keen understanding of Joshua, the angel, and Satan that he is not high priest material. But there he stands in his filth as the High Priest.

In verse two, it is most likely that the Lord is the angel of the Lord, another reason to consider this angel a preincarnate Christ. Joshua stands before Him not for judgment, but for purification. Before we do the work of God's ministry, we must be pure and holy and clean before Him and before people. We are all aware of our past and our sin and our filth, no one more so than ourselves and God. But He still chooses us for His plans and ministry. We must not turn Him down!

3:4 He answered and said to those standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Then he said to him, "See, I have passed over your iniquity from you and I will clothe you with festival robes."

The pronoun here most likely refers to the angel of the Lord speaking. The angel commands those standing before Joshua to remove his filthy garments. Most likely, there are other angels around Joshua who are serving the angel of the Lord. It is the angel who passes over Joshua's iniquity, another indication that the angel of the Lord is here the divine Son of God. Otherwise, the angel speaks for the Lord.

Joshua's sin and iniquity were like a filthy garment that he himself could not change. He could not just take off the filthy garment and put a new one on. It had to be done by someone else. It had to be done by the Lord. So the Lord is the one who takes his garment of filth with the help of His angels. We cannot remove our own sin no matter how much good we do. It will not be covered. It is a stain that cannot be removed by anything but the blood of Jesus! Nothing you or I ever do will clean our filthy existence unless the Lord passes over our sins and washes them clean.

The angel is still speaking and says that he has passed over Joshua's sins. Pass over is one of the verbs in Hebrew used for God's forgiveness of sin. The Passover is a celebration of when the death angel did not kill the Israelite sons in Egypt. God often speaks of passing over our sins. This means that He covers them and does not hold them against us. It is somewhat like when we see a grave error or someone violates our sense of honor, but we ignore it and don't hold it against them. Though we have it within our rights to hold them in contempt, we let it go. God has the power to hold us in contempt and punish us for our sins against Him, but he overlooks or passes over Joshua's sins here. The accusations of the adversary are worthless because God forgives.

Not only does God pass over Joshua's personal sins, but He also empowers him for the Lord's work in the temple as High Priest. The angel of the Lord grants that the festival robes be put upon Joshua. Festival robes are part of the garments that the High Priest wears as he is discharging his duties among the people. The Lord declares him worthy of the office of high priest with this action. God gives us a ministry despite all the sins we've committed and mistakes we've made. He cleans us up and puts His glory upon us to do His ministry!

3:5 Then I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put the clean turban on his head and they clothed him with garments and the angel of the Lord was standing.

Zechariah gets all caught up in the joy of a clean and pure and holy High Priest. He cries out for the angels to put the festival turban upon Joshua's head. This turban was a special head covering that the priest would wear, and the outfit is complete. Joshua is every bit the high priest God has desired, first pure and holy, undefiled, and now able to minister to His people with excellence. He meets now the qualifications for the ministry of the High Priest.

Surprisingly, even with interpretive angels, this vision is interactive, for the angels hear the prophet command to put the turban on Joshua's head, and they obey, most likely with a nod from the angel of the Lord. The angels do all that is told them to do, dressing Joshua in all of the

garments of the High Priest. Now the dressing of the priest is symbolic of God's affirmation of his call to ministry.

It is no slight thing that is being done here. God's authority is behind the choosing of Joshua for the High Priest, an affirmation and confirmation that he is to be the High Priest by God's decree. Moreover, the angel of the Lord stands over the proceeding granting his own affirmation of the events. As I said earlier, it is more than likely that this angel of the Lord, who has been referred to with the divine name on more than one occasion, is the Lord Jesus preincarnate. The best High Priest gives his own consent to Joshua's priesthood.

3:6 Then the angel of the Lord made Joshua bear witness,

After the garments are bestowed and put on, much like we put on God's righteousness, and He exchanges our own filthy rags of our own righteousness with His pure white robes of righteousness, the angel of the Lord makes Joshua bear witness. This is most likely a ceremonial agenda that makes everything official. The word for bear witness here means to solemnly adjure, to warn, or to admonish the high priest to discharge his duties in the sight of God with excellence and holiness. It might have been something like the inaugural ceremony that we have for the president.

3:7 "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: If you walk in My ways and if you keep My charge then you will judge My house and even guard My courts, and I will give to you the right of passage between those standing here."

Now we get at least some of the ceremony's specifics from the angel of the Lord. The prophet overhears what is said to Joshua and records it here. The angel now charges Joshua by the words of the Lord of Hosts, the one who can remove him from office if he does not discharge the duties in a holy and godly manner. Lord of Hosts means that God can use his armies to forcibly remove the priest if necessary. It is not as much a threat as a reminder of who Joshua serves.

Now we hear a series of conditional statements. These are common in the Bible when a promise is about to be given. Promises tend to be conditional throughout the Bible. There are two ends of the agreement to be executed. So we start with a condition that Joshua must walk in the Lord's ways and a second condition that he must keep the Lord's charge. The ways of the Lord are the roads that He takes, the methods He uses and the actions that please Him. The word for ways in Hebrew is the word for paths, roads, and ways. To walk on God's paths means to live your life doing the things that please Him.

The charge of the Lord for Joshua is to do the works of the priesthood and be a priest. Our charge is to live godly lives and to be godly. Those two things go together. There's a philosophical argument over whether it's more important to be rather than to do, but the correct

approach is a both/and approach. We must be God's people and do His works. That is the second condition for Joshua here.

For the two conditions Joshua must be obedient in, the Lord gives three rewards. The first is that the high priest will judge God's house. This could mean that he holds charge over all things that are part of temple worship, but it is most likely that the house of God is the people of God. In other words, Joshua as High Priest, will judge the people of God and hold them accountable to live as God desires. It is part of the mission of a pastor or priest to make sure that the flock entrusted to him or her is a godly flock. By his or her office of pastor, the right has been bestowed to worry about each person's spirituality and life. A good pastor holds people accountable for their spiritual vitality.

To guard the Lord's courts speaks of keeping the temple pure and holy before the Lord. It might go with the previous statement, but is most likely an affirmation that the temple is Joshua's realm to take care of. The word for guard is the same word used for keep in the first charge. The final promise or reward for Joshua's obedience is that he will be granted permission to walk among those around him right now in the vision. He will be able to hang out with angels and be part of the spiritual world. He will be granted godly vision to see what God is doing in the earth. This might by far be the most coveted of the rewards for discharging his duties with excellence. We can know what God is up to and we can see His plan if we would be close to Him and spend time with Him. If you want to see more of the spiritual world and nature, then spend more time with the Lord!

3:8 “Hear now, Joshua the High Priest, you and your friends who sit before you, because they are men who are a sign. Yes, behold, I will bring My servant the Branch.

The angel then gives the command to hear the word of the Lord. In the command to hear is the command to heed. When we hear God speak, we must obey. The friends, or neighbors, are those who are sitting with him, most likely the other angels or whoever was part of putting on the clean festival robes. These might have been angels, but here they are called men. But this is not necessarily saying they could not be angels, because earlier, the prophet saw a man on a horse in his first vision who turns out to be an angel.

Whoever these friends are, be they angels or men, they are a sign. The word for sign speaks of a wonder or an omen. It is not clear to us what exactly about them is a sign. Somehow they are the sign that God will send His Branch. One commentator suggests that the priesthood is in view here, and they are a sign that the Messiah will also be a priest. Now this is clearly speaking about the Messiah Jesus! And this makes sense, because He is the best High Priest and ultimate, the last of the priests who offer sacrifice. It is fitting that He is spoken of here.

The Messiah is called the Lord's Servant, just like in Isaiah, and he is also referred to as the Branch. That word for branch is also used in Isaiah about the Messiah, the shoot or bud. The Branch is the Lord Jesus. Matthew speaks of a prophecy that says, “He will be called a Nazarene.” This is not a quote to us, but the word in Hebrew for branch or shoot is pronounced,

Net-ser, hence, Nazarene. The branch, or the shoot, speaks of the origins of the Messiah, according to most commentators. The beginnings and origins of the Messiah are mysterious. For Jesus' birth, this is certainly the case!

3:9 “Now behold, the stone which I have given before Joshua, upon one stone with seven eyes. Behold I will engrave its inscription,” declares the Lord of Hosts, “and I will remove the iniquity of this land in one day.

While the branch is one of the images of the Messiah in the prophets, the image of the stone is another Messianic reference. Isaiah talks about a stone that the builders rejected, and this imagery of the stone is latched onto by New Testament authors. Some would suggest the stone is the cornerstone of the temple being built. Historically, this might have been accurate. However, the stone is a prophetic image of the Messiah.

The image of the stone is now shot into apocalyptic imagery and language. Apocalyptic imagery is that which takes a common image and then makes it cosmic or impossible, unnatural to us. A stone is a natural thing. We can all envision a stone. But it then takes an imagination to envision a stone with seven eyes on it. Now the imagery and its symbolic meaning come into play. This is what it means to have apocalyptic language or imagery. It is an unnatural image that usually has abstract meaning from concrete objects and images. The word for apocalypse means uncovered or no longer hidden.

This image of a stone with seven eyes on it is most likely an image of the all-wise Messiah. Here's how we can see that kind of an interpretation. Eyes in the Old Testament usually speak of being able to see things, or to reveal or show things. For this reason, eyes might represent wisdom, the ability to see the right course of action for the best result. The number seven is usually viewed as perfection or completeness. There are seven days to the creation of the world, and it was good and perfect before sin destroyed it. Ruth is better than seven sons, or the perfect situation of heirs.

This number seven can be used symbolically. We must be careful to not overdo it with numbers in the Bible. Some of them are just numbers, but others do have deeper and symbolic meanings. Different interpretations of these numbers are interesting, but they are not always important, and they are certainly not what we would rely upon to get meaning from the text. If we did interpret the stone this way, it would talk about a stone, a Messiah, who is completely wise or all-seeing, whose wisdom is perfect. This certainly explains Jesus! He is omniscient, knowing all things.

Next is another attention grabbing “Behold!” and it is followed by God saying that He will engrave the stone with an inscription. We don't know exactly what this means. Perhaps He engraved it in front of Joshua right then and there. To engrave a stone, you must cut into it. If this is a symbol or image of the Messiah Jesus, most commentators suggest that the cutting is the physical suffering Christ endured upon the cross and the crown of thorns and the whipping of his body. This would cut His skin.

The very next thing that is stated is that the Lord will remove in one day the iniquity of the land. At the cross in one afternoon, Jesus removed the sin of every human being who would choose and obey Him. This prophecy is best fulfilled in Christ, the Messiah of the whole world! Let us give thanks for the precious Stone who came as a Servant and was like a Branch in His origins, and He suffered the cutting and engraving of His broken body so that we could all be rescued from sin!

3:10 “On that day,” declares the Lord of Hosts, “a man will call to his neighbor from under a vine and under a fig tree.”

Verse ten speaks of a time of peace because of the Messiah’s actions. Now this part has not yet been completely fulfilled, because Christ has not come back and reigned in peace like this. It is a time of prosperity and no war. The same imagery is used in Micah 4:4 about the Messianic age. For neighbors to willingly spend time with one another under budding and productive vines and fig trees speaks of the prosperity of men, and no need to fight over resources because every tree is producing what is needed.

There is no ambivalence or anger or war when anyone can be considered a friend worthy of hosting. This time is coming when the Lord will rule the earth in peace and prosperity! We can experience part of that prosperity and peace on a small level in our own lives, but one day Jesus will return and peace and prosperity will spread through His kingdom! We believe He’s coming soon and we long for that day!

Chapter 4

Vision #5: The Golden Lampstand

4:1 Then the angel who spoke with me returned and woke me like a man who is awakened from his sleep.

Apparently at some time during this night, Zechariah falls asleep and most be awoken by the interpreting angel. This is of interest because it helps us to get background on how the ecstatic experiences of the prophets occurred. For some visions in the Bible, and especially dreams, one is most likely asleep in them, but these visions are actively participated in by the prophet. It is most likely that he was tired from a long day's work and now the ecstatic visions have compounded the weariness of the prophet.

Zechariah is suddenly wakened like a man who is still in his sleep. He is startled into consciousness so that the visions may continue. And so we begin the fifth vision in one night to the prophet of God. This one concerns a golden lampstand and the two leaders of the Jewish nation, Zerubbabel and Joshua. We might be able to apply this verse by realizing that ministry is hard work and it is very tiring work. But when we are called to the work of God, we must do that work. Sleep is important, but sometimes, there are other things that trump the need for sleep. This is one of those times for Zechariah.

4:2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold and a bowl on its top and seven lamps on it, seven pipes on the seven lamps which are on top of it.

After Zechariah is awoken, the angel continues the prodding of this next vision by asking him what he sees. Throughout the vision, we get a sense that Zechariah is extremely tired from these visions, as the angel expects he understands the symbolism of the vision, and the prophet asks many questions. The fifth vision starts out with the same formula as used before, "I see, and behold." The prophet then describes a lampstand, or menorah, that is completely gold in material.

The lampstand is quite unusual. It is unlike any lampstand seen before. I have a bowl on it that actually has seven bowls around its rim. An approximate picture of the bowl is represented by my Logos Bible software image that I have in front of me here and in the notes. The lip could also be translated the cast metal reeds or pipes that feed the oil to the candles and lights. The pipes on the seven lamps are probably where oil is fed into the bowl or the individual bowls. We can't completely understand its configuration, although it seems that this bowl might have somehow been attached to a menorah.

We are not given clear understanding of what the lampstand represents in this vision. So it would be hazardous to guess when we are not given that information. There have been several

suggestions from commentators, but we simply are not told. It might be partially because the prophet is supposed to understand the imagery. It is in some ways considered an easy understanding by the angel. The lampstand may not be the most important part of the vision, and that may explain why it is not defined as part of the symbolic imagery. It might be the temple work that is taking place or Israel as a nation.

4:3 And two olive trees are on its sides, one on the right side of the bowl and one on its left side.

The vision now focuses on the two olive trees on each side of the lampstand and bowl. Olive trees can be symbols for Israel. But the important thing here, and what I believe they are symbolizing, is the power of the Holy Spirit. Here's why I have come to that conclusion. Part of it is the message after the vision is described in verse six about by God's Spirit the work will be done. The other part is that the olive trees produce olives, and therefore, olive oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit throughout the Old and New Testaments.

One olive tree is on the right side and the other is on the left side. What we find out later is that there is a golden pipe on each side dropping oil fuel into the bowl to be burned by the lights around the lip of the bowl. The olive trees could stand for Israel being the workforce to build the temple as well, but I see the Holy Spirit symbolized in these trees.

4:4 Then I replied and said to the angel who spoke with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?"

The prophet may have understood the lampstand, and may have been interested in the strange use of a bowl of oil mounted above it with seven lamps, but he does not understand the two olive trees on its sides. So he simply asks the interpreting angel who is supposed to help him understand what he is viewing. Thus far the angel has helped him to understand the visions, but we will find this not the case in the fifth vision.

4:5 Then the angel who spoke with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" So I said, "No, my lord."

The interpreting angel this time is not as helpful as before, and even might have been shocked that the prophet did not already know what the two trees are about. The angel essentially asks like a teacher would ask a student who should have done his or her studies, "You don't already know?" The prophet is unsure of the trees. Apparently the rest of it made some kind of sense to him. He answers as most of us would have answered., "No, my Lord."

If the prophet is confused with some of this symbolic and apocalyptic imagery, it is alright for us to be confused with it as well. You will hear many interpretations of these types of symbols and images. But no one really knows unless Scripture makes it plain and clear to us. We

must be careful to not become too dogmatic about what we believe these things represent. There is much mystery in apocalyptic imagery.

4:6 So the angel spoke to me, saying, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of Hosts.

The angel instead of directly answering the prophet and telling him what the symbolic nature of the images represents gives him a word from the Lord. This vision is about Zerubbabel and Joshua. The word is for Zerubbabel, like an addressed envelope with a letter in it. Zerubbabel’s name is on the envelope. He is the governor who has started the temple building. Remember that this is the time period around Haggai’s writing, and while Haggai was most likely an older prophet, Zechariah was younger.

Zerubbabel had seen the temple started as the governor, and he had seen it stalled by outside and inside influences. The temple foundation was laid early in the return to the land, but then neighboring countries created a controversy that stopped the temple building. Then, it was resumed with the help of the two prophets who led the people in fervor, and it was steadily going. Then Haggai informs us that some of the people complained that it wasn’t as glorious as Solomon’s temple. These would all discourage the governor. He was a man who must manage resources. And this is where the Lord’s word applies to Zerubbabel, and also to us as we work for Him.

The word is simple. The Lord tells the governor that it will not be by sheer might or power that the temple is built and the work of the Lord is accomplished, but by His Spirit. The Lord’s Spirit is the agent of action that helps the people to finish the temple, not their own resources or strength. The word for might signifies the faculty or wealth, the property or the qualifications of humans to get something done. It represents the resources they owned to get the temple finished. The Lord says that their own resources will not complete the temple. They are not numerous enough or good enough to do such a miraculous work.

Next, the negative is also shoved in front of human power getting the job done. This speaks more to the strength and ability of the people who work on the temple. So the temple will not be completed because of their own resources or their work ethic or the strength of their hands or even the skill and ability of their workmanship. It is only by the power of God’s Spirit that this will be accomplished! And in case that power is questioned, it is the power of God’s Spirit, who is the Lord of Hosts, commander of every army known and unknown to haumnty. God will do His work though His people by His Spirit!

This would have served to be great encouragement to a ragtag group of Israelites attempting to rebuild a glorious temple with little resources and strength. And it would have encouraged their governmental leader, Zerubbabel, as well. But we must not leave the application to them. This is a word for God’s church today! We cannot do things in our own resources and strength. We need the power of God’s Spirit if we are to succeed for Him in anything. When doing God’s work, it is not our own ability or resources.

It is God's Spirit who gets the job done! We must know His Spirit and walk in the power of His Spirit. We cannot do miracles or save people's lives, but God can! We must be people who rely on God's Spirit in everything rather than our own resources and abilities. We must be people who surrender to God the works that He gives us to do, so that His Spirit can shine through us as they are accomplished. And we must not forget that the Lord is the builder, not us. He does the work. He uses us, but He is the powerful one!

4:7 “Who are you, great mountain, before Zerubbabel, you will be level, and he will bring out the top stone to the shouts of ‘Grace! Grace to it!’”

Further, the Lord speaks to the great mountain of building the temple with little resources and strength. This is a mountain of impossibility to the leaders of Israel, but it is not impossible with God's Spirit. The Lord taunts the mountainous problems of the governor and high priest as He speaks to their mountains and biggest problems. He says that these mountains will be leveled before Zerubbabel as long as he operates in the Spirit of God.

Zerubbabel and Joshau would have had the hands in the temple work, Zerubbabel from the standpoint of finding workers and resources, and Joshua in consecrating the temple and its implements and most likely making sure everything was built according to the Torah models. Every problem that could arise for them might seem like a mountain, but the Lord's Spirit caused it to be like a level plain instead for them. God's Spirit made the work easier.

Then there is a prophecy that Zerubbabel will bring out the capstone or the top stone of the temple to the shouts of the people for God's grace to be upon the project. The capstone was the last stone to be placed on the temple and it completed the whole work. This is a prophecy that as long as the leaders work in the power of God's Spirit and not their own, they would see the work done in celebration and praise to God, and it would happen on their watch. A peh here ends this section of the vision, but brings another section to light prophesying even more about Zerubbabel and Joshua.

Many of us see the problems and impossibilities of life as mountains, and yet in that perception, we lessen the power of God in our lives. Any mountain that we have God can turn into a level ground or a molehill. Nothing is impossible with our God. Every mountain is nothing as compared to Him, and we need to realize that by the power of His Spirit, all things are possible. There is nothing that God can't do, and there's nothing that should put us in fear or should keep us from seeing Him do great things in our lives. Let our faith of a mustard seed call forth the God who is bigger than any mountain that is in front of us!

4:8 Then it happened that the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Although you can't tell in most English Bibles, there is a break between verses seven and eight. This break means that verse eight gets right back into more understanding of the vision so far. We have discussed how the Spirit is the only agency that the people will see the temple built,

or any work of God in our lives. So now, we will get more clarification on this matter as the word of the Lord comes to the prophet yet again concerning this imagery of the fifth vision.

4:9 “The hands of Zerubbabel have established this house and his hands will finish it. So you will know that the Lord of Hosts sent me to you.

The prophet prophesies that Zerubbabel, who began work on the temple so many years ago in laying the foundation would also be the one to lead to its conclusion. He is the one who established the house of the Lord, the temple. He helped to initiate the laying of the foundation and the preparation of a place for sacrifices. And now that the project to finish the temple had been restarted, he would see its completion not only in his lifetime, but in his administration.

The last image had Zerubbabel putting the capstone, the final piece, onto the temple. This prophecy fleshes that out by explaining that he will be the one to finish it. It will happen by his hand. Then, the oft repeated phrase, “Then you will know that the Lord has sent me” is almost like a fulfillment clause, showing that Zechariah is a true prophet of God because what he prophesies comes to pass as he said it would.

4:10 “Thus whoever despised the day of small things will rejoice and will see the stone lined up by Zerubbabel’s hand. These seven are the eyes of the Lord. They roam about the whole earth.

Because Zerubbabel and Joshua will see the temple finished in their time, the prophet concludes that those who have been talking about small beginnings and how the temple did not look as glorious as Solomon’s temple would actually be rejoicing as the project was finished. They grumble in the midst of the project, but celebrate at the end. This might have been a message to the leaders to not get caught up on what the people said about the temple. They should forge ahead and those same people who had problems with it will rejoice with them in its completion. The image here has already been mentioned in a former verse when they celebrated the final capstone placed on the temple by shouting “Grace, Grace to it!”

The hardest part to translate in this verse is the object that is in Zerubbabel’s hands. Most commentators talk about the plumb line that would be used to cut straight lines. This device is in the governor’s hands as he sets the final stone on the temple. Now the image of the stone brings back the Messianic vision in the fourth vision of the stone with seven eyes on it. The very next sentence says that these seven are the eyes of the Lord. Now we must ask about a contextual question here. Is the word “these” referring to the stone, which is like the stone before Joshua with seven eyes on it, or is “these” referring to the lamps on the lampstand?

It is most likely that the seven are the lamps on the lampstand. Visions so far have not corresponded to one another, and so the imagery of the fourth vision is probably not in view here, even though the stone is mentioned. It is more likely that the lamps as lights that expose things that are in the dark are symbolized as the eyes of the Lord that roam throughout the earth,

the all-seeing eyes of an omniscient God. It is most likely that the angel would be explaining a current vision, not a previous vision. So the all-seeing eyes of the Lord are about the earth, gaining information. He sees all things. Nothing surprises our God. He knows all things and has the greatest wisdom. We need not fear for anything.

4:11 Then I answered and said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right side of the lampstand and on the left side?”

Now that the angel has started revealing the meanings behind the symbolism of the lamps, the prophet then asks about the olive trees that had befuddled him. This might be the only part of the vision that the prophet does not already understand. The two trees, as we have said, could be Israel or they could be a symbol of the Holy Spirit. One is on the left of the bowl and the other on the right side.

4:12 Then I answered a second time and said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive tree which are beside the two golden pipes from which pours out golden oil?”

Apparently the angel does not answer. We don't know why this is, but the prophet offers a second, more specific question. There are two branches that are feeding oil into two pipes that go into the bowl of oil and fuel, which feeds the lamps. The prophet now asks about these two branches that feed the oil into the golden pipes and thus into the bowl for use by the lamps. The oil must have been seen as a golden-looking substance with all the gold around it.

4:13 Then he spoke to me, saying, “Do you not know what these are?” So I said, “No, my lord.”

The angel responds the same way he responded earlier to the prophet's questions. He asks him if he does not really know what they are. There seems to be in this fifth vision more expectance of the prophet than before. As he attempts to interpret the vision, he is having trouble, maybe because he is still tired, or it might be because he does not truly know what these images represent. So he answers as before an inadequate knowledge of these things and says, “No my lord.” The word lord here is meant as a reverent way of address, not the divine name. It's like saying “Sir” or “Ma'am” today.

4:14 Then he said, “These two are the sons of oil who stand by the Lord of all the earth.

The angel finally replies that the two branches, which are symbols of the messiah, the Branch, are the sons of oil that stand by the Lord. The phrase sons of oil is very interesting for a couple of reasons. First, some translations translate “anointed sons,” but the word for oil is not the word for purified oil that is processed and used in anointing.

It is the word for unprocessed oil, like you would put in the lamps. The sons of oil is also a problem because there is only one Messiah, not two. So who are these sons of oil? The text does not tell us. We are to simply understand because this is the conclusion of the fifth vision. Whoever these sons of oil are, they are doing the Lord's work, standing by the Lord of all the earth, and the Lord is on their side.

Most scholars suggest, and I concur, that these two sons of oil are Zerubabel and Joshua, the two great leaders of the remnant in Judah. More precisely, I see an image of the Lord by His Spirit, pouring the oil of His Spirit into the two golden pipes, which would represent the leaders, and through the outpouring of His Spirit through them, the project is completed by the fueling power of the Spirit, and the temple is completed so that the all-seeing God can dwell within its structures. This is what I believe the interpretation of this vision is. But no one can be completely certain about these things until we receive fullest revelation.

What we can take away from this vision is the importance of operating in the power of God's Holy Spirit instead of our own abilities. God can use us only after His Spirit is poured out through us. We should never look to do the work without the power of God in us. Let us minister in the power of the Spirit so that God can indwell every project that He places in front of us and that we might enjoy the celebration of success through obedient submission to His Spirit and His Word!

Chapter 5

Vision #6: Flying Scroll

5:1 Again I lifted up my eyes, and I saw, and behold, a scroll was flying!

The sixth vision starts with something you don't see everyday, a continuously flying scroll! It starts out the typical way of the visions with "I looked up and I saw." The surprise of the prophet is packed into the attention-getting Hebrew word hiney, which means to behold or look. The scroll represents the Torah, or moral law of God, according to most scholars and commentators.

5:2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a flying scroll. It's length is twenty cubits and its width is ten cubits."

As is typical in these visions, the angel asks what the prophet sees and he responds by describing the vision. He sees this flying scroll, but he tells us its dimensions. It is 20 cubits long by 10 cubits in width. This is equivalent to about 30 feet by 15 feet! This scroll is huge, and it's hovering in the air flying as an open scroll. Some commentators have spent time trying to show that it is the same dimensions as the holy of holies or Solomon's porch, but most agree this is not what the scroll signifies.

5:3 Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of all the earth, for all who steal according to what is on this side will be purged out and all who swear according to what is on the other side will be purged out."

Now we receive the meaning of the symbolic imagery of a massive flying scroll. The angel tells the prophet that the scroll is the curse of God that goes out over the face of the earth. The word for curse speaks of the oath of God, and is a reference to the covenant, and to the Law or the Torah. Everyone on the whole earth is subject to His law. It is not that everyone follows it, but that everyone will be held accountable for it.

Two types of sins are mentioned here by way of example. James said that the person who violates one part of the law violates the whole thing. So here, we see one example out of a list that signifies the whole list. In the first example, we see someone who is a thief, who steals from his neighbor. In the second, we see someone who bears false witness or takes oaths using the Lord's name.

Each example connotes part of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are split into two sections based on who is offended. The first four are violations against God, and entail a person's relationship between themselves and God. The second six speak of our relationship to fellow human beings. To violate either is to call God's curse and judgment upon

us. Moses had a list of blessings for those who kept the law and curses for those who failed to keep the law in Deuteronomy 28.

Here we see the same type of punishment for those who sin in the moral law of God. The penalty for such treachery is to be purged or cut off from the people of God, the worst punishment that can be devised. This is a prophecy that God will get rid of all the sinners out of His community of believers. The scroll has two sides, which is also unusual. Usually, the first side was only written upon, but here, there are curses for those who violate their neighbors through sin on the front, and curses for those who violate their relationship with God on the back.

So far in these visions, we have seen blessings by God and encouragements, but now we see warnings for those who do not obey the Law of God. In our own lives, we must be people who obey the Lord's word and law. The Law of God is written on our hearts and attested to by the Holy Spirit living inside of us. No longer do we have to look upon stone, but we can hear the Spirit speaking God's good law into our lives. But we must still obey it. Nothing has changed in that when we do not keep God's commands and walk in His ways, we will experience the curse of folly and wickedness, the consequences of not following His law. Just because there is grace for our sins does not mean there is no consequence for sins against God.

5:4 “I will go out, declares the Lord, “and it will enter the thief’s house and into the house of the one swearing falsely by My name. And it will lodge inside the house and consume it, even the wood and stones.”

The Lord further declares not only that there are curses and blessings based on obedience to the scroll, to His law, but also that He will not hesitate to enforce them. The Lord Himself is the enforcer. He brings the punishment to the right person wherever they may be. His punishment has jurisdiction anywhere the sinner would hide. If the sinner hides in his house after robbing someone, then the curse will follow him there. If the sinner who takes false oaths, invoking the Lord's name and reputation in those oaths runs into the sanctuary of his own house, the Lord's curse will follow him there.

Not only will God's curse for the sinner find the sinner no matter where he would hide or take refuge, it will dwell with that sinner. The curse will stick with the sinner and will not let him go. Then it will destroy the whole of his house, all of his possessions to the very last thing, even the wood and the stone. The curse will be relentless. It is much better to obey the Lord's Law!

We must realize that sin follows us everywhere. We cannot get away from it. And its consequences find us. They are not something that just goes away. Some people live their whole lives dealing with the consequences of their former ungodly lifestyle. Sometimes God takes away the consequences, but other times it serves us as a reminder that we must not go that way again in our lives. We must stay in obedience to the Lord if we wish to avoid the curse of sinning against His holy Law. Let us be those who avoid the destruction of the curses of sin so that we might be desirable to the Lord.

Vision #7: Woman in a Basket

5:5 Then the angel who spoke with me came forward and said to me, “Please lift up your eyes and see what this is that is going out.”

The next vision starts as most of the others, with the interpreting angel coming to the prophet and focusing his eyes on the next vision. That same formula is quite common in this book, and is also used in other apocalyptic visionary like Revelation. The angel calls the prophet to look up and view what is coming next. There is some kind of object that is leaving or going out, and the angel views it as very important for the prophet to see.

5:6 So I said, “What is this?” And he said, “This is the ephah that is going out.” Then he said, “This is their appearance in all the earth.”

The prophet sees the image, but does not recognize it, so he asks the angel for help. The angel explains that the image he is seeing is an ephah. An ephah is sometimes translated basket by other versions, because it was most likely a basket the proper size of the largest measure of dry products. The ephah was a measurement that was akin to about 5-9 gallons depending on who you ask. The ephah was leaving for some reason, and it is up to the prophet to see what that reason may be.

The angel is the one who explains the significance of the ephah in the basket. The ephah stands for the appearance of the Israelites. The appearance of the Israelites by the nations of the earth is not a good appearance. They were viewed as evil by the peoples of the earth. The word for appearance is literally “eyes” in Hebrew. The ephah is most related to commerce, and so many commentators talk about the commerce of Israel, of Israel being idolatrous through its commerce and economy.

5:7 Then behold, the lead disk was raised and this certain woman was sitting inside of the ephah.

Next as the ephah is leaving, the prophet gets a peek inside of it. On top of the ephah is a lead disk or talent. It might have even been the type of money used. It’s one big and probably very heavy talent. It is described in different ways, as a stone and as a disk. It might have been one of the most common lead weights used to measure out grain. All of these images are economic in nature.

There is a very large weight that is used almost like a vault to keep whatever is inside the ephah from getting out, like a lock on a door, or a dungeon. When Zechariah looks inside, he finds to his amazement and surprise a woman. It is literally “one woman” or “a certain woman” that is sitting in the ephah or basket. Now a woman would not have fit inside of an ephah, so

many scholars suggest that this was a fertility goddess that was inside of the basket, an idol image. That is quite possible.

5:8 Then he said, “This is Wickedness,” and threw her down into the basket and he threw down the lead stone upon its opening.

The angel continues to help the prophet through interpreting the imagery and symbolism of what he is seeing with his eyes. In the earlier vision, the prophet expected the prophet to understand the symbolic imagery of what he was seeing, but in this vision, the angel leads the way in understanding what is transpiring before him.

The angel defines the woman in the basket as wickedness incarnate. The word for wickedness carries the idea and meaning of guilt or offense. The word for wickedness is a feminine word in Hebrew, as most words are arbitrarily given gender for nouns. So it makes sense that the personification of a feminine word like wickedness is a woman. But several scholars have asked why a woman would represent wickedness and guilt.

If the woman is indeed an idol, then the idol works well with the imagery. The most likely understanding of this imagery would fit nicely with a fertility goddess. The suggestion then is that the way the Israelites are making money is idolatrous. Perhaps they are worshipping the god of money in their dealings economically. Or perhaps they are worshipping the making of money, ergo the fertility goddess.

Although we are not told this, the implication of the rest of the verse is that the woman tried to escape from the basket but was prohibited by the angel. The verbs are intensive as this must have been either a quick encounter or a violent one. The woman is forced back inside the ephah, or thrown down into it, and the cover is once again placed upon the ephah basket. The lead stone is shoved into the opening of the ephah, the top, or literally the mouth of the ephah. The angel keeps the woman from getting out. A samek after this verse signifies the end of the first part of this vision, and we move now to the meaning and completion of it.

5:9 Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, two women coming forth, and the wind was in their wings. Now they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heavens.

Now the prophet lifts up his eyes once again and discovers that there are two women coming for the basket. These women are described as having wings. The word wing is interesting in Hebrew because it denotes any type of extremity or extension of a person. For instance, there are wings to a garment, the outer edges of the garment that flow around the body. A skirt for a woman is considered a wing. But it can also speak of a person’s arms, hence in English, the wingspan of a person.

Now we don’t know if these were angels or celestial beings or of they were women with wings somehow attached to them. Whatever they were, they are not described in any more detail

than that. They are also the agents of this vision, the ones doing whatever must be done, and it is interesting that they are not explained. Perhaps they have no meaning to the vision. We are not given any reference to what they mean, but everything else in this vision is given a reference.

Their wings are described as wings of a stork, or any long-legged bird. The wings are wide and able to support a lot of weight, which is good because they're going to be carrying this woman in an ephah away. These two women are not given any significance in the vision. Up to this point, and beyond, the angel will tell the prophet what is symbolic and what it means. But we are not given any reference for the two women with wings. So it is most likely that they are simply props of the vision, part of the background.

The ephah is then lifted up by the women into the sky as they carry it away. There is an interesting moment of imagery here as the ephah is hoisted between the earth and the sky. A similar image of the cross can be seen, as the Savior Jesus is transfixed between heaven and earth, the ultimate sacrifice that hangs between two worlds. But the idea here is simply that the basket is being taken away through flight.

One more comment must be made about the women having wind in their wings. Some commentators make the connection between the word for wind and the word for spirit. In Hebrew, the two words from English are the same. So here the idea might be made that the Spirit of God is taking away this evil or wickedness from Israel. But it has been commented that storks were unclean animals, and would most likely not have been used in this way.

5:10 Then I said to the angel who spoke with me, “Where are they taking the ephah?”

Zechariah is curious about the destination of the ephah. It represents the sin and wickedness of the people, and he might be wondering where it is going. He does not ask about the women with wings either, so it is very apparent that they, although agents of the removal of wickedness, do not matter to the vision as much as the destination of the ephah. Surprisingly, the angel will give him an answer.

5:11 And he said to me, “To build a house for it in the land of Shinar, and when it is established, they will set it down there in its place.

The angel answers the prophet and tells him that the wickedness has its own appointed place. The women with wings are taking the ephah to build a house for it in a place called Shinar. Shinar is a place used in the Bible as one of the places where wickedness reigns supreme. It was a place in the time of Nimrod when the people gathered and built a tower to heaven, and God diversified their languages and sent them away. It's almost as if the prophet is using the land of Shinar as an image to say that sin will be put in its proper place where it cannot hurt us or affect us.

The idea of building a house might more speak to building a temple, especially if the woman in the ephah is a fertility idol or a commerce idol. It is not right for the people of God to

worship such an idol, so she will be removed and taken to a place where sin reigns and such idols are worshiped. Once the house or temple is built for the woman, she will be placed down there where she belongs. The verb for setting it down is often used of an ordained plan, to say that God has ordained it to be this way. A samek closes out the vision and we will move on to the next one.

As we apply this vision to our lives, there is a place for sin, but it is not among the people of God. We must get rid of all idolatry among us and evil commerce. By evil commerce, we don't speak of selling and buying on its own, but rather of evil methods and greed and every type of evil that is a means to gaining wealth, exploiting others, and anything else that the pursuit of economy over pursuit of our Lord would cause us to sin.

We must be people who care about God more than anyone or anything else in our lives. The place for sin is not with us. It is somewhere else. One day, God will remove the wickedness from among His people when He comes to judge the wicked and deal out their penalties. But for now, let us not have anything to do with such wickedness! God removes it from us, and the guilt goes as well. The offense against God is forgiven! Praise His name for His grace!

Chapter 6

Vision #8: Four Chariots

6:1 And again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze!

The final vision begins in the same way most of the visions have started, with the typical vision formula of lifting up the eyes and seeing. Then it is followed by the typical, “and behold.” This is meant to grab attention, and perhaps even show surprise by the prophet of what is happening before him. This time, we are introduced to four chariots and two mountains made of bronze.

The eighth vision has some connections to the rest of Scripture, and so interpretation will be in some ways easier, but in other ways harder. We will attempt to compare the vision’s elements with other visions. For instance, this vision creates a wonderful literary inclusio from the first vision. If you will remember, that vision had horsemen on different colored horses going out to survey the earth. They come back saying that all the nations are at rest. That word rest is used in this final vision, but in a reverse way as we will see. This vision also has different colored horses and they are going out again to patrol attached to chariots. And we also have visions with the number four in them elsewhere, like the four horns and four craftsmen.

The inclusio of the first and last vision give us a sense, held all throughout, that God is beginning to move in very special ways not only in Zechariah’s time of the temple building, but also in the time of the Messiah and beyond. We start with another apocalyptic image in the mountains that are natural, and then are described unnaturally by being made of bronze. Commentators are not sure how to take this mountains composed of bronze image. Some say it is the opening to God’s abode where His throne is located. This seems to agree with the rest of the vision as God commissions these four chariots.

The two mountains help to remind us of the first vision as well because the myrtle trees were in a valley, and the two mountains naturally form a valley. Also, there are four chariots, instead of horses, again with different colors. The colors are different than in the first vision, but they still create similarities. Also, this passage might have at least been in the mind of John in Revelation as he experienced in Revelation six the different colored horses and horsemen. So we will compare all of these together here as much as they provide insight.

6:2 The first chariot had red horses and the second black horses.

Next we are introduced to the colors of the horses that are pulling the chariots. Chariots are usually part of the imagery of sovereignty and war in the Bible. A chariot is used in war as a weapon and those who stand in the chariot are usually well protected all around, except in the

back. Thus, kings usually rode in the chariots in war for protection and also prowess. The speed and shielding of a chariot kept a king more safe and yet allowed the king to vanquish enemies.

There are four chariots with four different colors of horses. First, we are introduced to the chariot with red horses and then to the chariot with black horses. The colors red and black can be symbolized in different ways. Revelation six tells us that the red horse in that chapter, which may or may not correspond to this vision, might have brought sickness and pestilence.

The Revelation order is white, red, black, and then pale. The white horse may represent victory, the red may represent pestilence and sickness, the black representing destruction and war, and the pale representing death. The first vision from Zechariah had red, black and sorrel (or brownish colored) horses. While Revelation six interprets the symbolic colors for us, neither this vision nor the first interpreted the meaning of the different colors. We must be careful to not put the same interpretation of Revelation upon these, although they may be similar.

6:3 and the third chariot white horses, and the fourth chariot strong speckled horses.

The last two colors are given to us. These are the colors of the horses or teams of horses that are tied to the chariots. It is most likely that these chariots signify some type of battle mode or at least the kingly rule of God. The most interesting color is the last for most scholars. The word strong is used last in the Hebrew sentence, and it is hard to interpret whether strong describes the speckled horses, or all of the horses of each color.

Verse seven makes a reference to the strong going out. The question then is asked whether this was the strong speckled horses only going out, or all of the horses are strong as they went out. We will discuss this more in detail there. But all four of these colors are not given any symbolic interpretation for us, so we don't really know how to interpret unless we see this passage as being drawn upon by John in Revelation. I believe that this may be a distinct possibility.

6:4 Then I answered and said to the angel who spoke with me, "What are these, my lord?"

The prophet is unaware of the meaning of this vision as well. Only in one of the visions is the interpreting angel unwilling to answer his questions, so Zechariah asks plainly what this vision of the four chariots means. This is a common question throughout the images and visions that the prophet experiences, and we have often seen him ask what these things represent. When the Lord shows us visions He will also help us to understand them. We can trust that He will not show us something just to confuse us. He will give us answers. Perhaps not the ones we want or expect, or even in the time frame we expect. But He will answer us.

6:5 So the angel answered and said to me, "These are the four winds of heaven going out after presenting themselves to the Lord of all the earth.

Once again the angel tells the prophet what is going on, at least to a certain extent. The chariots are explained as the four winds of heaven. The four winds usually indicate the cardinal directions of north, south, east and west. However, these four chariots will not so uniformly go their way, as we will discover. Remember also that the word for wind in Hebrew can also mean spirit, although here it is most likely wind.

We see winds being used in the judgment in Revelation 7:1 and following as well. It is most likely that John is seeing the same type of judgment, and explaining it from the same point of view as Zechariah here. If this is the end times event of judgment, which would be indicated to me by the four winds coming upon the earth in some sort of violence, as we will see, and coming as ordained by God through the bronze mountain, then John and Zechariah could be describing at least a similar event.

The winds go out after presenting themselves to the Lord. The Lord commissioned them to do a certain task. If the colors carry at least some of the same meanings in Revelation, then these are definitely judgment from the Lord, commissioned by the Lord, and approved by Him. Here, it is interesting that the “Lord of all the earth” is adonai instead of YHWH in Hebrew. One would expect YHWH, but only the word adonai is used for lord in this vision.

6:6 The black horses with *the chariot* go out toward the north land and the white ones go after them, and the speckled ones go toward the south land.

Only the cardinal directions of north and south are used by these horses, even though four winds usually speaks to four cardinal directions. Two go north and one set goes south in this verse. Many scholars actually try to make it fit into four cardinal directions, but that is not what the word says. In this verse, the black and white horses that are attached to the chariots go north.

One of the interesting propositions by a couple of commentators is that in Israel, you would have to go north or south to go east and west, which is indeed accurate. Israel is like a giant valley in a geographical sense and it is easiest to go north or south before going east or west. North could have spoken to any number of northern enemies of Israel and south would most likely represent Egypt.

We also are not told what these colored horses signify, as we are in Revelation. If the colors correlate, then the black horses bring sickness and the white horses bring victory for God. But we cannot be certain of this and using the symbolic colors in one section of Scripture every time that we see similar images elsewhere is not a good interpretive practice.

The speckled horses and their chariot go south. We don't know what the speckled horses indicate, for they are not in Revelation. On their first mission in the first vision, the horses and their riders merely observed and scouted the earth. In this vision, it is most likely they are no longer observing. So we have a hard time speculating on what the speckled horses mean for the south. Speckled might have meant a mix of the colors or a mix of other colors.

6:7 When the strong ones came out, they sought to go in order to patrol the earth and he said, “Go! Patrol the earth!” So they patrolled the earth.

We might be given the mission of the speckled horses and their chariot in this verse. As I mentioned earlier, it is grammatically possible that the word strong further explains the speckled horses or can stand to speak of all four colored horses and their chariots. Some scholars take this to mean that all four groups went on their missions as they were ordained to go. Others would say that this focuses on the speckled group and explains that they are going to the south to patrol it. Patrol is a military term that does refer to conquering. This is where we get the idea that this might be judgment.

No matter if strong ones refers to one of the chariots with its horses attached or to all of them, we realize that they are sent to patrol the earth. This is different than surveying the earth in the first vision. In the first vision, there were no ominous war chariots strapped to the horses. Now there are. The word patrol might be translated from the word for “walk” as it is here. But before was observing and now there is action.

The horses and their chariots are sent with the word go and then the word patrol. They give us the vision of zealots when they come out. The horses are ready to go. The prophet says the horses “sought to go” to patrol the earth. They are like dogs ready for the kill. They are jumping at the chance to go and do what they were made to do. It’s almost like they are being held back only by the anticipation of being told to go. And go they do!

6:8 Then he cried out to me, and spoke to me, saying, “Look at those who go toward the northern land. My Spirit is at rest in the north land.”

If we have only just focused on the south and the strong speckled horses only going south, then we are pushed to return to the horses going north and the focus shifts back to them. The angel cries out and speaks, so that the prophet does not miss what is happening with the northern group. It’s almost like he’s crying out to grab the prophet’s attention and redirect it.

The vision is redirected from the southbound horses to the northbound horses and the Lord says that His Spirit is at rest in the north land or country. Earlier in the first vision, the nations were at rest and God was enraged at them. Now, the nations are in chaos from battle and the Lord is at rest. The tables have turned, and just like Haggai suggested, the Lord will shake the nations! A samek ends the vision and next we will see some prophecies about the messiah, starting with the anointing and coronation of the priest-king.

As we look at the comparison of this vision with the first and with Revelation, we find strikingly similar imagery and colors. There are indeed differences, for no one has the exact same retelling of a vision even of the same event. Perspective helps to give different facets of the same event. I would say that this is talking about the end of time when God will come against the nations, like in Revelation six and seven, and that all of these prophets are having relatively the

same vision. There is coming a day when the Lord will war with the nations. Let us be ready for that day!

The Priest King

6:9 Then it happened that the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

The samek in the last verse has made a clear cut between the visions and what follows. The crowning of the priest, although extremely unusual and historically tenable, is not another vision. It is a prophetic event or image for us that has a huge implication for the Messiah Jesus! So in typical prophetic introductory form, the prophet begins to disclose to us a prophetic command for a very unique event.

6:10 Take from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah who came from Babylon and go with them that day to the house of Josiah, son of Zephaniah.

Zechariah is commanded by the Lord to go to the exiles that would have been traveling back and forth from exiled lands to Jerusalem. A number of Israelites remained in the exiled lands because they had established themselves, their families, and their businesses there. But the dedicated and devoted of the exiles would at least visit Jerusalem, especially for feasts, like in Jesus' days.

These three men that are mentioned were staying at Josiah's house. We don't historically know much about them, other than what is said here, that they are exiles from Babylon who are visiting Jerusalem. It is most unlikely that Josiah's father, Zephaniah, is the prophet. Almost all scholars put him as a different person that I could find. These exiles are staying at his house, as was a common custom for visiting Jerusalem. It was not worth it to visit for a day or even a week. Usually a visit would be at least a month because of the resources and time it took to travel in the world.

6:11 Then take silver and gold and make a crown and set it on the head of Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

Zechariah is instructed by the Lord to construct a crown of gold and silver. That is not a surprise. In this time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, although Zerubbabel would not be allowed to be king officially, a crown would at least show the people that he was God's leader, chosen by the Lord for this time to lead. But the surprise is that this crown was not for Zerubbabel!

It was instead for Joshua, the high priest! Never had a high priest worn a crown, been a king, or had these two offices been combined! And this did not mean that Joshua would be king either. He was only king over the temple area. But it does foreshadow a certain Priest who would also be King in the future!

Now the crown would probably have been made in two stages. First, one would make a gold band and then a silver band, and then combine them in the melting and making so that the crown would be made as two circles that linked together. This crown would be literally made, but would be symbolic and prophetic, not literally understood as putting Joshua above Zerubbabel. It will be explained as we continue on what this symbolic event symbolized.

6:12 And say to him, saying, “Thus says the Lord of Hosts, saying, ‘Behold the man! Branch is his name, and from under him will he branch out and he will build the Lord’s temple.

Setting a crown on Joshua’s head and then saying what the Lord says is part of a coronation service. Of course, if this was carried out, it would be symbolic and speaks to something that we have already seen in the visions, a messianic point from Zechariah. The priest and king would not be united in Israel, but the Lord Jesus is coming, and He is both priest and king!

The words proclaim with God’s authority. This formula often used by the prophets, “Thus says the Lord of Hosts” is common to show that God’s authority supports what is said next. So the Lord is declaring with authority that Joshua is the man. Then something we have seen in the vision about Joshua’s cleansing as high priest and the image of the stone with seven eyes on it, the declaration of the Branch, the Servant who is the branch from chapter three, is alluded to here as well.

Branch is a name here, and speaks of the branch in messianic terms. This prophecy says that the Messiah will branch out or will take deep roots and will build the Lord’s temple. Now, this is partially fulfilled in Joshua the high priest, who has been overseeing the temple rebuilding with Zerubbabel. So you could supposedly take this as the priest and the king (governor) are joined to accomplish God’s will, but that does not go far enough.

It is clear from this section that the priest is being anointed king, not simply joining with the civic governor. And it is also clear that this is not about Zerubbabel at all, but is about Joshua, and later Jesus! You can’t miss this Messianic prophecy! First of all, Joshua is a cognate of Jesus in Hebrew names, Yeshua. Second, this is about a priest king who rises up and builds a temple.

This is about Christ building His church! The temple is not a building as much as it is His kingdom and His people are the building stones and He is the foundation. That is what this prophecy is about. The idea of the priest king is new to the remnant, but it is clearly fulfilled in Jesus. He is a priest, as the writer of Hebrews explains, in the order of Melchizedek from the book of Genesis. And He is the King of all creation! And He will rule with goodness and mercy in the end of human history. This is all about Jesus! He Himself declared that He would build His church and even the gates of Hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

6:13 So he will build the Lord's temple and he will carry splendor and will sit and will rule on his throne, and a priest will be on his throne and the counsel of peace will be between them both.

The prophecy continues to elaborate on the truth of Christ's church. Jesus builds His church through the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God into the hearts of people, and He is the center of the temple being built, the foundation. Then Christ will carry splendor and glory in His church. Paul tells us that Christ is the Head of the Church in Ephesians. He is our glory. He is our crown.

Then we have the imagery of a king sitting on His throne and ruling His temple or Church. Then we have the image of the priest on a throne. The offices of priest and king will be united in Christ. He will rule with the excellence of the greatest King that will ever be, and He will be as righteous as the most righteous priest who ever lived. He will govern with ease and will lead people into God's presence.

Oftentimes in the prophets, we have the concern of the counsel of the king. A king would have counselors and hold counsel with his nobles to gain wisdom for ruling in the wisest way. So here we have this idea that the counsel will be a counsel of peace, that He will reign not through war or manipulation, but through bringing peace.

There will also be peace between the offices of king and priest in His reign. Right now, how many of us can say that the pastors in the nation and the president can get along in all things? There is no peace between these offices anywhere in our world today. But there is coming a day when Christ reigns and that peace will exist. We look forward to the peace of that era!

6:14 And the crown will be for remembrance to Holem and to Tobijah and to Jedaiah and to Hen, son of Zephaniah in the Lord's temple.

This crown that was constructed of silver and gold would be a memorial to the truth of what God was going to do in fulfilling this prophetic imagery. Legend has it that they made this crown and put it in the new temple in one of the windows to remind them of the priest-king that would come. How sad that they missed Him when He arrived!

The rest of this verse is interesting because it appends and changes the names of the visiting exiles involved in making this memorial possible. The names are almost the same, for the most part, of the earlier mentioned four. But Holem is a change from the previous name and Hen is the changed name for Josiah. Hen in Hebrew is the word for grace. Their names have been changed because of the understanding of what has happened in this prophetic imagery. May we all be forever changed when we meet Jesus the Messiah, the Priest-King who comes into our lives and administers wisdom and peace!

6:15 Even those who are far away will come and will build the Lord's temple. Then you will know that the Lord of Hosts sent me to you and it will happen if you will surely obey the voice of the Lord your God.

We finish the imagery with a promise that the foreigners from far away will come and help build the temple. Now this does not happen in antiquity. The Israelites finished the temple of Zerubbabel without outside help. In fact, the outsiders wanted to destroy the temple and squelch their efforts.

So who are these outsiders from far away that build the Lord's temple? This is a prophecy about the Gentiles being added to Christ's church, to His temple. They become part of the beautiful and sacred edifice of His holy Church! We are thankful to be a part of God's people, grafted in to His plan and part of what He is doing! We should never forget what God has done for us in making us who are on the outside insiders in His church! May His glory be renown through all the generations of all those who are far off and have been brought near!

Throughout the New Testament, the imagery of a holy temple being made is a common image. It gains much of its imagery from this prophecy in Zechariah. We are part of that beautiful building. It is beautiful in holiness and righteousness. As we grow deeper in Christ and in relationship and discipleship with Him, we find that we become more and more beautiful to Him and to the world.

The prophecy ends with a call to obey the voice of the Lord and for the temple to be built. Once again we see something we have seen about three to four times so far in the book of Zechariah. It is the promise that the Lord has sent Zechariah as a true prophet. Moses said that you will know a prophet of God from a false prophet in whether or not their prophecies become a reality. So we know Zechariah was a true prophet, although back then for these people, they would only know in part as the temple was completed. A samek ends this section and begins the next section of more prophecies about the coming King, the Messiah who is the greatest Priest!

Chapter 7

Keeping God's Heart

7:1 Then it happened in the fourth year of King Darius that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth *day* of the ninth month, in Chislev.

Chapter seven begins a historical issue that must be dealt with. It is prompted by a delegation from Bethel that visited Jerusalem about halfway through the rebuilding of the temple, on December 7, 518 BC. We know the date because it is specifically recorded in Zechariah's writings here. We know the years of Darius and can postulate the exact day of the event. The temple was started in 520 BC and finished around 516 BC. This is when the word of the Lord comes to the prophet, but the Lord answers because of the caravan of men from Bethel, a city about 12 miles north of Jerusalem.

7:2 Now Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melek with their men to appeal before the face of the Lord,

The city of Bethel sent some of its delegates to worship at the temple and speak to the priests and the prophets about a matter of the Law. Two of the men, the leaders of the group from Bethel are mentioned. The first is Sharezer, and his name is Babylonian meaning "protect the king." Other than this, we know nothing about this man. The second leader mentioned is Regem-melek, and his name means "friend of the king."

They come to Jerusalem from Bethel to speak about an issue, but their first priority was to worship the Lord. They both have Babylonian names, which only suggests that they were part of the remnant that returned from Babylon. We saw in Daniel how most of the exiles were renamed in their new lands. The word that describes their worship in the temple is a word that means to appeal or to entreat. It also has the meanings of appeasing and even flattery. It is a word used for worshipping the Lord in this book and in Malachi 1:9. Literally, it says that they wanted to appease the face of the Lord. This meant that they went before the Lord's presence and worshipped Him.

7:3 saying to the priests, which were in the house of the Lord of Hosts, and to the prophets, saying, "Should I weep in the fifth month and should I fast as I have done in other years?"

Within the context of worshipping the Lord, the question is raised about their fasting. They speak to the priests and to the prophets. In the old order of Israel during the time of their obstinate forefathers, the priestly office and the prophetic office were at odds with one another. But it seems that these complimentary offices have revived their friendship in the remnant community.

The priests are experts in the Law of Moses and the Law of God. They spend their time working out the Law, and so when there is a matter at hand that concerns His written word to Israel, the people ask the priests. But when it comes to a matter of needing God's revelatory word, they turn to the prophets to seek God for a response. So it is good to consult both in these matters. Both priests and prophets are spending their time in the temple as its construction is being completed.

So these men come to represent the whole of Bethel and they bring their question in an atmosphere of worship unto the Lord. I believe there's something special about the kinds of questions we ask when we experience God's presence. There's something about questions that causes us to worship Him more fervently than when we have no questions. They ask a question about fasting now that they have returned to the land and the temple is close to being completed for joyous worship.

The word that is used in this verse to describe the fasting is the word for consecration and respectful religious observance. They simply ask if they still need to fast in the fifth month and the seventh month. We are under the impression that they have been fasting for seven years in the fifth month from what is said. This is then an exile fast, a fast dealing specifically with being exiled from the land. So the question is raised as they are now in the land again if this tradition must be kept. Jesus talked about times of fasting and not fasting. He asked if the disciples should fast when He is with them and replied it need not be so, but when He left, He said that we would fast. So we will receive an answer about fasting for different reasons.

7:4 Then the word of the Lord of Hosts came to me, saying,

It is to this current issue question that God speaks directly through the prophet Zechariah for such a time as this. How many of us are willing to hear the word of the Lord when it comes? Worse than that, how many of us turn to the Word and wait until we hear a clear answer from Him? I'm a pastor and I don't always consider what the Lord would say, or have the patience I should have to hear His voice in the midst of an issue.

God speaks to the issues of our day, if only we would listen. So here, this question deals with a current issue, rather than a law issue. The reason that the prophet answers rather than the priests is that they deal with the Law, and the Law only has one commanded fast, during the Day of Atonement. So this fast that they are referring to is ordered not by the law, but by one of the leaders or someone else. So rather than the law, the word from the Lord will reveal the answer.

7:5 "Speak to all the people of the land and the priests, saying, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth *month* and in the seventh, did you not surely fast for me alone?'

Now we hear what the Lord has to say about this issue of a special fast that has lasted for 70 years of exile. The Lord commands the prophet to speak to all the people of the land and also to the priests, to inform everyone of what the verdict of the Lord is. The word of the Lord comes

in rhetorical questions. The first of these asks the people if they fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the Lord or for something else.

One of the commentators suggests that these historical fasts happened in two different months to commemorate part of the exile of the people in the land. The first, in the fifth month, is a fast because of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. The second fast the Lord mentions through the prophet was concerned with the assassination of Gedaliah, the last governor of Judah. So for 70 years of exile, the exiles had been keeping these fasts to remind them of what had happened in the land as a result of their disobedience. If this is the case, then the fasts are not for the Lord. They are commemorative, and His response is that they need not do these fasts.

While part of the fast would have been for the Lord, the focus was not completely on Him. He uses an intensive here of fasting twice in Hebrew. And He stresses that it was not for Himself alone by using the word for “me” twice. One wonders if the Lord was offended that they would fast concerning anything but Him. But let us see it this way. The people fasted before the Lord because of these two issues, just like we go to the Lord in fasting for something going on in our lives or our nation today. It is not wrong to have an issue that brings about our fasting. But these fasts had become commemorative rather than times to cry out to God.

7:6 And when you eat and when you drink, is it not for yourselves that you eat, and for yourselves that you drink?

The second rhetorical question concerns their motives and priorities. But it is also very applicable to us today as well. A lot of people consider fasting to be a very sacred act, while feasting is considered to be a secular or natural act. But to the Lord, both can be sacred, and are indeed sacred. In fact, every part of our lives is sacred to the Lord, and should be to us. There were feasts as part of the sacred festivals of the Lord in Israel. And there was one fasting day on Atonement Day, Yom Kippur.

The point of this question is that humans eat and drink or don't eat and drink, and it affects them, not God. We do these things because we have to so that we might live. If you don't eat or drink, you die. This is not so for God. God needs no food or drink. God takes no enjoyment in our little shenanigans. He is interested in the heart! The actions do no good with wrong motives or with divided hearts and intentions. God takes note of fasting and feasting only when it is done with a pure heart for Him and not for us.

7:7 Were these not the words which the Lord cried out by the hand of the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities all around her and the Negev and the Shephelah were inhabited?”

The final rhetorical question sparked by these visitors from Bethel asking about continuing memorial fasts makes the prophet wonder at the fact that the forefathers ignored the

prophets, and now they begin to seek them again. But seeking is not enough. They must obey the Word spoken!

The state of Jerusalem is nowhere near its former glory in the former days. In those days, Jerusalem lived on prosperity and was thriving. The word prosperous includes the ideas of being at ease, quiet, and undisturbed. Jerusalem enjoyed the benefits of peace, or shalom at that time. But they did not listen to the prophets or the Lord! And look what that got them. This question warns that the new remnant must not do business as their forefathers did.

The cities all around Jerusalem refer to the other cities in the land of Judah that also prospered. The image here is of Jerusalem being the capital city, and as goes the capital, so go the other cities of the realm. There was prosperity throughout the land. Even the Negev and Shephelah were inhabited. The Negev is the southern lands, a valley that is not always inhabited to the south of Jerusalem. The Shephelah was the lowlands in Israel between Judah and Northern Israel. Of course, these lands are barely inhabited now, but in Israel's history, there was a time of strength when they were well inhabited. A *peh* here separates the rhetorical questions from the prophet and the Lord from the response of the Lord to this question about these fasts.

7:8 Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying,

Next, the prophet responds to the question with a push to do godly and righteous things instead of what their forefathers did. The Lord now speaks to the issue through the prophet and lays down what this reformed remnant community of Israel must do. The prescription from the Lord for this new community is the same, but their application must be different, or they will find themselves in the same types of judgments as their forefathers. In the midst of a new community, one of the best times to approach the Word of God with humble obedience is now as the community is founded and encouraged.

7:9 “Thus says the Lord of Hosts, saying, ‘Judge with true judgments, and show lovingkindness and mercy, each one to another.

The Lord's response to fasts that were not even for Him is that the people need to do what His Law has told them to do since the beginning. They have failed to ask questions about the things that matter to God. These memorial fasts were in honor of two human beings, rather than the Lord. Now we go to prayer for others and we fast in some cases, but we do not fast in a certain month for 70 years. The fasting did no good for the nation because of the wickedness that was rampant.

So the Lord once again issues His desire for this new community as it begins to be established that they must do what He told their fathers to do through the prophets. But unlike their fathers, they need to not only hear, but obey. Once again the title of the Lord is Lord of Hosts. As has so often been discussed, this title refers to the warrior God who will use the armies

at His disposal, whether human or celestial, when He needs to use them. It is almost a threat so that the people will seriously take what He says to heart.

Through Zechariah, the Lord calls the people first to justice. Justice has always been on God's heart. He is the God of the underdog, the wronged, the defenseless. He calls the judges who would sit at the gates to judge with true judgments. The word for true here speaks of constancy in judgments, reliability. The judges are to not flounder in their decisions, nor should they change what used to be a judgment in favor of the victim for one in favor of the abuser for a bribe.

Next, the Lord commands all the people to individually treat one another with lovingkindness and mercy. He wants this to happen not as a social command or cultural mooring but on an individual basis, as seen in "each one to another." Lovingkindness can be translated loyal love, kindness, covenantal love. It is that famous Hebrew word *hesed* which speaks to God's faithful and loyal love for Israel even though they violated His covenant.

Mercy is another great word in the original language. It is a word picture wrapped up in letters. The word for mercy or compassion comes out of the root for womb, speaking of the care and compassion a mother gives to her young. That mercy is to be the attitude and action of every person in Israel. The Lord has highlighted these things before, but the fathers of this remnant refused to heed His commands.

What are some ways that you can demonstrate these elements of kindness to others? It's fairly easy for us to understand giving true judgments. We tend to judge people even before we've even met them! So how can a judgment before getting to know someone be true? Let us hold back judgment so that it is true when it must be given. We should not judge others, as Christ clearly states in the New Testament. But we will judge deeds and actions and even speech. We can't judge the inner part of a person, but we seem to be unable to judge the outer parts that we do observe. Let us be merciful and true in our judgments. Let us not allow favoritism to enter into our judging if we judge others.

We must also demonstrate a loyal love to others. This might be the hardest thing for us to do. It's easy to love family or friends, but we don't tend to love our enemies or people we don't even know. Let us make the extra effort to show love and kindness as God showed kindness to Israel when they did not deserve it. And let us be merciful to all, treating others with the love and care that a mother treats her child. Let us be soft in our approach and attitude, but also wise.

7:10 Also, do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the sojourner or the poor, and let no one plot evil against another in your heart.

As if those were not hard enough, the Lord demands even more from the Israelites. But once again, these are things the Lord has commanded since the very beginning. He commands all of the Israelites to not oppress the four most important social types of people to His heart. Throughout the Law of God in the books of Moses, the first five books of the Old Testament,

especially in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the Law of God is constantly making provision for these four groups on the fringes of Jewish society.

The first group is the widows. Widows in ancient Israel were numbered among the poor. A woman married specifically for protection and provision, as well as love. When her husband died, she could not own property or provide for herself. She was left desolate because of this in a patriarchal society. The individual was not the model in the Old Testament. The group was much more important in their society. So these women would be left without that provision and protection. They could easily be taken advantage of, if it weren't for God looking out for their needs of provision and protection.

The second group is the fatherless, or the orphans. The same story holds true here, except the children are without a father. Children could not provide for their families or themselves. If they had no father, they also had no provision or protection in society and were open to being taken advantage of as well. The third group is the sojourner or foreigner living or visiting in Israel. A foreigner had no rights in Israel, and so they could also be abused. Beyond not having any rights, they would rarely be familiar with the culture and getting around in Israel. They could easily be ripped off in monetary exchanges and business, as well as treated wrongfully and losing in a court judgment because they were not from Israel.

The final group is the poor. The poor in Israel had no recourse. They were most likely poor because of losing their family-owned lands and had nothing to fall back on. There could be other reasons, perhaps sicknesses like leprosy, or inability to find work to pay for their lands. Whatever the reason, this group of people in Israel would also be defenseless if it weren't for God's provision in the Law. Each of these groups would have been on the bottom rungs of Israeli society. They had no one except the Lord to champion their cause. During the time of Israel's darkest period that led to exile, these groups were ignored because God's law was ignored.

The word for oppression contains the ideas of exploitation, violation, rape and any other type of abuse. But the Lord did not just stop with disallowing people to take any kind of advantage over these groups. He pushed it further when He demanded that no one in Israel could plot evil against another person.

This is part of the Ten Commandments, the second part, the last six laws, that govern us in right horizontal relationship with fellow human beings. The word plot speaks of any kind of scheme, devising, planning, or calculating for one's own gain at the loss of another human being. This word has the value of others and how we treat them, whether we esteem them or treat them as less than human.

Today in America, we usually don't care about these individuals or groups of people either. We have a system of social security that supposedly takes care of them. However, the system can easily be abused by those who are not in these categories. I am reminded of Acts 3 where the paralyzed man sat at the temple everyday for most of his life. Do you realize that none of the religious people going into the temple never once tried to help him out of that codependent situation? Peter and John could have given him money, if they had it, but that money would just keep him trapped in codependence.

Instead, the Lord through them set him free to be interdependent, a truly biblical place to be. Let us not think that someone else has a better plan or acts better than we do as the church to help those who are in these situations. We have a better answer than Social Security. I think that if the Church did what it was called to do, Social Security would never be necessary. What can you do to help someone you know in one of these categories close to God's heart? God cares about them so much that his law made provision for them. Money is not always the answer. But what other ways could you help them? If we don't show them the freedom in Christ, then the government will show them how to stay in captivity. The things that break God's heart must break ours as well!

7:11 But they refused to pay attention and gave a stubborn shoulder and they stopped their ears from hearing.

Verse eleven once again points out the reaction of the remnant's fathers that denied God's law and fell into exile. It serves as a warning to this community, that things will change or they will go down the same paths their fathers traveled. Inaction puts us in the same place that we were in before. We must act differently and rightly and with obedience to change from consequences we have formerly received and might still be under today.

The fathers of Israel in the former times before the exile had sometimes not even listened to the word of God from the prophets! The prophet tells us that they refused to pay attention to what God told them through His prophets. They ignored the preached word! And they suffered beyond what they could imagine. The idea of paying attention means to be intently paying attention, or what we call today active listening. It is a verb that speaks of "inclining the ear" in other places of the Bible. Throughout the Bible, the images of hearing and obeying are often grammatically linked, so that when you hear, you then obey.

But instead of inclining their ears, the forefathers of the exile turned the stubborn shoulder and actually stopped up their ears against the hearing of God's Word! The word for stopping up their ears is the word *chabod* in Hebrew. This is a word often used for the weighty glory of God. But here it is a negative use, speaking to their ears being made too heavy and closed to what was heard. It's like when we put our fingers in our ears today! And this verb is in the *hiphil*, which means that they personally stopped up their own ears.

They made an instrument of hearing deaf to God's voice! Even more than not hearing, they did not obey through action. Instead of putting their shoulders to the plow of doing what God commanded, they turned a cold shoulder or a stubborn shoulder. More recently in our time, people like to say something like "talk to the hand because the face isn't listening." That would be our equivalent to what the Israelites did before the exile. They neither listened to God's guiding law nor acted upon what was spoken and preached by the prophets. And look where they ended up! Let us, as James says, be not only hearers of the Word, but doers! The Word is not easy, but it guards against God's wrath. Let us be softened by its hard words instead of being hard and broken in God's hard judgments.

7:12 But they made their hearts flint instead of hearing the law and the words which the Lord of Hosts sent by His Spirit in the hand of the former prophets, so it happened that the great frustration *came* from the Lord of Hosts.

Instead of hearing and doing God's Word, the images for the remnant's ancestors continue. They made their hearts, a soft organ of the body representing the seat of reason and emotions and will in the Hebrew mindset, was made as hard as flint or possibly diamonds. The image here is of one of the hardest metals known to humanity at least at the time. We know today that diamond can even cut through steel! The idea here is that no amount of hard teaching from God could have been harder than the hearts that refused to receive it.

Now once again, we see hiphil verbs here. The people intensively did for themselves the hardening. They made their own hearts like diamonds or flint. They refused to listen to the Lord's law. The Lord of Hosts is once again mentioned, showing that God was ready in His anger to bring armies against them. And so He did, exiling them from the land, as His covenant stipulated.

The Spirit of God is the agent of the sending of God's law and word in this verse through the prophets. This is especially important because it shows us the method of inspiration of Scripture. The Bible is written by the hands of human beings. But it is a spiritual and God-authored book by His Holy Spirit. Notice that the law and prophets were the direct medium used by God's Spirit, the agent bringing the message. The Scriptures may be written by humans, but they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit, making Scripture God's Word, not the word of men.

The former prophets especially speak of the major and minor prophets who lived in Israel's days before the exile, but it is more inclusive even than that. It actually goes the whole way back to the first prophet that was ever in any way rejected by Israel. The former prophets sometimes refers to the books of Joshua on to the Major Prophets we are familiar with starting with Isaiah. So all of Israel's history is in view here.

Because of the stubbornness and unfaithfulness of the people, the Lord's extreme anger, His frustration, is kindled. And the fire of wrath has been started. There is a thorough reasoning and connection between the people's refusal to listen and obey and God's wrath that led to exile. The remnant community could not receive this any clearer! This is a direct cause and effect relationship that is exposed and explained here. Let us take note in our own lives. When we disobey God as His people, we will find that His wrath is just as dangerous as it was to the exiles. Let us instead be soft and open to God's voice. Let us hear and respond lest we find ourselves frustrating the Lord of Hosts who can take His armies and bring scathing rebuke and judgment. When we hear God's voice, we can choose between the blessings of obedience and the consequences of wrath.

7:13 And it so happened that just as He called, and they would not listen, that thus they called, and I would not hear, says the Lord of Hosts,

There is a pronoun change that is of slight interest here. In the beginning of the verse, the Lord is referred to in the third person singular, but in the end in the first person singular. It is most likely that there is an amending by most scholars in this section. I rarely wish to amend the text. I believe that it stands as is without needing us to rip it apart. It seems to me that as the Lord gives the situation as a third party, He cannot stand anymore idly by and personally interjects Himself into the explanation in this last phrase. But that is the only explanation I have for this pronoun change. Most scholars and versions gloss over it.

Not only did God in His frustration bring curses against this community of Israelites who refused to obey the covenant and be faithful to it, but when the Lord commanded and they did not listen, He decided that when they called for His help, He would not hear them. We must remember that we are in relationship with God. If your spouse attempts to talk to you and you don't listen, why wouldn't you get the silent treatment when you want to be heard? So also, the Lord in being offended does to the people what they did to Him. We are so used to talking about how God is merciful and gracious that we forget that He has the right when we don't listen to not listen to us.

7:14 and I drove them away in a storm toward all the nations which they did not know, and the land was made desolate after them from passers-by and from returning, and the precious land was made horrific.

We continue to see the first person singular as the Lord Himself describes the former situation as an example of what would happen if the remnant chooses to follow in their ancestor's footsteps. The image of driving them away has the idea of a raging storm and is most commonly used in reference to whirlwinds. The Lord in His anger acted. And when the storm of His red-hot rage came through Israel to swiftly take away the people by strong winds of change, the people cried out.

But because they did not hear God in His warnings, He did not hear them in His judgment. This serves as a warning to the remnant community and especially to us. We must be obedient to the Lord. First, we must learn to hear His voice above the noise of so many voices in our culture. But when we hear Him, there are strict penalties and a crushed relationship with God to endure if we choose to not obey. Let us be fully aware of the consequence of not listening to our Lord!

God drove them out of the land through the storm of His fury and the winds of His rage carried them to the nations for exile. These were unfamiliar places they were placed in and they knew what it was like to be foreigners without a home. Because they had left the land, it also suffered and became desolate without humans to work it. Because the people would not return, the land that had so been promised in the covenant went into disarray. It was not the Lord's fault.

It was the fault of the forefathers who decided to not listen and obey the Lord. The horror could have been avoided through obedience. Let this be a lesson to all of God's people for all time!

Chapter 8

The Promise of Prosperity

8:1 Then it happened that the word of the Lord of Hosts came, saying,

Once again the Lord brings His word through the mouth of Zechariah and he begins another oracle. Some mark this as the third oracle in chapters seven and eight. There will be a clear split between chapters eight and nine, so here we have a third oracle and then a fourth as the first half of the book closes up.

This is the common language for the beginning of an oracle to the nations. This oracle is to Israel and Judah, to the remnant that is building the temple again. We don't know the specific date of it, but it is before the temple was completely finished, as we will see from an internal piece of evidence. You will notice that the title "The Lord of Hosts" is used frequently throughout this oracle.

8:2 "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy and with great wrath I am jealous for her.'

Once again, as we will see very often in these oracles, the oracle starts with "Thus says the Lord of Hosts." This is a common way in the Minor Prophets to start an oracle, and its full authority and weight lies in the title Lord of Hosts that connotes that God is the warrior in chief of every conceivable army, whether armies on earth or in the heavens.

The Lord begins by saying how jealous He is for His people and for Zion. Zion here should be understood as the city of Jerusalem, because the context of the next verse will speak directly of Jerusalem. Zion can be used of Jerusalem, the temple mount where the Lord's presence dwells, and also for God's people. The word jealous shows up three times here along with other emotions such as anger.

Because of the Lord's jealousy, He's got the back of His people. He will prophesy new things for Jerusalem, a restoration to the peace and prosperity the people have known before. God's jealousy tends in Scripture to be the basis on which He does something, usually extensive. Here, it is the cause for His goodness to be unleashed on the city of Jerusalem.

8:3 Thus says the Lord, 'I have returned to Zion and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem will be called 'the faithful city' and 'the mountain of the Lord of Hosts,' 'the holy mountain'.

Once again we see the familiar oracle beginning of thus says the Lord. Because the Lord is jealous for Zion, He returns to Zion so that He will dwell there. The Lord's presence left the temple mount before He gave His people over to exile, and now He is returning. There have been

other places in the prophets where the Lord's presence makes the environment around Him and the people dance with joy and fruitfulness.

The Lord once again will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, on the holy hill which is Zion, the temple mount where the temple is right now being rebuilt. This promise of God's presence is the beginning of prosperity, the cause for fruitfulness and peace through the city and land of Israel. We must never be mistaken about this point in the Word of God. Prosperity is not the main thing we seek. We seek instead God's presence, and the prosperity and peace come with Him to us. They are mere byproducts, not the goal.

The Lord has chosen to return to Jerusalem, and therefore the city receives three special names or titles because the Lord has returned. The first is "the faithful city." Jerusalem in the time before the exile had been marked by apostasy and idolatry, even though it was the city with God's temple in it! The city will now be faithful to God. He has rooted out the idolatry in it.

The second title is "the mountain of the Lord of Hosts." This speaks to its high place among cities, and also might hint at the Lord's presence. The gods of the world lived on mountain tops. The final title is "the holy mountain." This title may speak to the temple being located in Jerusalem. The temple mount is the mountain in the city where the temple stood. Jerusalem will once again be a vibrant city, like in the times of David.

8:4 Thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'Old men and old women will once again sit in the streets of Jerusalem and each one with staff in hand because of many days.'

Again we see this opening address of prophecy. It becomes a favorite in this chapter and may even focus on several words given either at once or within a certain amount of time, like a day or two. It is as if the prophet records words from several different times in a similar vein. This prophecy speaks to the amount of older people that will dwell in Jerusalem. Now this may sound strange to us, but one of the chief proofs of prosperity is that a person would actually live long enough to see old age. With our great health care today, it is easy to forget that we are living longer now than in most of human history. The average age of natural death in these times could have been as low as the thirties and forties!

But today we live much longer, so instead of seeing this as a great promise of prosperity, we wonder why anyone would want "a bunch of old people in their streets." But this proves to us that there will be prosperity when people live long because of the goodness around them. These older men and women simply want to sit in the streets of Jerusalem and enjoy life as it comes to them. Sitting in the streets might present the wrong picture. The word for streets can speak of a town plaza or square as well. So maybe a better image would be that the older population would enjoy sitting on park benches and watching children play around them in peace.

The phrase old men and women may not have been enough for some in Israel to hear, so the prophet clarifies that these will be people old enough to need a cane to walk because they have had so many years of life. They are great in age or in years. They need a staff or cane to get around. The joy of being old and wise will be theirs and they will live long enough to have their

cake and eat it too. Let us never forget that every moment of life we receive is given by our Lord. He grants life now and in eternity!

8:5 ‘and the streets of the city will be full of boys and girls laughing in the streets.’

Not only will the older people enjoy beautiful days full of life and memories as they sit in the parks, but so also the children will be abundant. The prophet goes from one extreme to the other, the extremely old people to the extremely young people, to show that everyone in between will also live in prosperity.

By signaling out the extremes of age of life, the prophet hints to all of life. So also the children, young boys and girls, will play and laugh in the streets. The word for laugh here speaks of having fun and being entertained, as only children can do. For some reason, as we get older, we lose the ability to laugh and have fun. But in these times of prosperity, everyone will be enjoying the shalom life, the complete life and wholeness of reaching the designed destiny for their lives as the Lord has seen fit.

Our longing for this can only come to fruition in the Lord’s presence and by His grace. Let us learn to enjoy the times of His presence and prosperity that bring not just survival, but the enjoyment of every moment of life. Let us soak in the life that God has given us while we still have it!

8:6 Thus says the Lord of Hosts, ‘If it is too wonderful in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it not be too wonderful in my sight?’ declares the Lord of Hosts.

Another opening phrase presents yet another idea. Here, the Lord tells the people that they can’t imagine how wonderful it will be when Jerusalem is prosperous again, but the Lord will do it. The great desire of the people is also the desire of the Lord. The people long for those days of prosperity and peace. So also the Lord longs for these wonderful and marvelous times of true life to infest Israel with their goodness. And the day is coming when the city will be alight with life again if the Lord has anything to do about it. And He does! A peh here makes a close to these first six verses as we continue in this third oracle after a short break.

8:7 Thus says the Lord of Hosts, “I will save my people from the land of the rising and from the land of the setting of the sun.

The next section of the third oracle opens with a further image than prosperity. In this next image, the Lord promises to save His people. The word save here denotes the idea of being victorious over an enemy or delivering or rescuing someone. It is a militaristic term, and the basis of the name Yeshua, which simply means “The Lord saves.” So the Lord has promised to be victorious for the sake of His people, to deliver them from their enemies in military fashion specifically.

Jesus will do this in the last days. He will bring His armies and be victorious with His people. So here the image of salvation as militaristic is not far off at all. Of course, when the New Testament speaks of salvation, it is not primarily using a military term, but in the Old Testament, salvation usually has a militaristic quality to it.

The Lord has specific lands which He is thinking of saving His people from. First, He will save them from the land to the east, or the land from which the sun rises. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. So, in fact, the land or country to the west is suggested as the next place God will save His people from, which is to say in Hebrew, the land where the sun sets.

Because the lands here are not given by name, I would suggest that much like the imagery going from the oldest population to the youngest to encapsulate all ages during prosperity might extend to this image in this verse. If I am correct, the Lord will save His people from the moment the sun rises to the moment the sun sets, so that His salvation will last all day long. If you take it as a geographical understanding, it could be said that from the extremes of the earth, the Lord will protect His people and deliver them from their vast enemies.

8:8 Then I will bring them and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and they will be to Me My people and I will be to them their God in faithfulness and in righteousness.

After the Lord promises prosperity in the first section of the third oracle, and then salvation, so He continues to promise that He will bring the people from all of these places, from the far regions of the earth and they will dwell with Him in Zion, in Jerusalem. He will bring the captives home from all over the world.

Next we receive a promise that is repeated throughout Scripture and is especially held in high regard by the prophets. This understanding of the people being God's people and God being their God is an expression of faith and fidelity. It means that there will be no other God for the people and there will be no other people for God. They will mutually share a unique and holy relationship to one another. This phrase explains the reason that humanity was created and the goal of the Lord since the beginning of the story. A samek here encloses the second part of the third oracle.

We must be a people who long to be with our Lord. The Bible has promised from cover to cover that God will be with us, that we will be His people and will seek after no other gods, but would hold Him in highest esteem. We must be God's people not only because He possesses us but because we are faithful to Him and don't chase after idols. We have many in our day from TV to a significant other to the things that we spend the most time on. Let us be a people whose priority is God and God alone. Other things are enjoyable, but we receive our greatest joy from being with God. And He will once again dwell with His people in the end! We look forward to our home-going!

8:9 Thus says the Lord of Hosts, “Let your hands be strong, those who are hearing in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets on the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of Hosts, the temple, is being built.

The Lord begins the third part of the oracle by encouraging the people to have strong hands. This is the verse that helps us to see that the people are still building the temple. Their hands must be strong and must finish the work of the temple because the finishing of the temple will bring God’s presence into their midst, into the middle of Jerusalem and that will bring the prosperity that they have been striving for on their own.

Their hands must be strong in completing the work. The work of the temple is paramount because it is the beginning of God’s peace and prosperity and the reversal of their fortunes. The oracle calls for everyone who hears the message being delivered through Zechariah on this day. So the idea here is that if you are hearing the word, as they would be, then you must respond by being strong and working on the temple even more fervently.

The amazing historical fact is that this temple was raised in about four years! The foundation waited fifteen years just to have something added to it! And it is because the people were greatly encouraged by these prophets, by Zechariah and Haggai, who are contemporaries. Now Zechariah does not stand alone in giving the Lord’s word to the people in those days. They also have the former prophets to hear as well as other contemporary prophets who spoke for the Lord. There was not always just one prophet in Israel but usually a number of prophets who spoke for God.

The interesting singular of mouth and plural of prophets may catch us off guard. How can all the prophets have one mouth? The answer lies in seeing the prophets as one revelation from God. IN fact, in the canonizing of the Scriptures, the prophets was a designation for the whole of the Old Testament other than the Torah. The Prophets actually referred to the whole singular prophetic witness over the centuries to Israel. So also we see here the singular, the mouth, but the plural, of the prophets. The prophets may have been many, but they spoke one message from one Lord to one people, His people.

And still today the prophets still speak to us from beyond their time. And there are prophets in our day. When we hear the Lord’s voice so clearly through the mouth of those who reveal it to us, we must act. We must strengthen our hands, be strong in powerful and lasting works. Let us hear and obey with efficiency the word of our Lord through His many prophets. And let us show that we hear by doing what is commanded for us to do!

8:10 For before those days there was no wage for the man nor wage for the beast, neither was there peace from the enemy for the one who went out or came in, and I sent every person against a neighbor.

Zechariah will now remind the people of what it has been like in the past when they have not listened to the prophets or heard God’s Word. The first thing that he mentions is that no man

had his wages. The second thing is that no animal had its wages either. This speaks to economic poverty because the Lord was not obeyed and people did not listen to His wise counsel. To be sure, when we listen to the Lord, we will find ourselves experiencing His power in our lives, and when we hear His counsel, there is a benefit to us not just in finances, but in every area of our lives.

Not only was the economic system failing, but when the people didn't listen to God's word spoken by the prophets, the sojourner or the traveler did not enjoy peace on the roads as he or she traveled. There were enemies all around. They would lie in wait for someone to come along and then take their possessions. The word peace here specifically applies to being able to travel roads without being robbed. But the word is shalom also, a word for completeness and wholeness and wellness. Who can be well when they get robbed every time they travel?

Not only these two, but also the Lord set neighbor against neighbor as enemies. The people warred with one another and took advantage of each other. There was no peace and there was no kindness. This is what happens when we don't turn to God's Word for guidance and wisdom. We do what seems right to us, and the next thing you know, we're warring with one another, being robbed on the roads, and no one gets paid because everyone has their own interests at the forefront instead of other peoples' interests. We need the counsel and wisdom of God more than ever before in our world!

8:11 But now, I will not *deal* as in former days with the remnant of this people, declares the Lord of Hosts.

The picture given to us by the prophet in verse ten is the past. It is dead and gone and over. Instead, the Lord with a challenging "but now" will react to Israel in a completely different way. Although that is what happened in the past, no longer will it be so. The Lord has a different method of operations for Israel's remnant.

The changed community experiences the grace of the Lord. There is no verb in this sentence, so most translations provide one. But the imagery here is that God will not operate in the same way with the remnant as He did with the exiles. Most imply dealing with or operative verbs here. The former days are not the way the Lord will work now. The temporal markers here must not be missed. The former days are the days before and leading up to the exile. But these days now are for the remnant that is faithful to Him.

When we are part of the faithful remnant, God will not work with us the same way He works with those who are not attempting to be obedient or faithful to Him. He will react to us in a completely different way. He will bring grace instead of wrath and judgment. We will enjoy His mercies instead of His anger. Be assured that the Lord has declared it!

8:12 For *there will be* a seed of peace. The vine will give its fruit and the earth will give its produce and the heavens will give their dew. Then I will make the remnant of this people to possess all of this.

Verse twelve continues on the understanding of how this latter time will be different from the former time in almost the exact opposite terms. Where there was no peace on the roads, there will in this time of the remnant be a seed of peace, or a sowing of peace. The word for seed here talks about a seed that is planted in the ground, and although it is small, grows strong and tall and wide and then produces the fruit of peace. The word peace here is that same word shalom, speaking of the wellness and wholeness of a life lived without the hindrances of evil.

Now there is an image of agricultural gain next. This talks about the vine, the grapevine perhaps, that gives its fruit and does not fail. It can do this because the earth or the soil in which it is planted is full of the nutrients needed to make it grow and produce, and the heavens, or the skies, drop their dew and rain on the earth. Throughout Israel's history, we can see times when God stopped the crops from harvesting for Israel or even when He stopped the rain in the days of Elijah. But in this community that is faithful to Him, there will be no stopping peace and prosperity.

In our own lives, we grow in Christ and as we grow deeper and wider in the things of God, we will experience these promises also. We will find that we are prosperous in all that we put our hands to because God is blessing our growth in Him. We will also find that there is a peace in our lives, despite what trials life brings, our deep trust and connection to Jesus the Vine keeps us in peace, knowing that He has ultimately won over the trials and sins of this world.

8:13 Then it will happen that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you will be a blessing. Do not fear! Let your hands be strong!

In this time of prosperity the Lord will also change the fortunes of the nation of Israel. They used to be a curse among the nations. The word for curse here speaks of a cursing or of a byword. They were held as an example of wickedness and evil instead of a nation of God's light and love. Both houses of Judah and Israel are mentioned to speak of the uniting of the divided kingdoms in this prophetic promise.

In the same ways in which the nations had separated from God's desired covenantal direction, so now God Himself will come and save them and make them a blessing. It is not stressed here, but since the times of Abraham, Israel was meant to be a blessing to the nations of the earth. The word save speaks of the militaristic idea of saving or delivering someone, and bringing victory.

Then two commands follow. The first tells the remnant, which at this point is weak and feeble, not having a defensive wall around Jerusalem nor even a temple in which to worship God, to not fear. There was much to fear as the remnant. What if the exile happened again? What if a stronger nation swept right in without national defenses and took them captive again? They must trust in the Lord and not fear what may come. The Lord will be their protection. Sometimes in our lives, we fear what may come. We have so many phobias and among the most universal

are the fear of the future, the unknown and the fear of rejection. We must rely upon God to keep us from fearing these things. He is greater than any fear that we have!

The second command repeats an earlier command in verse nine. The Lord once again tells them to strengthen their hands. The hand was also a euphemism for power or strength in Hebrew. The image here is clear. The people must trust in God. They must be strong in what He has called them to do and not worry about other things. They must carry out His commands. In our own lives, we must also be strong in our hands. We must do what God has commanded. We must not let our fear of failure or any other fear weaken us so that we are incapable of doing what God wills us to do. Let us do the works of God with confidence and strength! A samek ends this section of the third oracle and continues it for a few more verses.

8:14 For thus says the Lord of Hosts, “Just as I planned to bring calamity to you when your fathers provoked Me to anger,” says the Lord of Hosts, “and I did not relent,

The Lord once again speaks through the prophet with the customary “Thus says the Lord of Hosts.” Then He promises that He will plan good things as much as He had planned calamity for Israel in its disobedience. Verse 14 tells us that the Lord planned the calamities that befell Israel when the fathers of the remnant were disobedient. Their disobedience, as we have clearly seen, provoked God’s wrath and rage. That is how they were exiled. They brought God’s wrath through their disobedience and flagrant sins.

There are two important words in the Lord’s speech that need clarification. The first is the word calamity. In Hebrew, this word is the word for evil. But this particular word for evil, as there are several in Hebrew for what we generally call evil, does not necessarily carry a moral connotation. The word for evil here is more about things that are not natural or are not desired. This word can be used of natural disasters and other forms of “evil.” The reason I have not translated it as “evil” is because the English term naturally carries a moral sense to it. Calamity is a better word because it does not specifically connote moral depravity.

The reason why this is so important is that the Lord is the one planning the calamity. The Bible teaches us that the Lord does not do moral evil to us or use moral evil against His children (James 1:13-17). So it is not right to get the idea that God is planning moral evil against His people. Rather the image is of God sending calamities their way that will cause harm, but not morally destroy them. These can be natural disasters like He has already mentioned: holding back rain, letting crops die, and the like.

The other word that is of great importance here is the word for relent. Some translate this as God changing His mind or His will. God does not ever change (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17). He is as theologians call Him, immutable. He does not move or change. So this word is not the word for changing one’s mind as much as it is from not doing what God could have done. It is a word associated with mercy and not bringing the deserved judgment. But here, because the Lord is angry due to the fathers’ sinful disposition, the Lord does not change His plans to bring calamity or punishment. He brings it! All of it.

We must never imagine that we are so much God's children that He will not discipline us by sending calamity to teach us about Him and His ways. Even as God's children, if we choose to sin against Him and we choose to anger God with our behavior and evil, He will discipline us and He won't relent until we have turned away from sin and unto Him. Let us not learn these lessons from the school of hard knocks. Let us turn to the Lord and continue to have a tender heart toward Him!

8:15 “so again I have planned in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Fear not!”

The linking word between verses 14 and 15 is the word planned. God planned judgment because of His anger against the Israelites who would not obey Him. But in the same way that He refused to turn from His wrath in the exile, He will refuse to turn from His plan to bring goodness and blessing into Israel! These days talks about the current time of the remnant. God's blessing cannot be stopped. It is coming to them!

Both Judah, the country, and Jerusalem, the city are explicitly mentioned. That is where the prophet is speaking and that is his audience. But the Lord will bring to all of Israel and to all of Israel's cities this prosperity and blessing. The word for good is used to speak of all kinds of goodness and prosperity. The peace that was mentioned earlier can also be considered in this word's meaning. And once again the Lord calls the people to “Fear not!” They need not worry about the wolves gathering around them. The Lord is their shield.

God wants to do good things in our lives. But that goodness hinges upon our obedience to Him. When we're living in obedience to God, we need not fear the evil around us. We can live in this world but not be of it. We can trust in God to bring us goodness and peace without fearing what others can do to us. We can live with boldness and praise God with our lifestyles and actions!

8:16 These are the matters which you must do: Speak the truth each person to a friend, and judge with truth in your gates, and make efforts for peace.

The Lord once again mentions some of the things that He expected from their fathers in this generation of the remnant. The word for matters or things here is the same word that is used for when God speaks a word. The word debar is a word that means speech or word or matter or thing, an issue. The word is done. The Lord expects the Israelites to do the matter or do the word that He gives. We must also be expected to do what God tells us to do. Let us be obedient to His word!

The first is to speak the truth in the community. Each person is expected to uphold truth in their speech and to not allow lies to fester. They are to be honest and full of integrity as they speak. We need to be a people who do not enjoy telling lies or being false in our presentation and speech. How can we proclaim the true Christ if we cannot proclaim truth?

The second word or matter is to be truthful in their judgments at the gates. The gates were like the town square. The elders of a town or city would sit at the gates and carry out the most important matters of the community from economic exchanges to judging court cases and disputes. So they are commanded by the Lord to judge with the truth. They are not to take bribes or to falsify information or to falsely accuse and judge. Those who are in the wrong must be judged by God's law, not by what people think is right.

Next, the Lord tells them to seek peace, or to make peace. The verb and then the noun for peace are listed, making the search for peace intensive. The people are to seek the good of the others around them. The word for peace is shalom, a word that speaks not only of stopping fighting, but of reconciliation and of living in wholeness and completeness, to wish the wellness of others. We need peace in our lives today, and we receive it first from Christ and then from His community. Let us be a people of peace to those who are battered by this world.

8:17 Each person must not plot evil against a neighbor in your heart, and do not love a false oath, for these are all *things* which I hate, declares the Lord.

There are still further instructions from the Lord beyond the first three. He continues by saying that the remnant must not plot evil against one another. Plotting evil speaks of scheming or setting someone up for an evil outcome. The word here for evil is the word for evil in general, but speaks of every kind of evil, moral, natural, and the like. What is most interesting is that they must not plot evil in their heart.

The Hebrew conception of heart is that the heart is the seat of emotions, will and reason. So the planning out with reason an evil scheme against someone also requires the will and the emotions to be in agreement with the rational part of the human heart. This is a premeditated plan in which the whole of a person is invested in the evil plot. It's not like someone accidentally planned the evil. The planning is full-scale. The phrase also points to a secretive or internal planning rather than a planning that is done with the hands. This is part of Jesus' point about internalizing the sins that we commit. No one can see what a person is thinking, but we can only see with action. So we must be internally pure in our hearts, not just behaviorally.

They are finally called to not love a false oath. This would be when a person would take an oath in favor of something that was not true. In other words, a person is lying, and then calls an oath to use someone or something else's value as collateral for his lie. It could also speak to an oath that is taken to cover up false information. We must be people who love truth and who work in integrity only. Let us not bend to the left or to the right. Our behavior is only as pure as our internal heart and character. A samek here finishes out this section and gives us another short section in chapter eight.

The Days of Teaching the Nations

8:18 Then it happened that the word of the Lord of Hosts *came* to me, saying,

We have a new section here as denoted by this reuse of the formula for a new oracle or a new section. It starts out with an indicator of change in subject or at least a change in time. The phrase “it happened that” connotes a different time or a different oracle, and has been used before in this way. The word of the Lord, which is the debar of the Lord, comes to the prophet. This is the same process that occurs when God is going to speak a word through the prophet. Remember that the Lord of Hosts reminds the people that God has all of the authority and power of the strongest military. He is not someone to toy with.

8:19 Thus says the Lord of Hosts, “The fast of the fourth, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth *month* will be for joy to the house of Judah and for gladness and merry feasts. So love truth and peace!

Now the opening of the oracle is given with the common formula for Zechariah of “Thus says the Lord of Hosts.” What follows is backed by God’s authority, but spoken and written through the prophet. The subject matter returns to an earlier question in chapter seven about the two fasts. But here, four different fasts are mentioned. Earlier the men of Bethel had asked about memorial fasts in the fifth and seventh month.

Here, the prophet speaks of four fasts, not two. He adds a fast in the fourth month and in the tenth month to the list. Now, there is one fast in the seventh month, that is only a day long, on the Day of Atonement. That one is maintained in the Law as a commanded fast. But the memorial fast for the whole seventh month is in view here, not the one day fast on the Day of Atonement. These four fast months will become feast months instead.

In the fasting, the people had in a very real sense been mourning their loss of these two men discussed in the commentary of chapter seven. One was a governor and one was the king, both eliminated by the Babylonians in the exile. The people had been fasting for their safe return originally, but the fasts turned into memorials that were held for seventy years in the exile. Instead of the pain and sorrow of those fasts, the people would now enjoy the feasts in these months, in a thankful spirit to the Lord of His goodness to the remnant community.

The two words here, joy and gladness or joy and jubilation, are synonyms. They serve to intensify the joy that will be had by all. The feasts are meant to replace the mourning with gladness. But the Lord also calls the people to love truth and peace. The hate of truth and peace put their forefathers on the fast track to the exile and fasts that remind them of home in a far away land. Truth and peace are the basis for this new community of the remnant. If they get these right, then the Lord will bless them.

Our Lord cares about truth and about peace. We must be beacons of truth and peace in our culture today. This will not be an easy task. War is easier than peace, more in keeping with our nature. And truth is hard for us to handle, as the popular adage states. But we must be more in love with truth and peace than with lies and war. A peh here gives us a minor stop and opens another proclamation.

8:20 Thus says the Lord of Hosts, “Still yet peoples will come, which are the inhabitants of great cities.

Now the Lord finishes by promising some amazing promises for the people of the new community of the remnant. Once again, we see the common formula mentioned in the last verse. The Lord speaks again through the prophet to promise prosperity and goodness upon Israel. He says that yet in their history they will see a time in which many great people will come to Israel. These will be people of great cities, or people from many cities. I believe that this prophecy is speaking about the gentiles coming into the community of God’s people, becoming part of God’s people, through the gospel.

8:21 Then the inhabitants of one will walk to another, saying, “Let us surely walk to entreat the face of the Lord and seek the Lord of Hosts. Even I am going!”

The people of many gentile cities are telling one another that they are heading to Jerusalem and would like a traveling companion. It seems good to them to go up to Jerusalem and see the Lord there. Israel was always meant to be a light for God’s reputation, but they rarely measured up to that. They were more internal about their witnessing. The gentiles are coming to them and coming to the Lord from other cities.

Within the speech of the gentiles, we see that they long first to worship the one true God in Jerusalem at the temple, and also that they seek Him. Seeking the Lord is the only goal of God’s people. They want to search out the Lord. James tells us that when we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. Another place in Scripture tells us that we will find God when we seek Him with all our heart. This is what the gentiles from many other cities want to do. Their intentions are pure and so they will find God. The dialogue finishes with the speaker proclaiming emphatically that he is going himself to do this.

8:22 Then many people and mighty nations will come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the face of the Lord.

So it shall be that many come to seek the Lord in Jerusalem. Israel will once again become a place where the Lord’s name is called upon and the people hear the voice of the Lord. This is a great reason to get that temple finished, so that many may visit Israel under peace and seek the Lord and worship Him. Often the term for entreaty is a type of worship that can be offered unto the Lord. It has the idea of flattery, and thus worship. No matter how mighty the peoples and nations and cities, they are coming to Jerusalem to seek the Lord. They are humble before Israel and the Lord. This must have been very encouraging to this small and helpless remnant community. A samek separates from the last verse in the chapter.

8:23 Thus says the Lord of Hosts: In those days ten men from all the tongues of the nations will seize the wing of a Judean man saying, “Let us walk with you because we have heard that God is with you!”

The Israelites will find themselves quite popular because their God is seen by even gentiles as the one true God. They will also be called to do the work of a rabbi and teach the men of the gentile nations about the Lord. They will be entreated by these men to teach them and disciple them. Another formulaic phrase opens this last bit of promise. Then the Lord speaks of those days, a future time, in which ten men from another nation will latch onto the Judeans.

Ten is a significant number here. It is of great interest that the amount of men needed to begin a new synagogue was ten. When you had ten or more men, you could start another synagogue as a rabbi. The rabbis are the ones who pick their disciples, as we see Jesus doing in the Gospels. But these gentile men are so desperate to learn about God that they are begging the rabbis to teach them and lead them and disciple them.

They are desperate because they are grabbing or seizing the wings of the cloaks of the common Judean. They aren't even seeking a rabbi. They just want someone who is Jewish to train them in the things of God! The common Jew is called into service for the Lord. I see here a picture of the priesthood of all believers when I read this. Each one of us who knows Jesus is going to be called into service to help others grow deep in God.

But that means that we must first grow ahead of them, because you can't lead someone where you've never been. May we be ready and deep enough in the things of God that we can be used by Him to disciple others! This is no small task! The wing of the cloak is to be understood here, mostly the corner of his garment. They are grabbing the Jews by the pant legs, as it were, to know God. But pant legs is a modernization on my part. The Jews wore a cloak. A final samek leaves us with the thought of the priesthood of all believers in God's people here. Let us be prepared and show ourselves worthy of the task and approved by God to lead others into deeper things in the Word of God. He will make you ready for that challenge!

Chapter 9

Fate of the Gentiles

9:1 The burden of the Lord's word is against the land of Hadrach and Damascus is its resting place, for the Lord's eye is on humanity and all the tribes of Israel.

The first eight chapters of Zechariah are considered one section and the second section starts from chapters 9-14. Immediately in chapter nine we go from the prose of chapter eight to the poetic prophecy in chapter nine. There is a structural and subject change between these two chapters. While the first eight chapters mostly spoke of the visions in the night, this second part speaks mainly of the Messiah. There were messianic visions in the first eight chapters, but the second section seems to purely focus on the Messiah and the future, rather than the current remnant community. But we must not forget that the Messiah binds both sections of one book written by one man together.

The first word in this poetic prophecy is the word burden. A burden here also has the idea of a pronouncement, oracle or utterance. But there is an emphasis on the pain that is wrought within giving the prophecy. The oracle of the Lord is a burden to the prophet, so that the prophet must speak it. Jeremiah said that God's word to him was like fire shut up in his bones (Jer 20:9). It must be spoken.

But this oracle or burden is against the nations that surrounded Israel. The first land that is mentioned is the city of Hadrach. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is Hadrach named but here, but scholars and archaeologists have found the city's name among the Assyrian writings. It is a city in the north above the northern kingdom of Israel. And so is Damascus, recognized to Bible readers as one of the greatest cities of Syria above Israel. The prophet seems to be telling us that Damascus was in league with Hadrach. The point of this opening line is to show us that God's wrath and judgment will first start in Syria on its stronger cities.

The second line of the opening prophecy points to God's sovereign control over His judgment and over the world. The Lord's eye is on humanity. He's watching humanity and knows exactly what is going on around us. The eye is the physical symbol of wisdom or being all-seeing. To see everything is to know all things. God is all knowing. He is not surprised by the nations! But His eye is not only on the nations of humanity and upon every human being. He's also watching Israel. No one is hidden from the eyes of God or from His knowledge.

We must remember this when we look around at what is happening in the world. God is not blind. He sees everything that happens, and He will set all things right. God knows all things. We must take courage in that our God is not blind to our current events. He is intimately familiar with politics, economy, and social and cultural norms and fads.

Everything is in His control. We might want to rise up against perceived evils in governments and economic systems and society, but we must remember that God sees all of these things. That doesn't mean we can't interact, for we are to be salt and light to the world, to

preserve godliness and shine on darkness. But we must not fear the evils of this world. God will intervene in the fullness of time!

9:2 and also on Hamath which borders on it, Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.

Hadrach and Damascus do not stand alone in God's judgment. His judgment also borders on Hamath, another city in the north. We then move even farther north to biblical towns of Tyre and Sidon, which are in the region of Phoenicia. Tyre and Sidon are mentioned throughout the prophets for their economic greed and wealth. Sidon is mentioned in passing, as the prophet will next focus specifically on Tyre. These cities have thought themselves wise, but the comment about them being very wise is either sarcastic or speaking to an earthly or evil wisdom, perhaps their security in wealth and buying protection from "friends."

We must trust in nothing other than God's provision and power. We must not give our trust to politics, economics, or any other institution. Politics fail us and economies fail us, but the Lord never fails us. We must trust in Him alone at all times. That is hard to do when we have money or when political peace seems to be in our grasp. But let us let go of these things in favor of the Lord! We must learn as we walk with God that He is more precious than these things that we see. We must see Him as more precious than these things, than wealth and power and fame.

9:3 So Tyre has built a stronghold for herself and heaped up silver like dust and gold like the mud of the streets.

Tyre is a very rich town, so the people simply built fortresses and strongholds to protect themselves from enemies. The word stronghold can speak of ramparts, siege towers and fortified cities. It is most likely they have made a fort of some kind. One scholar speaks of a fortified city on an island that had strategic value in these times of the remnant. It is said that only the military genius of Alexander the Great defeated the people of Tyre and their fortification. He used the materials in the city of Tyre, which was demolished, to build a causeway out to the island and defeated them there.

Not only did Tyre make a fortress but also heaped up their silver and gold. This was one of the wealthiest cities in the known world, right on the coast and making much wealth from trade routes on the sea and in the land. They had so much wealth that it seemed to be as numerous as the dust on the earth or the mud in the streets. Wealth was so commonplace to them that it was like the dust and mud they walked on. Money might as well have grown on trees in Tyre. But their money could not save them from the Lord's wrath.

9:4 Behold, the Lord will dispossess her and strike down her power on the sea and she will be devoured by fire.

In verse four, we are shocked to learn that it is the Lord Himself who will dispossess the city of Tyre. This is a collaboration with Amos 1:10. Both Amos and Zechariah speak to the burning of the city of Tyre. The words here speak of a fire that will eat or devour the city. But the Lord is intimately involved in their destruction. The power that the city had in its naval forces is not enough to save it. The Lord is involved, and so it will all fall to Him because He is greater than any military.

It would be no surprise to us as we have studied the other Minor Prophets if the prophet here is claiming that the Lord is controlling the attack of Alexander the Great against Tyre. We have seen the Lord use one nation to extinguish another before, such as in Haggai's time. The power of the sea speaks to the naval forces and the ability of the boats, or to the trade routes through boats. Either way, Tyre will lose its most valued possession that guaranteed its wealth and safety. This is why we must not trust in anything or anyone but the Lord!

9:5 Ashkelon will see and be afraid, also Gaza, and it will writhe in anguish. Ekron also, because its hopes are ruined. Then the king will perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon will not be inhabited

From the north and greater north, the prophet now moves to the west of Israel, to the land of the Philistines. Throughout the Old Testament we have seen the cities of the Philistines, their powerful four cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gaza. Now all of these powerful cities come under the Lord's judgment as well. The Lord starts with Ashkelon. The inhabitants of Ashkelon will see what God does to Tyre and will fear what could happen to them. The reigning idea will be that if God can do that to Tyre, then there is no hope for Ashkelon.

The oracle says that both Ashkelon and Gaza will writhe in anguish. The literal meaning here is that they will writhe very much. The image of writhing brings to the concrete mind the writhing of a pregnant woman in labor. Such will be the pains of the people of these two cities. Also Ekron will not be left out of the judgment. Instead the inhabitants of Ekron will also writhe in pain. The hopes that it would be a greater city are dashed and ruined. The word for ruined has the connotation or idea of being ashamed by what is happening elsewhere in the land. God is making examples of these cities and it is frightening to their neighbor cities.

The last part of this verse tells us that the king of Gaza will perish or be taken away. It is most likely that he is killed and Gaza comes under the rule of this oppressor, most likely the historical Alexander the Great. Alexander captured these lands in the 330s BC. Gaza will no longer be free or under the rule of a king. It will fall under the rule of its oppressor. More than this, the proud city of Ashkelon will not be inhabited. Whether all of its people are taken captive, killed, or sent to another land, the proud city will be empty and become a ghost town. So much for trusting in pride, as the prophet will now mention. Our trust can only be in the Lord if we are to withstand the sands of time and the evil of this world!

9:6 and a mixed people will dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

Next, Ashdod suffers its fate. This also once proud city will now no longer be pure, but will instead have mixed people inhabiting it. The word for mixed people here connotes the idea of a half-breed or a child of incest ruling in that city. The people will be forced to follow one they do not wish to follow, one who is illegitimate. Or it can also be understood that the people themselves will be a mixed people and the whole city will no longer be of one race. Perhaps others from other nations and geographical places will dwell there.

No matter how we take this verse, the once proud cities of Philistia, the proud people of that land, will be humbled by the Lord through the hand of an oppressor. They will no longer be independent and self-serving. They will serve the whims of an oppressor instead. We must not trust in our own nationality or in anything other than Jesus. If there is anything we understand from a prophecy like this, it is that we will only live if our trust is in the Lord alone!

9:7 Then I will take away its blood from its mouth and its abominations from between its teeth, and it will also be a remnant for our God and it will be like a clan in Judah and Ekron will be like the Jebusites.

At some point, which is not specifically announced to us in this prophecy, the Lord will then take away the blood from the mouths of these cities. He will return their prosperity to them at some point, but it will not be business as usual for them. The image of blood from the mouth can be taken as either the Lord will heal the wounds of the people, just as wiping blood from a mouth that is bleeding from internal injuries. But it can also be taken, and more likely, that the people were drinking the blood of animals or even people as part of their pagan rituals and sacrifices, and that this practice will stop during the restoration or return of the Lord. The word return speaks the same as it does when God talks about returning to His people in Israel.

These cities and nations will know the Lord like Israel knows the Lord, as we will see. The second image is also an image of idolatry, the abominations between their teeth perhaps speaking of the detestable things they did or literally of the meat of idols or some other form of idolatry. The word abomination speaks of idolatrous and detestable things. So it may be that the people will be fulfilling the Law of God! There is a time in which this did happen, during the time of the Maccabees, when the people were possessed by Israel's forces and were forced to obey the Law. But it is most likely that this speaks to a future time.

The city of Ashdod is the referent for the pronoun here when we talk about its teeth and its mouth. But the whole of Philistia is in view. The surprise of this verse is the promise that the Philistines, the Gentiles, would be like the remnant and would be like a tribe of Judah! This verse specifically prophesies that these Gentiles will be somehow absorbed into Israel like a tribe! We see that the Gentiles are, as Paul puts it in Romans, grafted in to the people of God through the Gospel! The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem before David absorbed them into Israel when he took the city as his capitol. What a great promise fulfilled in Christianity, that the Gentiles and nations would somehow be part of the people of God! And we're talking about the Old Testament here!

9:8 Then I will encamp at My house with a garrison so that none will pass from here and return there, and no oppressor will cross over them again, for now I see with My eyes.

Finally, the Lord promises protection for these cities that endure His judgment through an oppressor that He controls. He talks about a garrison that is encamped to protect the people from future attacks by the oppressor. We know from history that Alexander the Great did not come back through these lands once he captured them, so this may be prophesying about him.

The Lord talks about no one passing to or fro in the land. His protection is because He now sees them, whereas before He ignored them. In His wrath, the Lord allowed them to be overtaken, but now after their restoration, He will protect them. It is not that the Lord sees them for the first time, but that He has focused His attention on them. A samek cuts this section from the next section that will bring further revelation.

Messiah Brings Prosperity

9:9 Rejoice abundantly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, indeed on the foal of a donkey!

This verse is an incredible and messianic verse. We know this because it is quoted by the Gospels about Jesus. Jesus set up this instance to send the message that He is the messianic King talked about here. The story of the Triumphal Entry is found in Matthew 21:1-11 and Mark 11:1-10. This verse is quoted by the Gospels to show that Jesus is this messianic king. When a verse is quoted in the New Testament, the context of that verse usually holds true as well. It's like making an allusion to a movie. When a quote happens, people who know the movie will quote the next line or remember the situation.

So this whole section is about the Messiah, Jesus. The daughter of Zion is called to rejoice abundantly. Literally it means to have much rejoicing. A synonym for the daughter of Jerusalem is to shout in triumph. This is poetic in nature. Hebrew poetry often puts line upon line that is similar. The two lines, daughter of Zion and daughter of Jerusalem, are essentially the same and the line of rejoicing and of shouting are essentially the same. They call the group of people living in Jerusalem, Zion, the people of God, to rejoice in triumph, which is why the fulfillment of this prophecy is called the Triumphal Entry.

Then there is that attention-getting behold. It prepares us for the vision that we see in the prophet's words. There is a king, the king of the people, belonging to the people, who is the Messiah. How do we know that he is king? He is described as righteous and having salvation. Righteousness was a trait that a true king must have, and Jesus fulfills that part of these descriptions. Then it says that he has salvation with him. Salvation was thought of in primarily

militaristic terms, but Jesus came to save us from sin, not some army. So He fulfills this part as well more differently than we could have imagined!

The next image does not match the kingly characteristics. He is humble and riding on a fresh colt, a donkey that has never been ridden before. Humility may be the character trait of God's chosen king, but it was rarely seen in earthly kings. Most kings have a world of pride to surround them. But not this king. Jesus came in humility and died in humility. He thought Himself not worthy of God, yet He is God, as Paul tells us in Philippians 2. Jesus completely fulfills this prophecy.

But there's more. Many scholars only reference verse nine for this, but the rest of the passage continues to illuminate what Jesus' reign will be like. Sometimes the prophets give us instead of a glimpse into Jesus' earthly ministry a glimpse into His person. This is why sometimes the prophets talk about the first coming of Christ and the Millennial Reign in the same breath. Jesus did this in His first coming 2,000 years ago. But He will be that king who is righteous and more of this prophecy that follows will be fulfilled when He reigns in the Millennium.

9:10 Then I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem and the battle bow will be cut off. Then He will speak peace to the nations and His rule will be from one sea to the other sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Not only will the king be righteous and have salvation with him, as well as being humble, but he will also bring peace to the whole world. The imagery here is of the battle weapons. The chariot is infamous as we have already seen from Zechariah's visions, for war. It is the greatest war machine in antiquity and the tank today would be its comparison. But Jesus the King will cut off the chariot. There will be no need in Ephraim, or northern Israel, to fight with chariots because there will be no war.

Also Jerusalem will be cut off from the battle bow. The bows and arrows that are launched in war have no necessity in Christ's kingdom. God's people will not need to fight because He will usher in peace instead of these weapons. The Lord will speak peace to the nations. In Revelation, there is an interesting image of a sword coming from Jesus' mouth. I wonder if this is the same as speaking peace to the nations.

Then it talks about Jesus having the rule of the whole world. From the River speaks of the River Euphrates and the other seas that are mentioned are probably the uttermost boundaries of Israel. And if it weren't enough to mention the extremes of the land boundaries of Israel, the prophecy is even more clear in saying that the Lord will rule to the ends of the earth. He will rule in Israel, all of Israel, and beyond. Jesus will rule this world in the coming Millennial Reign described in Revelation 20:1-6.

9:11 You also, because of the blood of My covenant with you, I will set free your prisoners from the pit where there is no water in it.

The second person pronoun here not only speaks to the remnant waiting for their Messiah King to come to them, but also to us today, who are waiting for the Lord's return and second coming! We are part of what God is about to do because of the blood of His covenant. For the remnant community in the time of history, the first covenant was the key, which was also brought in through a blood covenant. But for us today, we speak of the new covenant that is made with the blood of Christ.

The setting free of prisoners speaks to bringing out those who were imprisoned through the exile from a place with no water. The image of a pit with no water might have also spoken of Sheol. Several times in poetry, a hopeless life circumstance is spoken of like Sheol, the place of death. For us today, this imagery goes very well with imagery of salvation and being saved from death because of eternal life, and the Living Water. We don't have to languish in a pit with no water anymore. We have Jesus, the Living Water and we walk in liberty! We are no longer prisoners and slaves to sin. We live and walk in His covenant and freedom.

9:12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope. Even today I announce that I will return double to you!

The prophet encourages the people of the remnant and those just freed to return to the strongholds, to get back into the fight for freedom for others. For us today, when we are freed from our former lives, we are to place our trust in Christ and then help someone else who is a prisoner. This is what we call witnessing. The Lord promises these people in the remnant that He will return double to them, will increase them by double! He is pouring out His blessing now, not just in the future. Will we take the blessing and gifts that God bestows and enjoy them now? Let us look to today as part of the victory and enjoy His good gifts!

9:13 Thus I have bent *as a bow* Judah for Me. I have set Ephraim as My arrow. I will awaken your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and set you like a warrior's sword.

This verse is a specific prophecy spoken about the intertestamental period, but also speaks to the people of God being used in righteous war, perhaps in the battle of Armageddon. Whereas the imagery of peace was to cut off the battle bow, here the Lord says He will use Judah, the southern kingdom as His battle bow against a great foe. Historically, this speaks of the time in which the sons of Maccabeus defended Israel from the Greeks and Alexander the Great, but it also shows us that God will use His people in battle. God's people are battle-tested and ready to serve Him even in war if need be.

Ephraim, the northern kingdom, is set as the arrow on the bow. The sons of Zion, or the people of God, will be awoken to fight the sons of the Greeks. The word for son speaks of descendants here, for it will be a number of generations before this will come to pass. Not only is

the battle bow mentioned and the arrow, but also the sword. These forms of combat are lethal and the Lord speaks of victory. He does not go to war lest He be victorious.

9:14 Then the Lord will appear over them and His arrow will go forth like lightning and the Lord God will sound with the trumpet and will march with the whirlwinds of the south.

Not only will the Lord use His people in battle, but He Himself will be present with them in battle. We see this also in Revelation as Jesus leads the armies into battle as a true King and divine Warrior. The Lord will appear over them. He will show up for the battle. He will shoot His arrows forth and they will be quick arrows, quick as lightning.

The sounding of the trumpet is a sound that would signal a victorious charge by the troops. He will march with them into the battle and will be like the whirlwinds from the south. Whirlwinds from the south must have been fierce storms in the lands of Judah, so the fierceness of the Lord will be unmatched. He will fight with and for His people. We do see this in Revelation as the Lord leads into battle. For the remnant community, the sign that God would be with His people in their battle and struggles in the future was a source of comfort and encouragement.

For us today, we must realize that the Lord does not send us into the fire alone. We are not without His daily presence and His Spirit. We have God with us as we fight our own battles and as we live for Him. When trials come, the Lord is a source also to us of strength and comfort. Let us be encouraged by His presence to fight the good fight with every fiber of our being. May we never give in to the enemy, who is already defeated!

9:15 The Lord of Hosts will fence them in and they will devour and tread down the sling stones, and they will drink and will growl like with wine and they will be full like a bowl, like the corners of the altar.

The Lord will be the people's defense by going on the offense. He will fence in the Greeks so that they cannot win the battle. He will then allow His people to devour the Greeks, to tread them down. No matter what they fight with, even slings and stones, they will lose to God's people. The word devour here is the word for eating. God's people will devour the enemy, will consume them so that they are no more.

The people of God will drink and will growl like with wine. They will drink in the victory and shout to the Lord with praise for His deliverance and salvation from their enemies. They will be full with the victory of God like a bowl or basin that is filled. And the image of the corners of the altar being full might speak either of being full of sacrificial meat or of the blood from the sacrifices. Either way, these are images of victory in battle caused by the Lord's presence with His people in battle. We are victorious in Christ, and we need to not forget that when trials come!

9:16 Then the Lord their God will save them on that day as the flocks of His people, for the jewels of a crown they will assemble on His land.

Once again the promise of salvation is given by God. I would suggest that this prophecy talks about peace only because God has won the battle through His people. Then they will have peace. The peace of Christ's reign in Revelation comes only after the battle of Armageddon. But the Lord's victory ushers in that peace. The word save here is once again a military term of deliverance and victory.

The people of God are described in two ways. First they are described as flocks of sheep that must be protected by the Lord. This imagery of shepherding had its place among the kings of Israel. David, the greatest king, was a shepherd first. Shepherding speaks to the peaceful care of those under the care of the king. Jesus will be like a shepherd in that He will care for all under His reign.

The other image is that of the people of God being jewels on a crown. The word here is stones, but the imagery of jewels is implied from the context of the crown. This can be viewed in at least two different ways. At the end of Revelation, the people of God are seen as a precious and beautiful city that comes out of heaven in the new creation. The people of God are precious to King Jesus.

We are beautiful to Him and we are precious, of matchless value to our God. Another way we can understand the imagery of jewels in a crown is that we belong in His possession, for the next phrase says that the people of God will assemble on the lands of King Jesus. Just like the stones or jewels are gathered to make the crown. Our King will rule in peace and prosperity, and we will be precious to Him, not a bunch of peasants.

9:17 Thus what of His goodness! And what of His beauty! Grain for young men will prosper and new wine for young women!

This final verse talks about that prosperity and the perfect situation that the King's subjects will live in. He is a good King, full of goodness and mercy. He does whatever is good. He does not rule as any other king in human history, for His reign is greater than humanity has ever known or will know. King Jesus is matchless in His reign! But He is not only good. He is also beautiful. Theologians speak of the beatific vision of God. We rarely stop to see how precious Jesus is to us. We talk about how precious we are to Him, but He must also be precious to us. He is indeed beautiful and His kingdom will be elegantly beautiful, like the sweetest poem.

The next image is the image of prosperity in two separate images. The peace that the Lord brings with Him provides for prosperity, which is the destiny of His people. When they work the land, they will get a fruitful crop for their labor. The young men who work in the fields will have grain for their work. Not only for the young men, but also for the young women will prosperity be found. As the young men harvest the crops and grain, the young women tread out the grapes and provide new wine. New wine is the sign of a prosperous future!

Chapter 10

Israel Restored From Exile

10:1 Ask from the Lord rain in the season of the spring rain, the Lord who makes the thunderclap, and He will give to them rain showers, to each the grass in the field.

Although in English Bibles there is a chapter break here, and in most minds a chapter break begins a new train of thought, 10:1-2 actually completes the thought of the last section in chapter nine. So the new section is not until verse three. These two verses continue to illuminate more about the Messiah and how His reign is different from other reigns.

Verse one is an application of the truths of prosperity mentioned in the last section. It continues the thought that the land will be fruitful again. The Lord continues by saying that all the people need do is ask the Lord for rain and the rain will come. This reminds me of when Jesus tells us to ask anything in His name and it will be given. God greatly desires to give His true people their hearts' desire, because their desire is His desire. James tells us that we have not because we ask not. So here, the Lord simply tells His people to ask for the rain.

Notice they need to ask at the proper time. Timing has a lot to do with how God answers when we ask. Sometimes it is not in His time yet, and so we do not yet receive. The answer is not no. The answer is wait. Here, the people must ask for this good thing in a time it is expected. Several times throughout the Old Testament, God has held back the rains when they were expected to come, and crops were ruined because of the people's wickedness and idolatry and disobedience. But when the time comes for the rains to fall, when the people ask the Lord for rain, He will bring it in the due season.

The Lord's ability to answer the prayers of the people for rain is due to the fact that He is Creator. Because the Lord makes the rain, He can send it to His people. He is the one that makes the storm clouds that make the rain. The storm clouds here can also be interpreted as the thunderclap or the lightning. It is that machine that produces the rain that is referred to. The rain is asked for because it is needed to make the plants and vegetation grow. So when the people ask the Lord, in the proper season, He will pour out the rain and the ground will yield grass and every green thing. The Lord does answer our prayers and give us what we ask when it is in His time.

10:2 For the idols utter disaster and the diviners see falsehood and they tell empty dreams and futile comforts. Therefore, they wander like sheep; they are wretched for lack of a shepherd.

The potency of God's ability to make it rain with the mere asking from His people in the rainy season is directly opposite that of what the people expected the idols to do when they were disobedient. While God is the Creator of the whole earth and can do anything, the idols can do

nothing and those that serve the idols, diviners and sorcerers, find themselves impotent and their gods dead.

The idols don't speak, but the people find disaster when they look to idols. The diviners only work with lies and empty or vain dreams. And their comforts are futile. There is nothing in idolatry. Only the true God of Israel will hear His people and respond. Their fathers have served vain images and allowed diviners to do the work of prophets, but they only received emptiness and futility. Think back to your old life before you met Christ. Was anything really worth what you put into it? Did any of it truly matter? If it did, you would still be doing that today. But since it was futile and empty, you have turned to God who is full of precious glory and gives us meaning and purpose!

Because the idols were false guides that could not actually lead God's people, the people found themselves wandering like sheep without a shepherd, and their state was wretchedness and emptiness. They only knew the evil of disobedience and idolatry. They had no shepherd to guide them and they were lost in futility. The Lord mentions this because He is about to punish their shepherds who were false shepherds. The Lord is the only shepherd. There are no others. We must listen only to His voice as we walk with Him! A Peh at the end of this verse closes out our section on the Messiah's coming.

10:3 Against the shepherds My anger grows hot and upon the rams I will visit punishment, for the Lord of hosts visits with care His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like His majestic horse in battle.

The mention of God's people shepherdless to end the last section brings God to a warning about His people and their leaders and shepherds. I don't believe this polemic is charged against the remnant's current leaders of Zerubbabel and Joshua or their administrations. It is most likely either referring to the past or the future. The shepherds are leaders that are supposed to nurture and care for the people in their leadership.

But the shepherds have not been doing their job. They have instead incurred the wrath of God for their inability to be shepherds, or for their wickedness as shepherds. For some injustice or ill treatment of God's people, His flock, the shepherds and the rams, or the leaders, will be punished. The word for visit is used twice here, as we have seen it used in several contexts throughout the prophets. Visiting could be good or bad. It could be for punishment or for blessing. Here it is used twice, the first for punishment of the wicked rulers, and the second for caring and nurturing of the abused people of God.

While the Lord would bring judgment upon the rulers and shepherds, He would then visit the people with care. He would come to the house or nation of Judah and would make them like His majestic horse in battle. The battle references that follow from this verse on might suggest that the people were either defenseless or were in danger from outside forces. Once again, the title Lord of Hosts is used to show how the same God can punish the wicked and care for the innocent in the same moment.

The comparison to the Lord's own majestic battle horse might suggest that the Lord would come and make His people battle ready and they would be majestic in their battle movements and their enemies would be in awe of their tactics. He would teach them the art of war so that they could defend themselves and no longer be in danger.

10:4 From him will come the corner-tower. From him will come the tent peg. From him will come the battle bow. From him will come every ruler together.

Some translations say cornerstone, but the imagery here we have seen before. This word has been used in battle scenarios and images. It is the corner tower of a wall that would probably see the enemy armies coming first. It is not the cornerstone of a building or the temple here. The people of God, specifically the house of Judah, the southern kingdom, would be God's prepared people. They would see the battle coming and be ready to fight.

In this verse we can clearly see the poetry of Hebrew as the phrase from him will come is repeated four times. All of the four things that originate with Judah are battle-oriented. Judah is getting a battle upgrade and will be ready for battle. From Judah will come the defense of Israel, the corner tower. But also from Judah comes the tent peg to build encampments for its armies. Along with this comes the battle bow that strikes from afar. And finally, every ruler will come from Judah as well. We see that God is entrusting Judah with a lot of responsibility.

10:5 Then they will be like warriors treading in mud of the streets in battle. And they will fight because the Lord is with them, and they will put to shame the riders of horses.

Judah will no longer be weak among the nations. It will be strengthened by the Lord and will be something to worry about on the battlefield. The remnant must feel weak at the time of this prophecy. They have no wall around Jerusalem for protection nor do they even have a finished temple quite yet. They have no way of protecting themselves, but the Lord here is promising to teach them how to fight.

When the Lord is done training Judah, the nation will be like warriors and mighty men of valor once again. There was a time during the early king period in which they had a strong and vibrant army of mighty men. The word for mighty men here can mean hero or warrior. When every man of your army is a hero, there is no weakness for the enemy to take advantage of. The armies of Judah are pictured as trampling upon their enemies as a person tramples on the mud in the streets. They will walk all over their enemies in the midst of any battle!

This is music to the ears of the weak remnant. They long to hear these promises of strength and ability. But more important than having a strong army is knowing that in their fighting, the Lord is with them. All of the times in Israel's history when the Lord was not with them they suffered defeat at their enemies' hands. No one is successful in anything lest the Lord be with them. But these people will even on foot put to shame the enemies riding horses. Usually

in military tactics, the high ground is more defensible. It is easier to cut people down from atop a steed, but the warriors will fell those on horses.

All of this happens because the Lord is with them. This cannot be stressed enough. The Lord is our security. He is our success. He brings us what we need. The promise of a strong army is a good thing, but the better promise is that the Lord will be with the people. That alone is more precious than any army. The Lord will teach them how to fight and be with them. But they must fight their battles. He will give them the ability and strength. And God will give you the ability and strength to do whatever is laid before you, because He is with you!

10:6 Then I will make superior the house of Judah and the house of Joseph I will save, and I will bring them back because I have mercy on them, and it will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the Lord their God, and I will answer them.

While the southern kingdom of Judah is beginning to be restored, the prophets have been silent on how well the northern kingdom is doing in the return from exile. It is possible that the northern kingdom has yet to even see the inhabitants return. This verse tells us that God will make both Judah and the house of Joseph, or Ephraim one of his sons, strong again or as I have translated, superior.

The line actually says that Judah will be made superior but Joseph will be saved by the Lord. The Lord promises to bring back the people of the northern kingdom of Israel, called Ephraim, and here Joseph, by most of the prophets. God will save Joseph and the word save here is the militaristic term for deliver. It is the same word from which Jesus' name comes. Following this promise of salvation is the promise that God will bring back the inhabitants of northern Israel as well.

The image of bringing back reminds us of God bringing out the slaves of Egypt long ago and also the imagery of the remnant. We will actually see the prophet slip into imagery of leaving Egypt later in the prophecy. God even gives the reason for allowing the northern inhabitants to return. He is merciful. The word for mercy is one of the most concrete word pictures in all of the Bible. It comes from the word for womb and speaks of the mercies and compassion a mother has for her child, providing the perfect place while in the womb. God's mercies and compassion are like that nurturing and protection place.

But the Lord won't only save them and bring them back because He is merciful. There's more! He will forgive them. He will make things as though they were never rejected. He will not hold a grudge or remember their sins against Him. He is their Lord still. He answers their prayers and cries for help finally by returning them and forgiving them and having mercy on them. This is the Lord that we serve! He is a God of salvation and mercy. He forgives and forgets. He treats us better than we would ever deserve to be treated. God's forgiveness is His greatest gift!

10:7 Then Ephraim will become like a mighty warrior and their hearts will be glad as with wine, and their children will see and be glad; their hearts will shout in exultation unto the Lord.

Ephraim, or the northern kingdom, will also become strong like Judah. He also will have his armies of mighty warriors and heroes. When the northern and southern kingdoms are strong militarily, the northern kingdom will have people full of glad hearts. The gladness is like that when they have wine. It is a gladness like when they are prosperous. Not only will the people be happy, but the children also will be glad or rejoice.

Then there is another verb of rejoicing, the rejoicing of shouting the exultations of the Lord. The children will rejoice in God for His goodness and mercy to them. They will not be timid in their praise of God. When God is good, it is easy for us to praise Him. But when the times are tough, do we still lift God up on high with the same vigor and gladness? Do we lift Him up even in the good times like that? Or are we timid in our praise of God? He deserves all we can give and more!

10:8 Then I will whistle for them and collect them because I have redeemed them, and they will increase as they increased *before*.

When we see this image of God whistling for His people to come back to Israel, we have in our own minds from our culture the image of whistling for a dog. But that is not the image here. Remember the context of the shepherd who is guiding and leading His people. The people are like sheep, and whistling for sheep is a calming and guiding action of shepherds, not a belittling image as we receive with whistling for a dog. There is precedent in other passages about God whistling to His people in Isaiah 5:26; 7:18-19.

The promise is not only that God will call His people to Himself, but that He will also collect them, or gather them together. He is the one doing the work, not His people. They are obedient to the call or whistle like sheep. But He does the calling in His timing to go to their home. And when they are gathered, they will increase as they used to increase. This probably refers to the increase that was promised to Abraham about the nation he fathered being like the sands of the sea and the stars of the sky in number.

The reason for God doing all of this is because He has redeemed them. Since God has bought them back, He can decide what He wants to do with them. When we own something we decide what happens with that. The people of God are His possession. He has bought the people of God back from sin and death and disobedience and idolatry. So now He decides what to do with them. He could punish them. He could sell them. He can do what He wants, but God decides to bring them back home and gather them together! That tells us a lot about who God is.

10:9 Though I scattered them among the peoples, yet in faraway places they will remember me and they will live with their children and return.

Verse nine talks about what God has done because of the people's idolatry and sin. He scattered them among the peoples of the earth. Both Assyria and Babylon had a foreign policy of deportation of natives to their lands or other lands. When you're in an unfamiliar land, you're less of a threat. And having all of their enemies spread out instead of together made it easier to control them. The enemies could not form a power base or gain support.

Even though the Lord allowed the nation of Israel to be scattered and dispersed, the people simply worshipped Him from where they were around the known world. In faraway countries and places, God's people, though few in that little area, still called out to Him and remembered Him. They still worshipped Him, to the point of persecution by the locals in most cases. We have records of the persecution from Daniel and Esther, to say the least.

The Jews that were dispersed did not forget their God. In fact, they kept family ties and their children learned about God. One of the greater beneficial elements of the dispersion was the beginning of synagogues, places of worship and Scripture study. Because the Jews could not sacrifice to the Lord because the temple was destroyed and they weren't in Jerusalem, they put the same amount of dedication into study of Torah instead of sacrifice. And they returned when they received the opportunity. Although many of them did not return historically, they may have returned to the Lord in their hearts and practices.

No matter where we are in life and geographically, what matters to God is that we are spiritually close to Him. We don't need to be in a certain place to worship God and honor Him. In fact, we should be doing that in every place that we are in life and geographically. Let us be fully dedicated to God no matter where He has placed us. Our location with Him is the only location that matters. Wherever you go, worship God and honor Him. The Great Commission tells us that in our going, we are to preach the Gospel and make disciples, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Are you doing that where you are today?

10:10 Yes, I will bring them back from the land of Egypt and from Assyria I will gather them and to the land of Gilead and Lebanon until no land can be found for them.

Here we see the prophet give some imagery of what has happened in the past to stir the point of the people returning to the land and to God. God says that He will bring them back from the land of Egypt. To our knowledge, there were not so many Jews that were taken to Egypt, but this is not a literal image. Egypt is most often the image in the prophets of slavery and spiritual destruction.

So the people are figuratively in Egypt and they are in bondage to the places they have been deported. They're not home. They're aliens and strangers. The Lord will bring them out of their slavery and He'll also bring them out of the land of Assyria. Assyria was the nation that took the northern kingdom captive. So this promise now extends not only to the southern kingdom of Judah, but also the northern kingdom. Assyria was brutal in their treatment of the Israelites.

But the Lord is bringing them home, specifically speaking of geography. He will bring them to the lands of Gilead and Lebanon. These two places are the lands east and west of the Jordan. God will restore them to the promised land that He gave them as part of His covenant with them. But then there is something very interesting said next, something bigger than just restoration. The Lord then tells them that He will bring them into the land until no land can be found for them.

What is He talking about? The land is only so much of a resource. At some point, the Israelites, or I would say more exactly the people of God, will become too numerous for the dimensions of the land that were promised to them. How will this happen? Through the expansion of Christ's kingdom that is without barriers cultural or geographical. The land will not be enough to hold a kingdom that goes beyond land. This is talking about the whole people of God, Israel and the Church with its Gentiles included.

There will be too many to stay in that plot of ground God gave to Israel. Abraham's descendants indeed will be more numerous than the stars and the sands! Now the Bible describes some of how God is doing this, especially through Paul's attempts at understanding the mind of God in Romans 9-11 with the grafting in of God's people, no matter their introduction to God's kingdom and people. We can't completely understand exactly how God does this, but He has a great kingdom full of people that would definitely not fit in the bounds of the land promised to Israel! And you and I are part of that great Kingdom as we believe on Christ!

10:11 And he will pass through in the sea of distress and strike down the waves of the sea, and all the depths of the Nile will be dried up, and the pride of Assyria will be laid low, and the staff of Egypt will fall.

Now there is a promise that once again calls the imagery of the Lord's rescuing His people from Egypt, as they passed through the Red Sea unharmed and Pharaoh's armies were destroyed. The sea of distress might speak to the persecution and troubles that faced Israel in other nations and in their return to the land. We know from books like Nehemiah that they still suffered the disdain of others around them in their rebuilding of their nation.

The striking down of the waves of distress speak to Israel's ability, through God's help, to deal with the pressures of persecution and abuse from other nations. It also bears a striking resemblance to the image of Moses striking the water with his staff to separate the waters of the Red Sea, after which the depths of the sea dried up before them and they walked on dry ground.

But after the nation of Israel passed through the Red Sea, Egypt was crushed when they pursued. So also, Assyria and Egypt will suffer God's vengeance for His people. Assyria was a very prideful nation that will find itself humbled, and Egypt will lose its king or Pharaoh, its guide and leader, its shepherd's staff. Egypt's leadership will fall.

10:12 I will make them superior in the Lord and in His name they will walk, declares the Lord.

Verse 12 reminds us of verse six in its promise to make Israel strong and superior to the other nations once again. The Lord will do this for Israel. It won't be Israel doing it for themselves, but it will be their trust in the strong name of God that will grant superiority. The word for superior speaks of excellence and strength like none other. While we imagine superior speaks of the nation in its military and economics, here, the idea is that they will be spiritually superior to others, in that they will know the Lord, be superior in the ways of the Lord.

We know that the people will walk in the ways of the Lord and they will walk in the strength of God's name. The name is always referring to the reputation of a person in the Old Testament. So Israel's superiority will not be by their own merit but rather based on God's superiority and His reputation. We don't earn anything, not salvation, not a special place in God. We are given gifts by the Lord. We are given His name and His ways. We must walk in them. When we walk in them, God will make us great, not simply to make us great, but because we follow Him. A samek finishes out this prophecy and promise of God's restoration of His people to their land, and the promise of a greater kingdom through the Church!

Chapter 11

Leaders and Shepherds

11:1 Open your doors, Lebanon, that fire may consume your cedars!

Chapter 11 starts with a command from the Lord through the prophet for the doors of Lebanon to be opened. These first three verses maintain the poetic imagery and flow of Hebrew poetry. But in verse four, we will see a change into prose. So these first three verses in poetic meter and form expose another time of Palestine's judgment and fall to some conqueror. It starts in the north where Lebanon, known for its cedars and massive forests, will be the first to fall. The image is that of fear in verses two and three because if the cedars of Lebanon fall, then there is no hope for other forests. It is the premium forest in the land.

The judgment comes by fire and attacks from the north. Some scholars suggest this is referring to the Romans either conquering Palestine or to the Romans in rage warring to destroy Jerusalem in 66-70 AD when they reacted to rebels and insurrectionists. While we may not know for sure if this is a historical judgment or even the judgment of God to come, we can be sure that it agrees with either in using fire. The Lord promised not to use floods in His judgment in Noah's time, but several of the apostles point to fire as one of the key features of His future judgment. The cedars of Lebanon were its pride and joy, its strong point and most likely its biggest product to sell.

11:2 Howl, cypress tree, for fallen is the cedar, the mighty are devastated! Howl, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest is felled!

This poem talks to the trees and forests of the land of Palestine as part of the poetic device. Next, the cypress tree is told to howl or wail because the cedars have fallen. There is no hope if the cedars have fallen. It's almost as if the poem is suggesting that the trees are family or related, for the other trees and forests react to the felling of other forests. The words howl and devastate are used frequently in this poetry.

The mighty being devastated may speak to the great leaders and the strong armies of the region. This starts in Lebanon up in the north of Palestine, but it continues through the south as we will see. It even sweeps east, probably across the Jordan. Perhaps the trees of the Jordan or of Palestine refers to the tribes and regions of the whole land. Bashan is in the east, and the oaks of Bashan speak of its mighty leaders. Bashan, however has good grazing land more than it has forests, and we will see the shepherds react in verse three. The cypress trees are to be found in the southern most parts of Israel, hence the move south.

11:3 The sound of the howling of shepherds, for their glorious mantle is devastated. The sound of the roaring of young lions, for the thicket of Jordan is devastated.

The shepherds now wail or howl as the trees and forests did in the judgment. I would strongly suggest that while we can take this literally, as the good places for shepherds to herd and feed their sheep are being burnt up, the image of shepherds suggests the leadership as much as actual shepherds. The glorious mantle can speak of the grazing lands, but also speaks of the mantle of leadership, and the glorious lands which are ruled by the leaders.

God through judgment ruins the land and the leaders of Palestine again because of something they have done. The prophecy is not clear on the reason for more judgment, and this would have been harsh to hear if you're one of the remnant just thinking that you are getting the nation back to livable and workable conditions. The roaring lions are also the leaders in Israel. As with most poetry, a second line either clarifies or extends the imagery of the first, so both lions and shepherds are speaking to the leadership and rulers of the land of the Jordan, and the two images of the glorious mantle and the thicket of Jordan are the land that is being destroyed and ruined and devastated.

A samek completes the three verses of poetry and transitions to prose about what God told the prophet to do. No matter where we think we might be in our walk with God, we are never in a good place to start sinning or to do anything that calls for God's judgment. He is holy and just, and His justice can be poured out on anyone who deserves it, even His children. Let us live in such a way that we do not experience God's corrective judgment!

11:4 Thus said the Lord my God: Shepherd the slaughtered flock!

After the Lord has declared that judgment is coming again because of leaders that don't care for the people of the Jordan, the Lord now creates an image using the prophet as a shepherd. Remember that a shepherd is a leader in Israel. So the prophet goes out historically and becomes a shepherd for a certain time. So the Lord called Zechariah to be a shepherd so that an image of the shepherds could be presented. Zechariah represents the Good Shepherd that God would be to His people. Zechariah is called to shepherd and care for the slaughtered flock, those who are abused by bad leadership.

11:5 Those who buy them slaughter, and do not suffer their guilt. And those who sell them say, "Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich!" and their shepherds do not have pity on them.

The leaders had been buying and selling the sheep, the people of God, instead of caring for them as God's treasure. They would buy the sheep and abuse and slaughter them, or they would sell the sheep for a price and bless the Lord because they got money out of the deal! The buyers had no remorse or guilt for what they did in their abuse. These leaders did not care that they were abusive. They just did what they wanted, took advantage of God's people. Now this has not yet happened in Israel, for we are in a community where the leaders did care. I believe

this speaks of the religious leadership of Israel during Jesus' time. And the Good Shepherd that Zechariah is called to be in these verses shows us a picture of Jesus the Messiah!

These leaders are selfish and only concerned with their own interests. They are the height of what it means to be a politician! Whether they buy and beat the sheep or sell them for a profit for themselves, they are not the shepherds that God appointed them to be. Those who are abusive in leadership are nothing like shepherds. Shepherds care for every need of the sheep, and that is exactly whom God calls, shepherds, not buyers and sellers of His people. The nurturing of a shepherd is more to God than a leader who does whatever he or she wants to do with them. A true shepherd is out for the best of the sheep, not the shepherd. Find leadership, and become a leader, who is concerned with the people under your care.

11:6 Thus I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land, declares the Lord, and behold, I will cause them to fall, each person, into the hands of his neighbor, and into the hand of the king. Then they will crush the land, yet I will not deliver *them* from their hand.

The Lord is fed up with the leadership that is in place because they do not act as He, the Great King, would. The kings abuse the people and lead them astray and nowhere can good leadership be found. This of course causes chaos in the land, and each inhabitant is set against his neighbor. The people learn abuse from the leaders and then abuse one another. So the Lord will no longer shepherd the people or work so hard to bring good leadership to them. Instead, He will send the shepherd Zechariah.

This verse almost sounds like God gives up, but He sends Zechariah in the next verse. The Lord does let them have their fill of abusive leadership and abusive neighbors. The Lord's anger is to allow them to abuse one another instead of performing a redemptive approach any longer. Sometimes we wonder what the use of trying so hard is when things seem hopeless, but the Lord does not give up. He will send the Good Shepherd as His last redemptive act.

11:7 So I shepherded the slaughtered flock, thus the poor of the flock, and I took for myself two staves. One I called 'Pleasant' and the other I called 'Harmony.' And I shepherded the flock.

Zechariah begins to shepherd the flock that is slaughtered by uncaring leaders. The next phrase is a bit enigmatic when translating, but it seems to be an explanatory clause referring specifically to the poor among the sheep that are slaughtered. I suppose the image here is that all of the people are being abused, but especially the poor are abused by these horrible leaders. Zechariah will act as a shepherd of healing to those who need to be comforted through his leadership, which is an image of Christ, the Good Shepherd from John 10.

Next, in the beginning of his shepherding, Zechariah takes two staves. Many times, a shepherd would have a staff with a hook on the end of it to help direct sheep, and another staff or a rod to defend the sheep against predators. So it is not too unusual for the prophet to have two

staffs. The staffs represent the hallmarks of his leadership, what his leadership is based upon. We find that he will lead with the guiding principles of pleasantness or beauty and with harmony.

The first staff's name speaks of kindness and being delighted. It speaks of a goodness and of a sense of compassion. It is partially related in word family and bears a resemblance to the word for mercy, which speaks of the way a mother nurtures the baby in her womb. Nurture was exactly what these harassed sheep needed! We must be people who in leading can sense the needs that people have from our leadership. When we can be in tune with the needs of people, we will find that our leadership is much more acceptable to them.

The second staff is named harmony or union. It produces the image of being united and ready to serve a common goal. It speaks of a binding that binds everyone together for the same task. Surely these other leaders had been pushing the people toward different goals in a million directions, using division instead of unity to aid them in what they wanted rather than what the people needed. Leaders divide to conquer when they think of themselves first. But when they are willing to sacrifice themselves, they can bind others together in unity for a common purpose. They can give purpose through unity, and unity helps to achieve the goals set. The prophet then sets about the task of leading God's people with these tools at his disposal, leading in a completely fresh way than the people are used to from their leaders. He begins to care for and tend and shepherd the people of God.

11:8 Then I made three shepherds disappear in one month and I myself became short of soul with them and also their souls loathed me.

Even in good leadership, there will be dissenters. And that's exactly what happens to Zechariah. He's a better shepherd than others because he actually cares for the sheep. There are three leaders or shepherds that rise up against him and hate him. It says that they loathed his soul. There's a lot of imagery and idioms in this verse, even though it is prose and not poetry. The souls of the evil leaders loathed the good leadership of Zechariah, much like the priestly and pharisaic classes loathed Jesus in His teaching.

Beyond this is the imagery of Zechariah making them disappear. We don't know if this means that they simply quit shepherding or if he had them destroyed and even killed for their bad leadership. The text is unclear because it uses the verb to make disappear instead of something more definitive. Either way, these evil leaders were now out of the picture, and it serves as a lesson for us. When you're in leadership, there are sometimes that you will simply part company or that you may even have to guard the flock from evil people.

These three leaders were causing some kind of disruption or disunity among the whole of the leadership, for they are quickly removed by the leader who has favor and union as his standards. Zechariah also has trouble personally with these three leaders, pointing out that he was also getting impatient with them. I love the Hebrew idiom here for impatience, that is shortness of soul with someone. This is a very concrete image of impatience, getting to the end of your rope with someone.

There are some people that we are not going to get along with no matter how much slack and space we give them. Sometimes, the leadership move is to remove people who are fighting against the grain. But this is not always the case! We should seek to be as patient and uniting as possible. Their removal should be by their own hand. Eventually, the rest of the group will become dissatisfied with them.

11:9 Then I said, “I will not shepherd you. What is to die, let it die. What is to disappear, let it disappear. And what remains, let her devour each one the flesh of her neighbor.”

The exasperation and anger of Zechariah mimics God’s anger with the people. The precious gifts of favor and harmony or union are not what they want. The leaders have taught the people well. So even Zechariah agrees with the Lord that he will not try anymore to bring about these wonderful things. He has decided to quit because the people don’t want harmony and favor.

Instead of caring for those close to death, he decided to just let them die. That’s what they want anyway. Zechariah is in a place where most leaders live at some point. There are times when a leader feels the people don’t care to be led or taken care of. Even though that is the best for them, they like sheep become extremely obstinate. I would suggest that you’re not really a leader until you have experienced the exasperation of taking a people into a new direction that they don’t want to go, but need to go. That is when you really learn how to lead.

He continues to say that not only will he no longer expend efforts to keep the weak alive, but he will also allow those that disappear, or possibly leave the group, to go ahead and disappear. He will not search for them to reunite them to the flock anymore. They may disappear for all he has tried to keep them in unity and they have made it too hard. Even those who remain in the group refuse to accept the favor and unity that Zechariah brings as a caregiver and leader. So they will end up devouring and biting one another because that’s all they’ve been taught by other leaders. He will no longer attempt to settle the disputes.

Let us hope that we never become so obstinate that God no longer wants to be our Good Shepherd. More than ever we need a Good Shepherd to care for us and nurture us and teach us His new ways rather than the ways we learned from evil and selfish leaders, and from our former life. We need a shepherd to guide us and protect us and to keep us in favor and unity. We need Jesus. But we must be obedient if He is to stay as our shepherd. Let us learn from Him and make it easier for Him to lead us in our lives personally and corporately!

11:10 So I took my staff Pleasant and I cut it down, invalidating my covenant which I cut with all the peoples.

Probably in his anger, the prophet turned shepherd busts his staff of pleasantness over the people. This is an image that the favor of the Good Shepherd, since it was so vehemently

rejected, is taken away from the people. That favor is no more. This is most likely favor among the nations, but may also be favor with God Himself.

The cutting of the staff is a violent, but planned way of shattering the one into two pieces. It's destruction is symbolic of the loss of favor, pleasure and beauty in the community of the sheep, or the nation of Israel. Because the people did not want pleasure and favor, the prophet stops ruling with that as one of the hallmarks of his leadership. He comes as a leader who embraces favor and operates in favorable ways, but because it is not desired, the leader no longer practices favor with the people.

The two staffs have to do directly with God's covenant that the godly leader would have operated within. Part of the covenant was to give the nation of Israel favor with God. But instead, the covenant is invalidated, a legal term for dissolving or destroying or suspending the covenant. This is a huge deal for the leader to ignore the very things that were to make his reign godly and great. But when the people refuse to accept his rule as a godly leader, the leader becomes frustrated and then refuses to continue with these hallmarks of leadership.

Leading a hard people is the hardest thing a leader will ever do! Just ask Moses and a host of other leaders who have had to deal with hard people and stiff-necked people. Let us not be these types of people! A covenant was cut with people, literally, usually contained a cutting of an animal into pieces, like when Abraham passed through the cut pieces of an animal when God made a covenant with him.

11:11 So it was invalidated that day, and the poor of the flock knew who were watching me that it was the word of the Lord.

Therefore, that day that the leader broke off from the sheep, the covenant of God for the people of Israel is now annulled and broken. The poor of the flock for some scholars refers to the remnant that sees what God is doing through the example of the prophet's leadership. They understand that when the people of God do not stay faithful to God, they will be punished and judged by Him. The poor of the flock are those who need most godly leadership. But they suffer with the rest. They recognize that the prophet's image here is from God, a matter or word from God about how they must be obedient and not let this situation happen in Israel. In their new start, the new community must remain faithful to God and enjoy his staffs of favor and union.

11:12 Then I said to them, "If it is good in your eyes, give *me* my wages, but if not, keep *them*. So they weighed out my wages, thirty pieces of silver.

Now we observe the rejection of the Good Shepherd that Zechariah represents as he takes the command of the Lord and reacts as this future shepherding leader will. This is clearly about how the leaders of Israel in Jesus' day did not care about the people's needs and how Jesus is the Good Shepherd who does care for them. We know this for sure because Matthew quotes this area

of Zechariah and makes allusions to it with the thirty pieces of silver that are paid Judas to betray Jesus (Matt 26:15).

The Good Shepherd, unlike the demanding evil leaders, asks for his wages in shepherding. He wanted for the people to treat him with thankfulness for his efforts and give him his due wages for his hard work. But instead, the people paid him like a slave. Thirty pieces of silver is the set price in the Law for a slave (Exod 21:32). The good shepherd is not forceful about his wages, but asks for them kindly and is treated with disdain. This bears striking resemblance, which is why Matthew points it out in his Gospel, to how Jesus was compassionate toward the people while the religious leadership didn't care about them. And Jesus was indeed betrayed for the same price as a slave.

11:13 Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter, the magnificent price at which I was valued by them! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter.

Yahweh is upset with the leaders for their disregard for His Good Shepherd and finds their wages worthless. The sarcasm in the mouth of the Lord fits prophetic literary devices and imagery. It is not lost on the Lord how little the leaders cared for His chosen leader and they treated him as a slave. So this is why the Lord refers to slave's wages as “magnificent price.” He is sarcastically pointing out how wrong that price is for the priceless shepherd that stood before them.

In the same way, Jesus is the precious Good Shepherd who was treated like a slave and a common thief in his day as He was murdered upon a cross. The Lord takes the thirty pieces of silver and throws them to the potter. What is interesting is that in the Gospels and in Acts chapter one, there is reference to the Potter's Field being bought with the slave money paid to the betrayer. There are many parallels here, which makes most of this chapter prophetic of what would happen to Jesus.

11:14 Then I cut down my second staff, Harmony, to invalidate the brotherhood between Judah and between Israel.

It is at this time that the division of the people is so great that the second staff is destroyed as the first one was. Jesus Himself said that He would cause division and aggression, and He certainly did, which led to His crucifixion. He said that He did not come to bring peace but a sword. Certainly the world has been divided about Jesus since His arriving. Zechariah symbolically takes the second staff called Union and destroys it next. There is no more unity in Israel because Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has sharply divided the remnant from the lost.

Most scholars will point to the destruction of Jerusalem in 66-70 AD which was led up to by dissention and dissatisfaction in Israel. The people began to be more and more divided until the Romans came to the city and obliterated it to stop the rioting and the rebellions. This cutting

down of the second staff ruined or annulled the brotherly connections between Judah and Israel. No more were the two kingdoms once again united, but rather they destroyed their unity and the whole nation suffered destruction for it. A samek closes out the imagery of the prophet becoming a leader of God's people like the Good Shepherd to prophetically imagine what Jesus' day would be like.

11:15 Then the Lord spoke to me, "Take for yourself again the equipment of a foolish shepherd."

Once again the Lord speaks to Zechariah and commands him now to give an image through his own shepherding of a leader completely the opposite of the Good Shepherd. This time the equipment is of a foolish shepherd, or a shepherd who does not care for the flock at all. This leader would be completely different from the image of the Good Shepherd, doing the absolute opposite of what the Good Shepherd did with the flock. He would not care for those in distress but would leave them to their fate. Many would equate this image of the foolish shepherd with that of the antichrist at the end of time, the final leader that leads God's people to utter chaos and destruction, whose reign will be cut short by God Himself. The equipment of the shepherd would be the robe and staffs that a shepherd would have to herd the flock.

11:16 For behold, I am raising up a shepherd in the land who does not attend to those who are disappearing nor seek the scattered nor heal the broken nor sustain the exhausted, but the flesh of the fat one he devours, even their hooves he tears off.

This second shepherd does only harmful things to God's people, to the nation of Israel. He comes in and does not shepherd. In fact, this leader is wicked all the way around, with no good in him whatsoever. He doesn't care about the sheep that disappear or get lost or separated from the fold. He doesn't seek the scattered or even search after them. This is completely antithetical to Jesus, who even tells parables about searching for the one lost sheep and leaving the 99.

This antichrist or foolish shepherd is only a shepherd in name and rank and title and position. He is not at all a leader of God's people. He's masquerading as a leader, but is not a leader with good intentions. In fact, his intentions are clear with every action against the people. He does not heal the broken among the people of God. He does not attempt to do anything shepherd like at all! He does not encourage or sustain those who are exhausted. Instead, he actually preys on the weak and exhausted, eating even the flesh of the fat sheep, or the sheep that are well off. This antichrist destroys the people of God inasmuch as is possible.

This could speak of any false teachers or prophets, as Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount talks of wolves wearing sheep's clothing. We must be aware of wolves and false teachers and people with the spirit of antichrist. It is easy to observe outside adversaries. But we could be picked off with "friendly fire" from false teachers behind our lines or inside the fray. We must be

vigilant to determine if someone is a false teacher and not allow them easy access to the saints! Let us stand firm in the teaching of Jesus alone! A samek separates the rising of this false leader from his fate given by God in the concluding verse of the prophecy.

11:17 Woe, worthless shepherd, who leaves the flock! The sword upon his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be utterly withered and let his right eye utterly dulled!

The woe is issued to the foolish or worthless shepherd, the one that does not even remotely shepherd God's people as a leader. This is the leader who is out to take advantage at every turn of God's people. There is a woe cast toward this leader and the idea of leaving the flock is the idea of letting it go to demise without lifting a finger. This leader will suffer the end of his life when God sends the sword upon his arm and right eye.

The arm is an image of the military strength and political power of a leader or nation. This leader's strength will be cut off with a sword. This is most likely an image of Jesus taking the power away from the antichrist through battle. The second image is the cutting out of the right eye of this foolish shepherd. The eye is often the source of wisdom and understanding. Seeing is perceiving and understanding what is seen. So wisdom or counsel or understanding are the object of this image. The leader's understanding will be diminished.

The withering of the arm is the same image, the idea of the power of the leader being eroded away to nothingness. The right eye being dulled is the wisdom and understanding of that leader being taken away from him, most likely through conquest. A samek then ends the section on the shepherd prophecy. We can take away from this that if this is a prophecy about the antichrist, although his rule will be atrocious and utterly wicked, the Lord has an end in mind for him. The antichrist and his wickedness will not reign forever! God will put an end to him, but the reign of our Lord Jesus will indeed be forever! Let us praise God because the enemy's time is short! And when we experience evil, its end is near. It will not go on forever. It is finite. We can stand strong until its end. We can outlast the evil around us!

The Lord Protects Jerusalem

12:1 The burden of the Lord's word concerning Israel. A declaration of the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and established the earth and formed man's spirit within him:

We have a fresh section here after chapter eleven as we are given a new burden of the Lord's word. We have seen this phrase before in Zechariah to connote a new section, so this is the key here. It is more like a transition because of the *peh* that follows it, to set it apart from the prophecy as an introduction. Now the Lord will speak of Israel's future. Some suggest that this is about spiritual Israel, or the church, but I believe it might be about Israel as a nation. I don't see anything in the text that warrants the spiritual Israel point of view, so I would most likely think of this as for national Israel either in the future and not yet experienced, or linked to some historical event.

Then we have a double introduction in the formula of "a declaration of the Lord" which we have seen countless times in the prophets. There follows a description of the Lord Himself. He is the one who is Creator and Sustainer. The image flows right out of creation, as the Lord is He who stretched out the heavens, or made the expanse of the heavens. Then He is the one who established the foundation of the earth. He is here the Creator of all things. And then He formed man's spirit within him. The word for spirit is also breath, possibly referring back to the breath that was breathed into humanity. God created all things, and He also gave humanity His image, the faculties to be more like God than anything else in creation. Humanity is the pinnacle of His creation because He breathed His life into us, His breath. Therefore, God has the right to speak to His people and proclaim a declaration to them.

12:2 Behold! I will make Jerusalem a bowl of staggering to all the surrounding peoples, and also the siege of Jerusalem will be against Judah.

The prophecy starts out with the attention-getting "Behold!" This is much like any of our short exclamations that call for attention when someone is not paying attention. It is almost a grunt of surprise in some cases, but it is meant to focus one's mind on an issue or thing not in focus. The Lord sovereignly declares that He will make Jerusalem, the great city of God, a bowl of staggering to the nations.

This is the first of several promises coming up in the next couple of verses. There is coming a day when the surrounding nations of Israel will no longer delight in it being in their midst. They will begin to want it gone, but they will have one large problem. It becomes impossible to remove Israel from the landscape. Today in our world, as has been for more generations than we can imagine, Israel is on a standoff mode with its neighbors because of these long histories between Israel and other nations.

The Lord is the agent who makes the city of Jerusalem this bowl of staggering. When the nations and peoples wish to attack, they will find that Israel is not so easily taken and destroyed and wiped off the face of the earth. They will find quite a challenge as we will see in the coming verses of explanation. The nations will stagger because Israel will not be an easy mark to take in battle. The image goes on to present Jerusalem under siege and the nations against Judah, but to no avail because Jerusalem is well defended. This would have been of great comfort to the people when Zechariah spoke it, because the walls were not built around Jerusalem and it was not the safest place to live. There was no security in Zechariah's time for Jerusalem, but this prophecy declares something quite to the contrary. The people would have listened to this with delight!

12:3 And it will happen on that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone to all the peoples. All who carry it will surely gash themselves. Then all the nations of the earth will gather against her.

The second thing that the Lord will do is make Jerusalem a heavy stone to all the peoples, an immovable stone. They won't be able to get rid of it and they will stumble over it when trying. Anyone who tries will inflict injuries upon themselves. The image is of gashing and cutting, perhaps either out of frustration or out of trying to move a stone that will not be moved. Jerusalem is not going anywhere. The city stays and the people of Israel stay. The nations will not be able to rid the earth of them.

This next line leads me to believe that this section might best be referring to Armageddon. In the battle of Armageddon, especially as seen in Revelation, we see that the nations of the world stand against Jesus and He defends Israel and wins the victory against the nations. But this line is in prophecies of that event, that the nations will gather against the Lord. Here, the feminine pronoun refers to the city of Jerusalem itself. I would most likely lean toward this interpretation rather than the spiritualist interpretation. Jerusalem will become a city immovable by the nations, so they will gather and unite as one man against the city.

12:4 On that day, declares the Lord, I will strike every horse with confusion and its rider with madness. But upon the house of Judah I will open My eyes, and every horse of the peoples I will strike with blindness.

For the second time in this prophecy, we have "on that day" which refers to that day of the Lord, in my opinion, when this grand battle will take place. Once again, for the second time, we have that formula of the Lord's declaration. And then comes the reason for Israel's ability to be immovable and the city's impossibility to be removed. It is because the Lord fights for the city. The Lord is the one to strike every horse with confusion and bring madness to the riders.

We have seen the Lord do this before in history. It was against the Assyrian armies that the Lord came upon them and caused confusion when they attacked Jerusalem in King

Hezekiah's day. When Gideon's 300 came against the Midianites, the battle was won by the Lord who caused mass confusion and panic. The Lord will confuse the horses and the riders will be driven into a mental state nonconductive to winning in a battle.

But while there's mass confusion on the side of the nations in the battle, so Judah and its leadership, its whole house, which usually speaks of the nation, will be able to see everything with the clarity that the Lord will give them. The Lord will keep His eyes open upon them and they will be able to rout the enemies because they will be in confusion without a way out. They will even be struck with blindness, which may be a poetic way of talking about confusion again. The final analysis is that Judah will be fighting clearly and the nations will be stumbling along in darkness and confusion. Judah will make quick work of the nations because of the Lord's help.

While this is most likely about the battle of Armageddon, let its promises and points not be lost on us as believers. Today we fight an enemy who is blinded and confused. The devil does not have nearly any power, but we give him too much credit! C. S. Lewis liked to talk in the *Screwtape Letters* about how the demons couldn't understand what was happening in prayer between a believer and the Lord. The devil is confused in battle. Let us not allow him to win in our lives. Let us fight with clarity, knowing that we are victorious with the Lord's help!

12:5 Then the clans of Judah will say, "Strength to me, the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the Lord of Hosts, their God!"

:Because the Lord is fighting for Judah, the clans of Judah will realize their strength that comes from the Lord in the battle. The clans will rise up in victory seeing that their foe cannot overtake them no matter how numerous. The Lord is their divine warrior, and so they are strong. That is why we see the clans declaring in the midst of battle, "We are strong, we of Jerusalem because the Lord of Hosts is with us. He is our God!" That is essentially the battle cry, that the Lord is with them.

There are times of discouragement in our lives. We all have them and we all go through these times. But it's like a shot in the arm when the Lord comes to our rescue and shows His strength in us. Those are times of victory where we can declare that we are strong because of the Lord's strength being bestowed upon us. Let us allow God to fight for us so that we can be strong in the situations that we face in life. Give the battle to the Lord and see if He won't do great and victorious things before your very eyes! Don't forget to give God the glory for that strength either and to attribute the victory to Him!

12:6 On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a cauldron of fire in the midst of wood and like a torch of fire among cut grain. Then they will devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples and Jerusalem will be inhabited again in its place in Jerusalem.

For the third time, a reference to that day might refer to the Day of the Lord in which this battle takes place where God defends as a divine warrior the nation of Israel. Now the ferocity

and ability of Judah's clans is depicted by the prophet. When they realize that they are in a battle that they will win because the Lord has given them strength, they become unmatched in their battle prowess.

The first image is that of a cauldron of fire in the midst of wood. This gives the image that they will spread among the enemy like a wild fire and cannot be stopped. They will be on fire with the heat that easily destroys wood and the fire that consumes the wood. They will consume their foe with great speed and efficiency. The second image is even more expedient, as a torch of fire among wheat grains. The grains stand no chance and take even less time to be consumed than the wood.

There is an unmatched efficiency in battle by the warriors of the clans because they know that the Lord fights for and with them. They devour everything around them, every nation that raises itself against them falls to their weapons in defeat. They move against the nations with speed and efficiency that leaves the nations with no recourse. The people on their right and left are cut down swiftly and destroyed, all of the people. Though Judah's clans are surrounded, the nations don't stand a chance! A promise that Jerusalem will be filled with inhabitation right where the city lies finishes the image, and another *peh* here moves us from images of divine war to images of God saving His people in the next section.

12:7 Then the Lord will first save the tents of Judah, so that the glory of David's house will not surpass the glory of the inhabitants of Judah.

While most English Bibles make a separation between verses nine and ten, the separation in the Hebrew Bible is between verses six and seven, the *peh* we just spoke of. So I would rather put these two images together starting here, not in verse ten. The first image in this chapter is of the Lord fighting for His people, for Israel. This next section has the image of the One who is pierced for God's people, and there are textual clues that the Lord is the one who is pierced. So I will attempt to explain these images as fulfilled in one Person.

This verse starting the new section in Hebrew speaks of how the Lord will save Judah before He saves Jerusalem. It is quite an enigmatic verse that is hard to explain, but most commentators speak of Jerusalem representing the house of David, the stronger house, and the house of Judah being the rest of Judah. Jerusalem is in Judah as its chief city. The tents of Judah specifically refers to all of the other family clans besides David's family clan. I would interpret most of their suggestions to mean that the political or royal part of the nation will actually be rescued after the nation is rescued.

The glory or beauty or splendor of David's house might refer to that royalty. Perhaps there was a disconnect between the royalty and the rest of Judah, or between the leaders and the common people in the land. However, we are not saying that one or the other will not be saved. Both will be saved, but this verse points to the saving of the clans of Judah before the royal clan of David. Perhaps it could be signifying that no one is special in salvation, but that God is equally concerned to save everyone despite their background.

12:8 On that day the Lord will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the feeblest among them will be like David on that day, and David's house like God, like the angel of the Lord before them.

Once again we have this formula of on that day, referring to the Day of the Lord. This new section is consistent with the previous section in this. The word protect literally speaks of fencing in or defending, putting a cover over the people. This is the image of hedging soldiers and protection, much like a giant shield, over the people. The Lord puts a fence around his people so the enemy cannot divide and conquer or use any other military tactic.

Perhaps this fencing in refers to the walls themselves when rebuilt that keep the enemy out of the city. But also, it talks about warriors being made out of even the feeblest or weakest in the community. In that day of battle, the Lord's strength will be so encompassing that even those who are weak and feeble, the elderly and the young children, would be able to fight like a mighty heroic warrior. They would be like the mighty warrior King David and no one could stand against them on that day of battle. What child does not imagine himself a superhero?

The imagery continues to extend itself with similes. We must be very careful in this verse to remind ourselves that these are similes, comparing the strength and vigor even of the feeble with the warrior David. They will not be David, but be like David. And they will be like God in their abilities on that battlefield. They will not be God, but they will be like Him in His strength. Then another image of being like the angel of the Lord reminds one of how the Lord led the people into battle and fought battles for the people. The point is that they will be invincible in battle no matter what their strength level or training.

12:9 And it will happen in that day that I will seek to exterminate all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

It is through this enabling of the Lord that the nations will be eradicated, exterminated, and destroyed. We are reminded that Israel did not start the battle, but they will finish it with God's help. The nations were the ones to despise Jerusalem and wish to get rid of the nation of Israel. They are simply defending themselves but with the power of the Lord.

Once again we see in that day as a marker of the time when this would happen. I believe that this is a prophecy not only about the strength of Israel with God's help, but for all the people of God fighting with the Lord in the Battle of Armageddon. How can so little stand against so many of the nations? Because the Lord is with them! The Lord seeks to destroy the nations because of their own insolence in wanting to eradicate Israel. Now there is no marker indicating a new section here, so we will now talk about Jesus, the pierced one who helps us win the battle!

The Piercing of God's Servant

12:10 Then I will pour out on David's house and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications, and they will look on Me, whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as a mourning for an only child, and weep bitterly for Him as one weeps bitterly over a firstborn.

Some commentators would say that this is a new section with a different focus, but I think it follows on the last section about God being the strength of His people to defeat the nations. The Lord promises to pour out upon everyone in the people of God, in Jerusalem, a spirit of grace and supplication. The spirit of grace is to see the one whom they have pierced. The spirit of grace and supplications might mean this is a new section, but it could also be part of the ending of that battle, in which we all look upon Jesus who was wounded for us, not in that battle, but on the cross, a different battle that has already been won.

It is very important to notice what Zechariah does in the grammar of this verse to see who the Pierced one is. The first line about the pierced one says that they have pierced Me, the first person singular pronoun, referring to the Lord who is speaking here. And then in the next line, the pierced one is no longer first person singular but third person singular. This shows that God is giving divine qualities to the pierced one, who is both Me and Him. Many point to this as an indicator of God the Father and the Son in the same verse.

Then there are two images of Jesus and the mourning for Him. The first is quite interestingly, like mourning for an only child. Children were extremely important to that culture and that day because they were the future of a family, of a nation. The only child is a singular blessing. In those days, health was not as good as it is now and the more children one had, the more of a possibility that more would survive to carry on the family name. So when an only child was lost, the family's future was in grave danger of being destroyed. There was great grief over the death of a child and the death of a family's future.

The second image is of mourning over the firstborn. The firstborn, especially a son, was most important because he would be the leader of the family and would receive his father's blessing and a double portion of all that the father had. He inherited the responsibility of the family when blessed by the father, so to lose a firstborn son was to lose the leadership of a family.

What is most interesting about these two images is that Jesus is referred to as the firstborn and also is God's only Son! Jesus is the one pierced. In one sense, God is metaphorically pierced by the sin and idolatry of the people of Israel, but Jesus was physically pierced on the cross for our sins and won the victory that day for all of us who believe on Him. He is the one who gave us weak ones strength and won the battle as our pierced Lord! And could it be that He will still have those pierced hands and side in the Battle of Armageddon for the nations and the people of God to look upon and remember His sacrifice? He had them after He returned to the disciples in the upper room. Does He still bear those marks now?

12:11 In that day, great will be the mourning in Jerusalem like the mourning for Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddo.

A third image is of the mourning in that day being so great, like the mourning for Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddo. It is interesting to me that the valley of Megiddo, where the battle of Armageddon will be fought, is mentioned here. Who is Hadad-Rimmon? Most scholars point to the dearest of the kings of that time, Josiah, who died in the valley of Megiddo (2 Chron 35:25). Some suggest that this Hadad-rimmon was a god, for whom a pagan ritual of mourning happened every year. I would say it is an image of Jesus as the beloved king, like Josiah, who was pierced and died in the valley.

I would imagine and suggest that the mourning will be for the pierced one, for Jesus, who suffered greatly at the hands of every human being who has sinned against God and needed His sacrifice. In fighting that battle, we begin to understand Jesus' suffering. I would suggest that there might be a blurring, prophetically, of the battle on the cross and the battle in Armageddon, both tremendous victories of God for His people that save them from evil.

12:12 Then the land will mourn, family from family by themselves, the family of David's house by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of Nathan's house by itself, and their wives by themselves,

The final image of mourning is from every family within Judah, and I would contend, within the whole of the people of God, for this systematic mention of so many clans and even the wives mourning suggests an inclusivity in mourning for the Pierced one. After all, we realize that our sins caused Him to be pierced. First, the land itself will mourn, meaning that the whole of the land, every family living in the land.

Families will mourn by themselves, almost like they are cut off from the rest of the community. David's house is mentioned first in the list of families, speaking of the royal leadership. The wives are included and mentioned in each of these family lists to suggest wholeness. It is a family-wide mourning. Next is the prophetic family of Nathan and their wives. So both the kingly and prophetic clans are mourning for the Messiah, for their own hand in His piercing.

12:13 the family of Levi's house by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves—

Next, the family of Levi's household is the priestly clans. We see these three offices represented here, and then the family of the Shimeites might simply refer to the rest of the families in Israel. The Shimeite clan is a family within the priestly clan, according to several scholars. This shows that each of the offices of Israel will weep for the piercing of the Prophet, Priest and King, Jesus the Messiah.

12:14 all the families of the remnant, family from family by themselves, and their wives by themselves.

Finally, all the families of the remnant are added to those who are mourning for Jesus. This remnant could refer merely to the remnant of Israel, but I believe it can include the Church as well, which is part of the inclusiveness of this passage as it speaks about God's people using a widening of all the families that will mourn and weep bitterly concerning the pierced one. Each family will mourn on its own, but it is part of a larger community of mourners. A samek ends the section on the pierced one and those who mourn because of His pain and suffering, remembered because that same pierced one is the one who gives the strength to God's people to win the victory at the battle of Armageddon and at the cross.

We win in the end. There are times when we don't feel like winners or feel victorious, but we win along with Christ. Christ won the decisive victory at the cross. Let us live as victors and not as those who continually violate the victorious life of holiness. Let us experience Christ's victory over the enemy by being obedient, and so joining in His victory!

13:1 In that day there will be a fountain opened for David's house and for Jerusalem's inhabitants for sin and for uncleanness.

While there is a new chapter break here, and many translations will either put verse one as part of the last section, there is no literary division marker in the original language here. So this whole section until the division marker after verse six is all part of the piercing section at the end of chapter twelve. Let us keep that in mind as we continue to look at this passage.

We are still referring to the cross, and to the piercing of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Zechariah continues to lead us into fuller understanding of that day. He tells us that a fountain will be opened for all of Israel, for all of God's people. While many would love to say that this fountain is the fountain filled with blood in the hymn, it is most likely that this fountain is not the one referred to in the hymn. The fountain has cleansing water in it, water that can wash away sins and uncleanness.

The washing of water through the word of the New Testament and the practice of water baptism may be more in keeping with this fountain idea. Many would refer to the washing of our sins with the blood of Jesus. It could be that this refers to a continual cleansing begun with the blood of Jesus, but continued in the fountain of the pure water of the Word of God and of confession of sins and uncleanness. When we see uncleanness, it is usually referring to the Levitical understanding of unclean, which is both physical and spiritual. Water and baptism were used in such cases.

David's house and the Jerusalem inhabitants refers to the whole of the nation of Israel, and moreso to the whole people of God. David's house was the royal house and the rest is the inhabitants of Jerusalem. All of the people of God will be cleansed from sin and uncleanness in this fountain. When we come to Christ, we are cleansed from all of the filth of our sinful and unclean lives. We are made new and fresh and clean! John 15 talks about a washing of the feet only because the disciples are already clean. God's Word and the Holy Spirit continue to guide us into being clean in Christ.

13:2 And it will happen in that day, declares the Lord of Hosts, I will cut off the idols' names from the earth and they will be remembered no more, and even the prophets and the unclean spirit I will remove from the earth.

Not only will the people of God be clean and free from sin because of the pierced one, but they will also no longer listen to or worship idols. One of the elements that God clearly cleaned out of Israel in the exile was the desire to worship other gods. Even today Jews do not tolerate any form of idolatry. But this is a time in which the Lord completely removes idolatry and false prophets.

The people not only will not remember the names of the idols, but the people will have no interest in idolatry. The word for cut off means to completely remove, just as one can be cut off from his or her people. The names will be no more, and so the false gods will not be worshipped, but forgotten instead. Along with the idols are the false prophets that propped up their reputations in the world.

There is no word in Hebrew for a false prophet, so the prophets being referred to here are the false prophets of these forgotten idols. The Lord will remove these false prophets and the unclean spirit as well, that spiritual force of evil that seeks to make things profaned and to use prophets for unclean purposes. There was an unclean spirit released from God in the dark days of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-23). No longer will an unclean spirit plague the world and the false prophets will be removed from the earth. The next couple of verses explains how the false prophets will be dealt with. We have not yet seen a day when false prophets and teachers have been removed. Perhaps this will happen in the Millennial Reign or this might simply be a picture of heaven. But it was begun and inaugurated by the pierced one at the cross.

13:3 And it will happen that if any person again prophesies, then his father and mother who bore him will say to him, “You will not live because you have spoken falsehood in the Lord’s name.” And his father and mother who bore him will pierce him through when he prophesies.

Remember that this speaks purely of false prophets. True and godly prophets remain on the earth. But those that are falsely prophesying will find themselves the target of a sword from their own parents. The father and mother here who bore the prophet will have the responsibility of removing him. This may seem harsh, but several Mosaic Laws refer to this very thing. Sin and falsity cannot exist in the righteous kingdom. They must be eradicated or they will, much like a disease or leaven, infect the whole people of God. They must be dealt with, not allowed to fester.

This might be part of what Jesus was saying when He said He would divide families in Luke 12:53. Although, simply giving one’s allegiance to the Lord Jesus would put a division between family members who don’t believe, also the idea of children turning to idols would divide the family. The parents take this matter into their own hands. They are the ones to declare to the false prophet that he may no longer live! But even the death of a son will be easier to bear than to hear the falsity being pawned off as the word of the Lord from a false prophet. It is the very definition of profane to take the holy and make it unholy.

We must not allow falsehood in the name of God to continue. It will indeed infect the whole people of God. People will listen to wolves in sheep’s clothing and they will no longer hear the true word of God. Anyone can be led astray with the subtleties of falsehood weaving its way through what appears to be orthodoxy and truth. We must be vigilant to hear from God in these matters! Let us not allow false teachers to speak in the name of Christ! The image here is not of someone speaking for a false god, but crediting the Lord for their lies. The parents answer

this false prophecy by piercing their child through! Would we be so aligned with Christ that we will not endure false teaching today?

13:4 And it will happen in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies and he will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive,

In this time where false prophets are exposed for what they are, they will be greatly ashamed of what they have done, serving idols and falsely declaring lies under the guise of God's truth and word. They will be ashamed of all the ways in which they received false information from idols, such as visions and prophecies. The reference to the hairy cloak might refer to Elijah, who wore a hairy cloak in his days of prophecy.

We see John the Baptist having some of that same imagery in his ministry as forerunner of Christ, meant to remind the people who have not seen or heard a prophet speak God's Word to them since Malachi. His appearance was meant to allude to Elijah, and so this hairy cloak may have become a symbol of the office and function of prophet, sort of a way of knowing who was a prophet just by mere looks. But it became a way for a false prophet to gain acceptance as a true prophet.

Interestingly, Jesus talks about false prophets as wolves wearing sheep's clothing. We must be careful to not allow false prophets any platform to speak blasphemy and profane God's Word or name. Let us not simply accept a prophet because he holds some title or looks like what we think a prophet would look like.

13:5 and he will say, "I am not a prophet. I am a man working in the soil of the land, for a man sold me in my youth."

Along with being ashamed of what the false prophet has done and how they have abused the good name of the Lord in using His name for their lies, the prophet will no longer wear the cloak that people distinguish prophets by. And he will also denounce his position as a true prophet and tell the truth about his origin and life. He will rather be a farmer tilling the soil than to be a false prophet. This time in history will be a time when falsity and lies are seen in a very negative light.

The prophet would rather be a common working hand in a field than a false prophet. He would rather be a worker for hire, or even perhaps a slave is in view here, than to be one of the false prophets. Wouldn't it be such a wonderful world if those who enjoy teaching false and profane things to be ashamed of them instead? Let us make sure that we do not allow such things around us!

13:6 Then someone says to him, "What are these wounds between your arms?" And he will say, "I was beaten in my friend's house."

While it may seem like someone is speaking to the false prophet turned farmer, this verse is actually someone asking the pierced one about His wounds. Remember that though a chapter break has been given in English Bibles, there is no break between this section in chapter thirteen and the last section of chapter twelve. The pierced one is the one being asked here, as a way to sum up the section. A samek breaks into a new section after this verse.

As the people have been weeping and mourning the loss of the pierced one who provided through his piercing a fountain that cleanses from sin and impurity or uncleanness, someone asks about His wounds. They ask what are his wounds between his arms. Now most scholars suggest that this would speak of either the chest or the back. It is fitting to speak of wounds on the back, as we know Jesus, the Pierced One, was whipped with many lashes as part of His crucifixion. The point is that He has suffered physical wounds and pain beyond bearing.

While the pain and suffering are physical and excruciatingly agonizing, so also is the emotional piercing of Jesus in that He was pierced by the ones He loved! The pierced one answers that the wounds were inflicted by those in his friend's house. The word for friend could be translated lover or loved one. Jesus is beaten by those He loves. We are those who have wounded Christ with every sin and every act of defiance. He bears the wounds we have given Him. And yet, He still loves us! We thank God that Jesus was stronger than our hate of Him, that He could endure the pain and agony of physical and emotional piercing. May we love the one who first loved us!

Striking the Shepherd

13:7 “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd and against the fellow who stands next to me,” declares the Lord of Hosts, “Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter! So I will turn my hand to the little ones.

The next section starts with prophetic poetry and is fairly short, but a conclusion to the event of the pierced one's moment of suffering. We know that this is Messianic because Matthew will quote this passage in the Garden of Gethsemane about striking Jesus and the sheep, the disciples, scattering. The word awake speaks of the action of the sword, or the enacting of the suffering. The sword is the image of destruction and death.

Jesus was physically pierced with a sword by one of the Roman soldiers to check if he had died already, and blood and water flowed. But the imagery of awaking the sword is the poetic image of bringing the pain of the experience. The sword is against that same Good Shepherd that has appeared throughout chapters 11-13. And the Good Shepherd is obviously Jesus from all of the quotations from the New Testament. Zechariah is one of the most quoted prophets in the New Testament writings.

The fellow who stands beside me or next to me might speak of Jesus as being both God and human, the one who is standing beside the Lord as He speaks this command for the sword to awaken. The Lord is the one to allow the pain to be inflicted upon His Shepherd. This is very

important because Jesus was not overtaken or surprised in the crucifixion. He laid down His own life. He has command of His life the entire time. No one takes it from Him. He commands His own life.

Now we come to the section that is quoted by Matthew about the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane where it all began. The command comes to strike the shepherd with the result that the sheep will scatter. The Shepherd is the leader and when you take out the leader, the followers have no one to follow. This specifically speaks prophetically of how Jesus would suffer alone, how the disciples would scatter during His capture in that garden. And indeed, while many of them were there at the proceedings, they all scattered, one young man fleeing without his clothes!

Then the next sentence simply says that the Lord will turn His hand to the little ones, or the lowly. The lowly could be the poor rather than children. The little ones might speak of the weak ones in the flock. Regardless, this passage is quite specific about the events in the Garden of Gethsemane, and it is naturally linked by New Testament writers inspired by the Spirit, and Jesus' post-resurrection teaching and opening the Scriptures to their minds. May we also see the illumination of the Spirit as we read God's Word!

13:8 “And it will happen in all the earth,” declares the Lord, “that two-thirds in her will be cut off and pass away, and one third will remain in her.

These last two verses speak of how God limits the amount that will be in the remnant in all the earth. The Lord says that two thirds in the earth will be cut off and pass away or die or perish. Most translations understand that as people, and this is most likely the two thirds of the whole population that will perish. We know that in the book of Revelation, there is one third that perishes in the judgments. But even one-third of creation is affected there.

Perhaps this refers to another time period. I would suggest that the cutting off might refer to being cut off from God's grace and presence, separation from Him, which the New Testament describes as perishing or death. Perhaps this is an image of the saints with Christ in the Church. But there are most likely other suggestions. I say this only because of the rest of the chapter in the next verse referring to a time of testing and then becoming the people of God.

13:9 “Then I will bring the remnant through the fire and refine as one refines silver, and I will test them as one tests gold. He will call upon My name and I alone will answer him. I will say, “He is My people.” And he will say, “The Lord is my God.”

This last verse of the short three-verse section continues the imagery of verse eight. After the two-thirds are destroyed, only one third is left. And then that one third is still not completely pure, so the Lord tests through fire. Then there is a simile here of one testing with fire the silver and gold. Metal is heated up and is more malleable to be shaped into whatever the blacksmith wishes.

Sometimes in our lives, we endure pain and hardship, the fires of life, so that we would be shaped and molded and come out stronger in our lives and in our walk with God. We suffer many trials throughout life, but all for the strengthening of our character and faith. We must trust the one who can control the flames. In that time of testing is when the people, here seen in the third person collective singular, cry out to God for His help. Any time that we are in the fire, we can call on the name of Jesus and He will be with us!

There is an intensive when the Lord says “I will answer him.” I have translated it “I alone” because it is intensive. The word for the first person singular is coupled with the verb, which intrinsically has the subject “I” inside of it already. Once again we have that great promise held out by all the prophets which we have seen traced through Scripture from beginning to end, the great completion of all things and the goal of God in all of this life, a time in which we can be God’s people and He will be our God.

We can see this theme and phrase tracked throughout Scripture, as one of the greatest promises that the Lord continues to allude to. God has created us free willed creatures for the one purpose of choosing to freely be God’s people who only trust and look to Him in all things. And when God is our God, we are His people, a fully faithful and committed people of God. All of this happens through the forging of the fires of each trial we face in life. A samek here ends the section on how both Jesus, and those saints of the church, endure suffering for a greater purpose. This very New Testament concept is begun in the Old!

The Lord Reigns in Jerusalem

14:1 Behold, a day comes for the Lord when the spoil will be divided from you in your midst.

The final chapter of Zechariah opens with an attention-getting exclamation used often by the prophets. This first word calls the attention of the readers and listeners to what follows. The message is about the Day of the Lord. But it starts out with gloom and despair for Israel and for Jerusalem. This day is coming for the Lord's purposes. The Day of the Lord is a frequent staple of the prophetic writings. It is that final period of time in which all the promises of God and human history are ended, and eternity begins.

This day will first be marked by danger and darkness for Jerusalem. It will start when the spoils of the city will be divided after the city has been sieged and sacked. The Day of the Lord, according to Joel, is a dark and gloomy day. It will not be the day we expect. It will surprise the world. That day will not surprise us, but the world will be surprised by the Lord's coming. It starts in the worst of times when it seems that God's city Jerusalem is lost for good.

14:2 Then I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle and the city will be captured, and the houses will be plundered and the women will be raped. Then half of the city will go into exile, but the remnant of the people will not be cut off from the city.

The Lord will actively gather the nations for battle. They will come against Jerusalem on final time. This may be the precursor to the Battle of Armageddon. We cannot be completely sure of all prophecy. We must have an open mind to God's fulfillment timetable and process. The city is captured by the nations of the world and it seems that it is lost. The spoils of the city in the individual houses will be taken away and plundered. The wealth of Jerusalem will be depleted.

Along with this imagery of losing everything that the inhabitants of Jerusalem have, the women will be abused and raped. Picture the worst things that can happen in our world, and that is what the prophet depicts here. The day will be a horrid day, a day that no one wants to live in. Half of the city will be exiled. The people will be dragged away from their homes. These are the worst possible circumstances for Jerusalem. It will be a moment in which no one has any hope of restoration.

But then there will remain half of the city as a remnant! They will not be cut off and taken away. They will still dwell in the city. The hope begins here. Commentators are divided on when this prophecy will take place. Some believe that this speaks of spiritual Jerusalem, the church, but I believe this is the actual city of Jerusalem in the end when Jesus comes in the

second coming. The remnant will stay in the city and God will begin the final salvation with them.

Even in the darkest time, God is with us. He will be our victor and He will never let us go. We must trust in Him always, even in times where we have no source of hope around us. These are the times that we must look to God and let Him be our hope. He is the only way that we will get through these darkest times. Christ is our hope and He will restore all things!

14:3 Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations like when He fights on a day of battle.

In this darkest of times for Jerusalem, the Lord comes to the rescue! He goes out to fight with the nations that have plundered Jerusalem. He fights with them like in old times when He fought with Egypt in the sea or when He fought for Israel in the land of Canaan. The Lord here is depicted as Divine Warrior. The Lord is prepared and arrayed for battle. He will not be defeated because He is invincible.

The Lord protects Jerusalem through battle. He is our Divine Warrior as well. He has won the battles that must be fought, and even now, He fights for the souls of humanity. Sometimes we think we have to fight our own battles, but the Lord should fight them. Let the Lord fight the battles that are not for you to fight. He will be victorious in your life! He is your Savior and Warrior and Protector!

14:4 Then His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem to the east, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west by an exceedingly wide valley, and half of the Mount will move northward and half southward.

The Lord comes to fight for Jerusalem by coming a second time to earth. This verse depicts Jesus coming back in the second coming, and His feet touch the Mount of Olives where He had ascended from the disciples into Heaven. Now He returns for the final stages of the end times. The Mount of Olives is to Jerusalem's east and it gives a clear view of the whole city. Jesus rides the colt from the Mount of Olives into the city in the Triumphal Entry later on.

Symbolically, the east is where the sun rises, where each new day begins, where light comes into the darkness and where hope reigns. This apocalyptic reference to the east, where the Mount of Olives lies, is to show the hope that comes on the shirttails of Jesus' arrival, in the wings of His arriving. But the Mount of Olives itself will be split in two to allow the people of Jerusalem to escape the capture and invasion of God's holy city.

The Mount will split into two parts. One part will move to the north and one part will move to the south, creating a valley in between in which the people can flee. Jesus comes to bring safety and security to the downtrodden. He makes a way out of danger, a way of escape. Their escape will be their salvation, all provided by the Lord's return.

14:5 And you will flee to the valley of My mountain, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azal. And you will flee just as you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, all the holy ones with you.

The people will escape by fleeing into this new valley created by Jesus to get them to safety and away from the captured city and invading nations. The valley goes the whole way to Azal. No one knows where this place is, if it is a proper name. It could also be rendered, “on the side of it” or even “very near” which would suggest that the escape will be easy rather than hard in hard times. But no one knows exactly where the border of this valley is or what city it leads to.

The people will flee as in the days of Uzziah, the king of Judah. Amos 1:1 mentions an earthquake in the days of Uzziah, which is most likely the reference here. Apparently the people will flee to places of refuge as they did when that natural disaster struck. The Lord Jesus talks about people wanting to escape the city in the end times and not being able to escape, but here the remnant does flee and escape the torment and danger of the captured city.

The final sentence of this verse is interesting in that it calls for the Lord Jesus to come down, the Lord God who will rescue the people. He will be the one rescuing them and fighting the battle. But He will bring His holy ones with Him. Scholars are divided on whether these are angels or if it is the saints who have been taken up in the rapture, come to fight with the Lord, who leads them into battle.

Joel talks about an innumerable army with the Lord of hosts on this dark Day of the Lord. Revelation talks about the saints fighting with Jesus in the Battle of Armageddon. I believe these are the saints, the holy ones. But it's possible that angels will also accompany the army. The armies of the Lord can be made of any soldier, human or celestial. That's what the Lord of Hosts refers to, His ability to fight with any army He desires. One final note for this sentence is the pronoun listed as second person singular. Most translations translate “him” instead of “you.” The you being referred to here may be the escapees as a collective group, or it could be referring to Jesus.

14:6 And it will happen on that day that there will be no light, thickening darkness.

The Day of the Lord is described almost exactly as it is in Joel, as a day of darkness and thickness, a day of congealed and confused celestial bodies. The day will not be light, but it will be a day of darkness. The light will be taken from humanity, probably literally in the clouds hiding the sun or some kind of cosmic disturbance. But this can also refer to the metaphorical darkness that humanity has been steeped in since sin entered the world. Darkness is usually a symbol of sin and death and no hope.

14:7 And it will happen that a certain day, known only to the Lord, no day, no night, but at the evening time, there will be light.

It is in this setting, this day that is not really light or dark, a day of confusion, that the Lord will come and bring the light of hope to Jerusalem. This day or era or time is a day of mass confusion and thickness, of nothingness, a day of void. There is no night, no day. It is almost as if time itself is confused as to keep going or simply stop.

It is in this day, a certain and specific day, a designated unique day, that the Lord Jesus will arrive to save the day. He will bring the light of hope with Him as He comes. He is the Light! It will happen in the most desperate of time, when the evening and the sun are setting. The Lord will come in the darkest moment and bring the light of hope!

14:8 And it will happen on that day that living waters will come from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It will be in summer as in winter.

In that evening when the Lord arrives, there will be light and hope, and there will be life. The prophecy speaks of living water that flows from Jerusalem, where Jesus sets up His throne to rule for a Millennium. Now some readers will make a connection to John 4 when Jesus calls Himself the living water. That may be a possibility, since Jesus will be the King of the city. From Him flows all life! But the other possibility is that this living water is water that is not corrupted or polluted, water that is pure and flows with life, that gives life to those who drink of it. It might then be a sign of prosperity in King Jesus' kingdom.

There are other prophets that mention water or a river flowing from Jerusalem or the Temple (Joel 3:18; Ezek 47:12). The water could also be symbolic of the Holy Spirit. It flows from one sea to another, from possibly the Dead Sea in the east and to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. And it never stops flowing, even in the summer. In this part of the world, a river could easily dry up because of the heat, but this one flows no matter what the temperature. It does not dry up and is a constant source of hope and life.

14:9 Then the Lord will be King over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and His name one.

Not only will this prosperity flow from the river of living water, but also Jesus will reign in the city as King over the whole earth! Jesus will set up His kingdom in Jerusalem and rule there as king, but His rule will be all over the earth. He will reign as King for a thousand years, as we are told in Revelation 20:1-6. Then there is the statement about the Lord being one and His name being one. This may speak of Him being worshipped for who He is as God. It may also refer to no one being idolatrous. The speech of being one usually implies that there are no other gods. It may be that He stands unopposed by anyone or anything as well.

14:10 Then the whole land will be like a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem will rise and dwell underneath it, from the Benjamin Gate to the place of the former gate to the Corner Gate and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepress.

In the reign of Christ, we see that the land will become like a plain, and the city of Jerusalem will be the highest point around. The plain will extend from Geba, which is six miles northeast of Jerusalem to Rimmon, which is near Beersheba in the south. This flattening of the land will be to put Jerusalem on a pedestal, so to speak, to show its height and power in the world.

Jerusalem will be raised in prominence geographically. Now this may literally happen and be the case, even as a result of the giant battle, or this may be symbolic of highlighting the place where the King of Kings will rule and dwell. The city then is described as inhabited to its brim, with the Benjamin Gate on the north, to the former or first gate on the eastern wall to the corner gate on the west and the Tower of Hananel is on the northeast corner of the wall, even to the south where the King's winepress and garden were located. The city will be full to its limits of inhabitants, which would have been hard to picture for the remnant in Zechariah's day. And this is all part of the provision and prosperity of King Jesus in His reign!

14:11 And they will dwell in it, for a ban will never again be. And Jerusalem will dwell in security.

The people will be able to dwell in the city without fear of anything ever happening to them again. The reason for this is that there will no longer be a ban on the city. A ban carried destruction and harm with it. There was a ban to devote things to destruction in the book of Joshua, in which the things under the ban were destroyed after being plundered. So the ban in the city of Jerusalem will be forever lifted. The security of the city is marked by its prominence and its King who protects it from all things dangerous, as we will see in the continuing prophecy.

14:12 And this will be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples who fight against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

If all of this is not enough to keep the nations at bay, the battling of the Lord and the Kingship of Jesus, God will also use a plague to keep the peoples that don't surrender at bay. The Lord will strike the people who fight against Jerusalem. For those who refuse to accept the kingship of Jesus, there will be a plague that will destroy them. They will continue to fight, but they will die by a nasty supernatural plague. This plague is described as one that rots the body and the eyes and the tongue. Those who oppose Jesus in Jerusalem will have this plague happen to them. They will rot where they stand. This is to protect God's city and His people from those who will not obey the King of Kings.

14:13 And it will happen in that day that a great confusion from the Lord will come upon them, and each person will prevail upon the hand of a neighbor and the hand of one will be raised against the hand of a neighbor.

The Lord will also send a great confusion upon those who fight against Jerusalem. They will suffer this punishment of plague and will also turn on one another. Confusion is one of the common tactics of the Lord in battle. We have seen Him use confusion for Gideon and also to save Jerusalem from the Assyrians in the time of Hezekiah. He confuses the enemy so that they turn on one another and take out each other rather than the people of God. The confusion comes from the Lord and keeps the city safe by making the enemy destroy themselves. Each one will raise his hand to a friend or neighbor to kill them in battle.

14:14 And even Judah will fight for Jerusalem and the wealth of the surrounding nations will be gathered, gold and silver and garments in large quantity.

If that is not enough of a defense, indeed it most likely is, then Judah will all join in to help Jerusalem in their fight. All of the nations is a pretty big army. Perhaps the Lord will use all three of these strategies in His disposal of the hoards of the wicked who refuse to submit to His Kingship. The wealth that may have been stolen in the plundering of Jerusalem, from verse one, may be returned to the city, or it may be that all the wealth of the nations will belong to the King of all the earth from then on.

Another possibility is that the word for wealth here means an army or a possession or even a plot of land that is owned. It includes things like silver and gold and nice garments, but also land and power of the nations. All of that will belong to King Jesus! He will rule better and greater than any other king in all of human history. Everything that is of worth and precious will belong to the King rightfully. It is most likely that conquest will bring these plundered possessions to Him.

14:15 And thus a plague will come upon the horse, the mule, the camel, the donkey, and all the beasts which are in those camps like this plague.

This verse sums up that this plague will be used upon not only the people, but also the animals that the people and armies of the nations are using against Jerusalem. Anything that stands against Jesus will be rotted away by this disease. Every beast that helps the nations against the Lord will receive the same destructive plague that the humans who fight will receive. Nothing will stand against Jesus in those days. Ultimate victory is His alone! And we will be with Him in that day! The glory of victory will be His.

14:16 Then it will happen that all the survivors from all the nations that have come against Jerusalem will go up from *their* sufficiency year after year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Those who are left among the nations after the battle is over will go to worship the Lord and will bless the King. Jesus will reign on high and be worshipped by all the nations. In other places in God's Word, we are told that every knee will bow and every tongue confess, that the nations will all be a part of God's redemption. This may be the start of that promise.

Jerusalem will once again be the religious center of worship. Everyone will go to where Jesus is to worship Him. We can't fully imagine what His rule is going to be like, because there has been nothing like it on this earth until He comes and reigns. The invisible Kingdom of God is the closest we can come to realizing what His rule will be like. But one day inside of human history, space and time, Jesus will reign better and more perfectly than any king could.

Considerable mention is made of the Feast of Booths throughout this section on the worship of the nations in Jerusalem. The Feast of Booths is a time of celebrating the harvest and prosperity of God upon Israel. How fitting that this feast will be celebrated by all, perhaps as a perpetual feast because of the prosperity that King Jesus brings to the world. Also, notice that the King, Jesus, is called the Lord of Hosts. This is important because it culminates the idea of God being the King of Israel from before they had a king, and it also shows us that Jesus is divine.

14:17 And of the families of the earth who do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, upon them there will be no rain.

But for those who still neglect their duty to worship the King, there will be distress and trouble. The Bible tells us that they will not have prosperity. The rains from the heavens will not come to their lands. When they don't worship the King of prosperity, they will not enjoy His prosperity. The families of the earth here might speak of tribal units or national entities. The Lord will keep rain from watering crops and they will be in want because they do not serve and worship the King of Kings.

14:18 And if the family of Egypt does not go up and bring themselves, then on them there will be no *rain*. There will be the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Specifically, the nation or family of Egypt is mentioned as one that might resist the Lord's rule. They will not receive any rain when they live in their obstinate approach and do not worship the Lord. The idea of bringing themselves contains a presentation before the Lord. They will not be able to endure without the rain. The plague that took care of the armies of the nations in the great battle will still be available for those who are not compliant with the King.

They will be required to celebrate the feast along with all others. The time of prosperity for the earth has come under the leadership of the Lord Jesus. He brings only good, and still some nations will reject Him. Revelation tells us that when Satan is freed, the nations will once again join with him. This shows the full depravity and pride of humanity to turn against God even when they see the glory of His reign.

14:19 This will be the sin offering from Egypt and the sin offering from all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

The rain will be the result of Egypt's sin against Jesus, the King. When they don't come to the festival in their rebellion, they will endure rainless skies and dead crops. Any nation that follows the lead of Egypt, or any nation that opposes Jesus will sin against the King in this manner and receive the rain and the plague for their resistance. While this may seem harsh, the Lord reigns with such grace and kindness that rejecting Him is the act of insanity. Who wouldn't want to enjoy the full prosperity of the earth? Those who have so much pride they cannot endure the rule of the greatest King. The suffering through no rain and the plague will in a sense be a sin offering to King Jesus for not showing up to the party of the feast.

14:20 On that day there will be on the bells of horses, "Holy to the Lord," and the cooking pots will be in the house of the Lord like the basin in front of the altar.

This verse talks about an inscription upon the bells of horses that the horses are holy to the Lord. This is an image of God making everything sacred, even common things. Everything will have its place and use in Jesus. Even cooking pots will be like the basin in front of the altar in the temple. They will all have holy uses and everything will be holy before Jesus. He will live with His people in holiness and everything will reach its intended and designed destiny. Prosperity and holiness will be the norm of life with Jesus as King.

We can't fully grasp this because we live in a world that is constantly compartmentalizing the sacred and the secular. We don't understand that everything has a holy or unique use, and that when Jesus reigns, those uses will be holy and unique. We can't think in terms of everything being sacred, even cooking and the animals that we use. But this day will come when everything will be sacred before the Lord, just like in the temple.

14:21 Then every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of Hosts and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts on that day.

The final verse finishes the promise of the sacred invading the secular. Even the peoples of the earth will cook and boil things before the Lord in His presence, and it will be a sacred act. Everything will be holy for Him, and every action will be holy. Brother Lawrence talked about

practicing the presence of God in which everything we do can be devoted to the Lord. Nothing in our lives would be a place where God would not dwell with us. Even in washing the dishes or in working the ground, everything we do can give God glory and honor Him. This is the idea here in the text.

A final statement can be taken a few different ways. I will take it in the context of holiness before Jesus in His reign. The final sentence simply tells us that Canaanites aren't invited to the House of the Lord, the temple. What is that about? It can be taken as a reference to unholy things happening in the House of the Lord. Canaanites are elsewhere eluded to in the prophets as merchants. We could take this to mean that there will no longer be merchants in the house of the Lord. Remember that Jesus got rid of merchants who were cheating the people out of money in God's house.

Another way to view this is that the Canaanites represent the unholy or the things that are unclean or don't belong in the house of the Lord or in the land of the King. If you take it that way, it would mean that only the holy things would remain, and that there would be nothing unclean or evil in the city of Jerusalem. Either way, it is not a slight against the people of Canaan, but an image of purity and holiness.

We are looking forward to this time when Jesus reigns in the whole earth. He reigns in our hearts now, but the King will soon come to rule in our world. He will not just be ruling over those who love Him, but over the whole earth. Can you imagine what His reign is going to be like? We long for His return. So I finish this book and study with the same words that many Christians constantly finish conversations with. Maranatha! Even so, Lord, come now!