

The Book of Zechariah

The majority of insights and much of the text here comes from the Bible Reading program (<http://www.ucg.org/brp/index.htm>). Additional insights are those of myself and friends during our in-house Bible studies going through this book.

The Book of Zechariah was written in 519 BC about 20 years after the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Persians in 539 BC. A remnant of the Jews returned to Palestine and rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem again.

It should be noted that only a small percentage of Judah returned. The remainder of the Jews in Babylon stayed there for many centuries. There was a church in Babylon in the first century amongst their descendants (1 Peter 5:13). Over the centuries following the fall of Babylon those Jews would follow the rest of the lost tribes of Israel into Europe.

Zechariah means “God has remembered”. God loves and remembers His people. For Israel’s good He has had to punish them. Near the end of chapter 1 He remembers how those He sent to punish His people overdid it with evil intent and He executes judgment on them for that.

God says that remembers His people in chapter 2 and tells them that He has a happy ending for them – to rebuild Jerusalem and all the cities of Israel once again. This occurred in Zechariah’s day and this will happen again after Christ’s return in the millennium. This is the real theme of the book of Zechariah to encourage them that God is for them at this time and in the end-time as they obey Him and that He will restore them.

Interspersed within the book are some prophecies for other times. God prophesies about events in the day of Alexander the Great nearly 200 years later where their neighbouring nations would be chastised and they would enjoy relative protection, as a type of what He will do in the end time (9:1-8). The next verse (9:9) speaks of Christ entering Jerusalem at His first coming on a donkey before jumping ahead to His second coming.

Events related to the time of Christ are spoken about in chapter 11. It prophesies about the destruction of the Temple (11:1) and Judea (11:6, 16) at the hands of the Romans in 70 AD after their rejection of Jesus Christ (11:12-13). God broke the covenant with them (11:10) as a result and they would be scattered to all nations in the great Diaspora that followed the Romans destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Zechariah’s prophecies are very much dual. They picture events that happened in Zechariah’s lifetime as the remnant of Judah returned from Babylon.

They also picture events in the end-time – both to physical Israel and to spiritual Israel (God’s church). Physical Israel will go into captivity in Babylon (United Europe – the beast power – Revelation 17). Note the phrase “daughter of Zion” (2:10). Daughter means descendant (as in end-time descendant) and Zion is used for Jerusalem and Israel.

Spiritual Israel in the end-time has already gone into spiritual religious Babylon with the doctrinal apostasy that overtook the church over the past decade. As a remnant of the Jews came out of Babylon and rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem, a remnant of God’s people came out of spiritual Babylon and have begun to rebuild the church and the Work of God again (Zechariah 4).

Zechariah 1 starts off with a call to repentance and not to act the same way as their ancestors who didn’t repent and went into captivity in Babylon (1:3-6).

Then comes the first of eight visions in the book - **the vision of the horses**. They are horses of different colours – red, brown and white. They are angelic beings who “walk to and fro throughout the earth” (1:11). The colours of the horses that execute judgment for God may indicate war (red), disease (sorrel-brown) and conquest (white) if they are similar to the four horsemen of Revelation 6.

In Zechariah 4:10 angels are called the “eyes” of God – used also in Revelation 5:6 for angels as well. Another term for these “eyes” who report on conditions that are happening on earth for God is watchers (Daniel 4:13-17). This term “watchers” appears in ancient extra-Biblical texts such as the Book of Enoch, the Book of Jubilees and in Sumerian writings. In those extra-Biblical texts it indicates that some of those angelic beings, who previously had the job of being watchers, became fallen angels and rebelled with Lucifer (now Satan).

The earth is resting quietly (1:11) and God is angry at the nations at ease now after destroying most of Judah and overdoing it with evil intent (1:15). It’s time to rebuild Jerusalem (1:16-17).

Then comes **the vision of the horns and craftsmen**. There are 4 horns who have scattered and conquered Israel and Judah. The 4 craftsmen who terrify the 4 horns are the nations God uses to punish those 4 horns that overdid it when they conquered God’s people (1:18-21). According to the Bible Reading Program these are their identities:

- 1) Assyria (conquerors of northern kingdom of Israel - 721 BC) conquered by Babylon (612 BC).
- 2) Babylon (conquerors of southern kingdom of Judah – 585 BC) conquered by Persia (539 BC).
- 3) Rome (deporters of the Jews from Judah starting from 70 AD) conquered by the Barbarian tribes (476 AD).
- 4) Future Roman-Assyrian-Babylon beast power (United Europe) to conquer end-time Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 30:3, Isaiah 10:5-20) and then to be conquered by the Asiatics (Revelation 9:13-21) and then Jesus Christ at His return (Revelation 19:20-21).

Zechariah 2 starts off with **the vision of the measuring line**. The angel is measuring Jerusalem saying she will be rebuilt and will not need walls (this can only be in the millennium and after) for God will be a fire around her and be her protector (2:4-5).

Israel (Zion) is the apple of God’s eye (2:8) – He cares greatly for her. He takes it very personally when His people are mistreated. Notice the Lord of Hosts (2:8) says “then you will know that the Lord of Hosts has sent me (the Lord of Hosts)” (2:9). Two beings here both referred to here as the Lord of Hosts.

Zechariah 3 starts with **the vision of the High Priest** where the High Priest, Joshua, is opposed by Satan and the filthy garments of Joshua are replaced clean white clothes – He is forgiven in God’s eyes and pronounced righteous. Joshua is a brand plucked from the fire (3:2). In Amos 4:11 God says that He overthrew them as “Sodom and Gomorrah and you were like a firebrand plucked from the fire.” God had brought them out of the fiery trial of captivity.

Joshua is promised if he walks in God’s ways he will judge God’s house and courts (3:7). The BRANCH is Jesus Christ (Isaiah 11:1-5, Zechariah 6:12-14) as is probably the stone (3:9) who is the focus of the seven eyes (angels) – seven eyes representing complete vision. Joshua is a type of Jesus Christ who would bear sin for mankind and then take His place as the ultimate High Priest ruling over Israel. Forgiveness and prosperity (sitting under the vine and fig tree) are promised in the future (3:10).

Zechariah 4 is the vision of the lampstand and **the two olive trees**. There are two olive trees on either side of a single lampstand with seven candles branching from it. After speaking about Zerubbabel for a few verses the angel then says “the two olive trees are the two anointed ones who stand before the Lord and the earth” (4:12-14). This appears to equate with the two witnesses who are called “the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth”

(Revelation 11:4). The high priest, Joshua, and the governor, Zerubbabel, spoken of in chapters 3 and 4 may be types of these two end-time witnesses.

A lampstand is a symbol of a church (Revelation 1:20). Lampstands allow people to see in the dark (Matthew 5:14). Olive trees produced olive oil and oil is a symbol of God's spirit as seen in the parable of the virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) flowing through His servants as they serve others.

In Zechariah there is one lampstand (4:2). The people were united under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel in Zechariah's time. There are two lampstands or two churches in the end-time (Revelation 11:4) which are represented by the two witnesses.

Who are the two churches or lampstands in the end time? The most likely answer is one group are those who go to place of safety (Revelation 12:6) and the other group are those who aren't protected - "the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

Joshua is referred to as a brand plucked from the fire. Fire represents the Great Tribulation in Revelation 3:18 and maybe the second witness is plucked out of it a little while after it begins. Perhaps the second witness comes from those who don't go to the place of safety and is a representative of the great many small splinter groups in the Church of God. Perhaps one represents the Church of God and the other represents the Messianic Jews who have much in common with the rest of God's church.

Zerubbabel is told that God will build the Temple again through his efforts and those supporting him (4:9). This did happen in Zechariah's day but this prophecy is dual and also refers to the rebuilding of God's church (His Temple - 1 Corinthians 3:16) and His work in our day now.

The angels rejoice seeing God's people doing God's work (4:10). He is told "not by might nor by power but My (God's) spirit" these things will happen (4:6). God will see to it. God will help His people overcome all obstacles such as removing mountains (4:7). Jesus said if we had pure faith as small as a mustard seed God would move mountains for us (Matthew 17:20).

God says not to despise "the day of small things" (4:10). In Haggai 2:3 God says: "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, *is this* not in your eyes as nothing?"

Do we have this attitude today regarding the size of the church and the work in comparison to how it was in our former association? Do we despise the day of small things now when we compare ourselves with the days when the church numbered 150,000 and the Plain Truth went out to millions of people each month?

In Haggai 2:7-9 God says "I will fill this temple with glory," says the Lord of hosts. "The silver *is* Mine, and the gold *is* Mine," says the Lord of hosts. "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the Lord of hosts." God almost always starts things out small but with a very big end in mind.

In time the whole world will be ruled by God and people of all nations will become converted and what we had in our former association will be miniscule in comparison. God's church will become big enough at the end to become noticed and hated by all nations (Matthew 24:9). Even though God promises His Work will grow once again, God is still much more interested now in the quality of our own personal conversion than He is in the quantity of people converted.

Zechariah 5 starts off with **the vision of the flying scroll**. Zechariah sees a flying scroll 20 cubits (30 feet) by 10 cubits (15 feet) written on both sides. It's about the size of a billboard recording a curse on one side to thieves and a curse on the other side to perjurers reminiscent of the curses pronounced on lawbreakers in Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

Perjury here may be taking God's name in vain. One side may represent man's obligations to his fellow man and the other side man's obligations to God like the Ten Commandments which were written on both sides on stone tablets according to Exodus 32:15.

When ancient nations made treaties two copies were made and were placed in the holiest temple of each nation. It appears likely that there were two copies that were made of the Ten Commandments (both written on each side). God gave Moses both His copy and the copy for the Israelites since they shared the same holy temple emphasising how God would dwell amongst His people.

The curses in the flying scroll vision have lawbreakers expelled from the land (5:3) and the next vision speaks of wickedness being expelled from the land.

The vision of the woman in a basket has a woman identified as wickedness (5:8) thrust into a basket that is covered with a heavy lead cover so it doesn't get out and then taken away by two women with stork wings (are these angels that look like women?) from Israel to the land of Shinar (5:11) which is Babylon. Unclean birds are used by God to remove wickedness to Babylon which will be the habitation of every unclean spirit and unclean bird (Revelation 18:2). Wicked Israel was taken into Babylon (symbolized by a woman – Revelation 17) in ancient times and she will once more in the future and then wickedness will be completely purged from the Holy Land.

Zechariah 6 starts with **the vision of the four chariots**. There are four chariots that go from between two bronze mountains to various places. The horses and their colours are similar to the four horsemen of Revelation 6. Bronze represents great strength like the two bronze pillars of the Temple so they may represent God's judgments going out over the earth. The black and the white horses go to the north country (Europe). Black may indicate famine and white conquest. The dappled colour may be speckled or pale representing plagues and the dappled horses go south. In Zechariah 14:18-19 Egypt receives plagues of drought if they don't come to the Feast of Tabernacles. The red horses don't go anywhere specific probably indicating global war.

Joshua, the high priest, is then crowned in a symbolic ceremony that represents the crowning of Jesus Christ over all nations at His return. The names Joshua and Jesus both mean Saviour. "Behold the Man" (6:12) is how Pilate introduced Christ at His trial (John 19:5). Jesus is the BRANCH (Isaiah 11:1-2) and His branches of government will go out to all the world (Isaiah 2:2-4). He will build the millennial Temple spoken of in Ezekiel 43 and He will bring peace to the whole world. Gentiles will come from afar (6:15) and help build the Temple (Isaiah 60:3-12).

Zechariah 7 starts off with a delegation of the people going to the priests and the prophets about whether to continue certain national fast days that were instituted to commemorate tragic events when Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians nearly 70 years earlier. The two fast days mentioned in this chapter (7:5) and the other two mentioned in the next chapter (8:18) were traditional days not ordained to be kept in the scriptures.

"Counting the beginning of the year from the month of Nisan, the Jewish sages identified these dates as follows (in the Talmudical tractate *Rosh Hashanah* 18b):

- **the fast of the fourth month** fell on the ninth of Tammuz, the day when the city walls were breached (2 Kings 25:3-4; Jeremiah 39:2);
- **the fast of the fifth month** was on the ninth of Ab, when the house of God was destroyed by fire (2 Kings 25:8-10);
- **the fast of the seventh month** was on the third of Tishri, the anniversary of the assassination of Gedaliah the son of Ahikam (2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:2); and
- **the fast of the tenth month** fell on the tenth of Tebeth, which was the day when the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1, Ezekiel 24:2).

“In Zechariah’s day, sixty-eight years after the destruction, when the rebuilding of the Temple was almost complete, the question naturally arose whether the time had not come to annul these fasts, since Jeremiah’s prophecy about the duration of the exile might well be thought to have been fulfilled” (*The Illustrated Family Encyclopedia of the Living Bible*, Vol. 8, p. 93, quoted in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on Zechariah 7:2-3).

God asks, “Did you really fast for Me—for Me?” (7:5). The sad truth is that their fasting was selfishly motivated. In verse 6, God says the same was true in regard to their feasting—it was all for themselves.

It may be hard, though, to understand how self-denial can be selfish. Yet consider that rather than using fasting as a tool to draw closer to God, to realize total dependence on Him and more readily discern His will—which is the true purpose of fasting—the people were using the fasts to both wallow in self-pity and make God feel sorry enough for them to do something for them.

In verses 8-10, God reminds the people to focus on what’s really important—the weightier matters of the law, such as justice, mercy, faith and love (Micah 6:8; Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42), the true religion of looking out for the widow and orphan (James 1:27), and other matters of serving and helping one’s neighbor. It was the refusal of their forefathers to heed this message that brought about the exile (Zechariah 7:11-14). These are the kinds of contemplative thoughts the national fast days should have been stimulating.

Zechariah 8 starts off with God saying I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her” (8:2). God has tremendous passion and love for Zion – both the land and especially for His chosen people He also refers to as Zion.

Verses 3 to 6 gives us a beautiful picture of the security, peace and joy that will then permeate not only Jerusalem but all the world when Jesus Christ returns to earth and establishes the Kingdom of God on the earth. Considering the terror and violence of the Middle East we see today, the imagery of people growing to great age and children playing in Jerusalem’s streets is an amazing contrast.

In verses 7-8, God promises the restoration of all His people. He will gather them from both east and west. This return from both east and west is from the future captivity that will come on both the House of Israel and the House of Judah (Isaiah 1:11).

In verses 9-10, God encourages His people to be strong in their work of building the Temple—and there is likely a spiritual meaning for His spiritual people of the end time intended here too. With confidence in God’s promises, we should be strong in participating in God’s spiritual temple-building work today.

Israel will be blessed tremendously. Notice that God says He will deliver both Judah and Israel at that time—that is, all 12 tribes (8:11-13). In verses 14-17 God again sets forth our moral responsibilities—as all people living by these precepts is the way that will bring about the wonderful world of peace God proclaims. It speaks of giving “judgment in your gates” in verse 16. In ancient cities there were rooms adjacent to the gates of cities where judges and the ruler of the city would also go to at certain times to judge on matters.

In verses 18-19, God returns to the matter of the Jewish fasts. During the millennial reign of Christ, they will be turned into times of joy and feasting. This would parallel Christ’s point about His followers not fasting while He was with them (Matthew 9:15). In the future Kingdom of God, Christ will again dwell with His people.

While sadly Jewish religious practice today is still very ritualistic and legalistic, that will not be the case in the world to come. Indeed, the people of other nations in the Millennium will even seek out the

Jews as those who are close to God—and who can therefore guide and teach them in the ways of true worship (Zechariah 8:20-23).

It speaks of ten men from every language grabbing the sleeve of a Jew wanting to learn about God from him. While there will be a pure language for the whole world that God will bring (Zephaniah 3:9) this doesn't necessarily mean the abolition of all other national languages as this verse indicates.

God's new language, which will probably be easy to learn and completely phonetic, will be the primary language in all nations but other languages will continue to exist.

Wales is a bi-lingual country within a country. English is the primary language but alongside English they have preserved Welsh as a secondary language which they teach to all school children along with English. Also, most of their street signs have the names of the street in both English and Welsh. English (the international language of the four countries that form the United Kingdom) is the primary language and the national language is preserved as a secondary language.

In Europe the situation is the other way around. There are quite a number of different national languages which are all the primary language in each country even though most people in countries like France and Switzerland also know how to speak English.

The various languages of Europe like French, Italian and German all have their own particular charm to them and are expressions of the wonderful variety God has created in these people. German conveys the sense of order and authority of the German people while French and Italian both have quite an emotional and romantic feel to them like the people of those countries.

In the World Tomorrow God's new international language will be the primary language in all countries with national languages being the secondary languages of various countries.

Zechariah 9 starts off with a message against the land of Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon and Gaza. Hadrach was in Syria, north of Hamath on the Orontes River, southwest of Aleppo. Tyre and Sidon are on the Lebanese coast north of Israel. Ashkelon and Gaza were Philistine cities on the southern Palestinian coast.

Verses 3-4 describe destruction to come on Tyre, reminiscent of Ezekiel's prophecies against Tyre in Ezekiel 26-28. The greatest ancient destruction of Tyre was accomplished by Alexander the Great—as the unwitting agent of God—when he rebuilt an ancient causeway out to the island fortress, breached its towering walls and set the city ablaze. And this was a forerunner of the destruction God will bring against end-time Tyre—that is, the global power bloc also referred to in prophecy as "Babylon the Great" (Revelation 18).

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

In verses 5-6 we read: "The king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. A mixed race shall settle in Ashdod." In Alexander's conquest, "Ashkelon lost its population, and Gaza was reduced after a siege of a few months...Special mention is made...that the king of Gaza was brought alive to the conqueror after the city was taken; the...'king' of the city, was bound to a chariot and dragged around the city to his death.... Ashdod was to lose its native population during this invasion, being replaced by a...mongrel people. It was Alexander's policy to mingle different conquered peoples" (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 316).

Notice that verse 1 mentioned the eyes of all people, especially “all the tribes of Israel” being on the Lord—that is, on Him carrying out His will against these nations. The scattered tribes of Israel, on the northern periphery of the Persian Empire, experienced a measure of liberation through the conquests of Alexander. Yet this could also signify all the Israelites of the end time witnessing the coming of the Lord to deliver them—as described later in the chapter (9:14).

Regarding the protection by God of His people in verse 8 Matthew Henry says in his commentary that “Alexander the Great, struck with an awe of Jaddus the high priest, favoured the Jews, and took them under his protection, at the same time when he wasted the neighbouring countries.”

Alexander’s deliverance of Judah from Persia and his protection of them became a type of God’s end-time vengeance on surrounding Arab nations (partly by the United Europe and partly by Himself with the returning Israelites) and the coming end-time deliverance of Israel and Judah from captivity at the return of Christ.

Verse 8 further shows the end-time element of this prophecy, as God promises to never again allow a foreign oppressor to tramp through His people’s land. Since the time of Alexander, other oppressors have clearly afflicted the people of God so we also see God projecting forward into the future. He looks ahead to the time after the surrounding Arab nations will have been devastated by the United Europe’s sweeping conquest of the Middle East followed by God’s punishment of Europe at the time of Christ’s return.

Following on from the millennial context of Zechariah 9:8 when “no more shall an oppressor pass through them” we read of the coming of the future King – Jesus Christ. Verse 9 speaks of His first coming as Saviour and suffering servant when He would give His life for mankind and verse 10 speaks of His second coming as King of kings over all nations.

Zechariah 9:9 contains the prophecy of the saving Messiah arriving on the colt of a donkey. This was fulfilled when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on such a donkey colt a few days before His crucifixion (Matthew 21:2-7; John 12:12-15). “The donkey was the mount of princes (Judges 5:10; 10:4; 12:14) and kings (2 Sam. 16:1, 2)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Zechariah 9:9).

God had forbidden Israel’s kings from multiplying horses to themselves (Deuteronomy 17:16). Horses would have been a symbol of exaltation and conquest. Notice that Zechariah 9:10 shows horses and chariots as war implements. The donkey was to symbolize humility and peace—and Israel’s anointed kings were to represent the future Messiah who would humble Himself in the cause of ultimate peace.

Verse 10 speaks of Christ’s dominion which “shall be from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth”. In verses 11 and 12 God speaks of delivering His people who are captive prisoners “because of the blood of your covenant”. The covenants to Abraham and the Sinai covenant were sealed with blood. God will then restore double to them in His kingdom.

Though Christ speaks peace to the nations (9:10) they hatefully reject Him. He must therefore subdue them through means of war (9:13-15). God will even use the returned captives of Ephraim (representative of the northern tribes) and Judah to fight their enemies.

Some have attempted to link verse 13 with the Jewish fight in the days of the Maccabees against the Seleucid Greek overlords of Syria. While there may have been a forerunner in that divinely assisted struggle, there is mention of Ephraim, as representative of the northern tribes—and they were *not* present during the Maccabean period.

Greece is seen as the birthplace of Western civilisation and may be representative of the coming United Europe and the Gentile world in general. Isaiah 14:2 speaks of Israel taking captive those nations which took them captive. Like in the time of the British Empire they may rule over them under

Christ's direction for a time, reconstruct their infrastructure and teach them of God's way before giving them their independence under Christ's overall rule over the whole earth.

Zechariah 10 starts us off with God's promise of blessing Israel with rain when He restores them and then He comes back to their earlier condition where they are being led astray by their leaders both civil and religious.

He promises to punish the corrupt shepherds and the goatherds (10:3). When sheep and goats are together and then go astray it is usually the goats that lead the rest in the wrong direction. Even in the church we sometimes have lay people who are not in positions of direct leadership who wrongly influence the rest of the people in the wrong direction.

"The cornerstone, the battle bow, and the nail [or tent peg] are figures of the Messiah to represent His qualities of stability, dependability, and strength. The cornerstone speaks of the ruler or leader on whom the building of government rests figuratively. (See Judges 20:2; 1 Samuel 14:38; and Isaiah 19:13.) It is a well-known symbol of the Messiah. (1 Corinthians 3:11, 1 Peter 2:6, Isaiah 28:16) The nail [or peg] refers to the large peg in an Oriental [i.e., Middle Eastern] tent on which were hung many valuables. On the Messiah will rest the hope and trust of His people. He will be the worthy support of the nation, the altogether dependable One, the true Eliakim. The battle-bow stands for all implements of war and might. Messiah is the great military commander of His people; He is the Man of war (Exodus 15:3). This will be clearly and openly manifest when He comes to rule (Psalm 45:4-5)" (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 321).

The rest of the chapter speaks of God's promise to restore Israel and His joy when He will do so in the future. Verse 9 speaks of them being sowed in many nations during their captivity while verse 10 speaks of them returning from Egypt and Assyria and the depths of the River (the Nile) being dried up as they return. This parallels with Isaiah 11:11-12 when the Nile shall be dried up for the returning Israelites at Christ's return. Egypt is conquered by the King of the North (Daniel 11:42) and so it is a vassal of the real power that has conquered modern Israel – the Assyrians – the coming German-led United Europe.

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

Zechariah 11 comes back from the far future and focuses on events that will happen a few centuries after Zechariah's time when the Messiah would come and the Jews in general would reject Him and pay the consequences forty years later at the hand of the Romans.

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

"In the Talmud the Jewish rabbis identified Lebanon here (10:1) with the second temple, 'which was built with cedars from Lebanon, towering aloft upon a strong summit—the spiritual glory and eminence of Jerusalem, as the Lebanon was of the whole country'" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 1-3). The mighty trees of the land, besides being literal, could also symbolize the principal men of the nation (the "shepherds" of verse 3). The roaring lions of verse 3 would seem to represent the ravaging conquerors.

"Two staves [staffs] are taken because the shepherd in the East carried a staff to protect against wild beasts [i.e., a club], another to help the sheep in difficult and dangerous places [i.e., a crook]" (Feinberg, p. 327).

One staff, probably that of protection, is named “Favor” or “Grace” (“Beauty” is apparently an imprecise translation here). The other, probably the one used to keep the flock together, is named “Unity” or “Union” (as “Bonds” here, according to verse 14, connotes bonds of brotherhood). Christ’s shepherding work was to care for and protect His people and to keep them together.

Verse 8 says, “I dismissed [KJV has ‘cut off’] the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.” Many explanations have been offered here, and there is no way to be certain which is correct. “‘In one month’ has been taken to refer to (1) a literal month, (2) a short period of time, and (3) a longer period of indefinite duration” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 7-8).

Who are these three shepherds? Some commentators suggest that they are not three particular individuals, but three classes of leaders among the people. Most suggest civil magistrates, priests and prophets. “Others understand it of the three sects among the Jews, of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, all whom Christ silenced in dispute (Matthew 22) and soon after *cut off*, all in a little time” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, note on verses 4-14).

Still others, seeing the reference as denoting individuals, suggest Eleazar, John and Simon, the three Jewish faction leaders during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Again, there is no way to be sure.

Is there an end-time parallel with the church and the modern Israelite nations? God denounces the worthless shepherds in Ezekiel 34 which parallels the corrupt ministers who led much of the end-time Church of God astray in the doctrinal apostasy. We also have three branches of government in our Israelite nations – executive, legislative and judiciary – which have led our nations astray.

In verse 10, He takes the staff representing divine favor on His people—the one with which He fended off the nation’s enemies—and breaks it. This signals “the revocation of his covenant of security and restraint, by which he had been apparently holding back the nations from his people” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* on verses 10-11).

In Zechariah 11:12, the Messiah declares His job as the nation’s shepherd officially at an end, saying in effect, “Okay, I’m done here so it’s time to pay Me what you owe Me for My work—or just forget it.”

The appropriate wage, Feinberg comments, would have been “their love, their obedience, and their devotion to God and His Shepherd. But it was not to be a matter of compulsion; if they were so minded, they could refrain from any manifestation of their evaluation of His ministry. They were prepared, however, to indicate their estimate of Messiah and His work. They gave Him thirty pieces of silver (money) for His wage. According to Exodus 21:32 this was the price of a gored slave. A freeman was considered twice that amount. Think of the insult of it!” (p. 328).

God’s designation of the sum in verse 13 as a “princely price” was evidently given in sarcasm. “The price was so disgraceful that it was to be cast to the potter who busied himself with things of little value. Casting a thing to the potter may have been proverbial for throwing away what was worthless” (Feinberg, p. 328).

Casting the money into the temple for the potter seems odd on the face of it. Why would money be cast into the temple if it were to be for the potter? Remarkably, the specifics of this prophecy were fulfilled in detail. The nation’s leaders weighed out 30 pieces of silver to Judas, Jesus’ moneykeeper, to have Jesus turned over to them (Matthew 26:14-16). Later remorseful, Judas flung the money into the temple—but the chief priests, not willing to put “blood money” into the temple treasury, gave it to a potter to purchase his field (Matthew 27:3-10).

Sadly, Jesus even spoke of servants given charge of His spiritual household, the Church, in the last days who would abuse their fellow servants—and warned that they will pay the price for their callous misdeeds (Matthew 24:45-51). Verse 17 about the worthless shepherd parallels what Jesus said about the hireling in His parable about the Good Shepherd in John 10.

Zechariah 12 starts off with God saying that Jerusalem will be as a cup of wine or strong drink causing drunkenness to all surrounding peoples (12:2-3). Perhaps this implies national enemies being totally irrational about trying to control the city, as is certainly the case today. Those who try and negotiate a compromise over Jerusalem will be badly burnt by the experience. Yet the cup is also a metaphor for God's wrath, as would-be conquerors are turned into reeling and collapsing men, incoherent and confused as if drunk (Revelation 14:10; 16:19).

In an end-time battle after Christ's return, God says He "will strike every horse with confusion, and its rider with madness...every horse of the peoples with blindness" (12:4). While there may well be cavalry in the final battle over Jerusalem, perhaps horses in the end-time setting of Zechariah 12:4 refers more broadly to military vehicles. Seeming to parallel this, Zechariah 14:13-15 tells us that God will send a "great panic" among the attacking nations, causing them to slaughter one another in the ensuing confusion just as He did to ancient gentile forces that came against Judah in the days of Kings Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah (see 2 Chronicles 20; 2 Kings 18-19).

In verses 5-9 God says that He will use the governors of Judah to strike down their enemies on either side. This has happened with the dramatic victories that the Israelis have had in the 1967 Six Day War and 1973 Yom Kippor War. Another possible fulfillment could be towards the end of the Day of the Lord when some of Judah will fight against their European overlords in Palestine. Another possibility may be after the "Armageddon" battle when the Israelites have returned to Palestine and God may use them to punish neighbouring nations like Edom (Palestinians) who conspire with Europe to bring Judah down. The book of Obadiah speaks of God's vengeance on Edom.

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

The reference to the prior "mourning at Haddad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo" (12:11) is probably to the people of this town on the plain of Megiddo mourning the death of King Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:20-27). Feinberg notes: "The prophet means that the mourning will be so intense as to transcend even the closest ties of earth, those between husband and wife. Each will want to be alone with God in that hour" (p. 334).

Zechariah 13 starts off with God saying He would provide a fountain to wash away the sins of Israel (13:1). The fountain imagery shows that this provision for cleansing away sin will be abundant and overflowing. Some see the fountain as representative of the shed blood of the Messiah.

The fountain could symbolize the Lord Himself as "the fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 2:13). The living waters in this figure depict the Holy Spirit, which will be given to Israel and then all nations to empower them to depart from the way of sin and uncleanness. The river of healing water that proceeds from the throne of God in the millennial Temple situated above the Gihon spring could also be a symbolic of this as well.

"In that future day, if anyone dares to utter false prophecies ('lies,' 13:3), his own parents—in obedience to Deuteronomy 13:6-9—will take the lead in executing him [though apparently not by stoning as in ancient Israel]. The Hebrew for 'stab' [in the NIV and 'thrust...through' in the NKJV] is the

same verb as 'pierced' in [Zechariah] 12:10, thus indicating that the feelings and actions shown in piercing the Messiah will be directed toward the false prophets" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on 13:2-3).

Those who were false prophets before—including the false preachers of nominal Christianity—will cast off their religious-looking garb. Out of fear of humiliation and punishment, they will seek to hide their past occupation by claiming to be average, everyday workmen from their youth (13:4-5). Verse 6 is understood by most commentators to refer to the former false prophets lying about how they received ritual, self-inflicted wounds, such as those the prophets of Baal inflicted on themselves in the contest with Elijah (1 Kings 18:28).

"When the Shepherd is struck, the sheep are scattered, in fulfillment of the curses for covenant disobedience...[One commentator] maintains that the thought is that the Lord 'will scatter Israel or His nation by smiting the shepherd; that is to say, He will give it up to the misery and destruction to which a flock without a shepherd is exposed...This part of [chapter 13] v. 7 is quoted by Jesus not long before his arrest (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27) and applied to the scattering of the apostles [on the night He was delivered over to the authorities] (Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50), but they are probably intended to serve as a type of the Diaspora [i.e., Dispersion or Scattering] that occurred [when the Romans invaded] in A.D. 70 and following [—the greatest fulfillment to come in the end time].

Verse 8 says that two-thirds will be cut off and one third will remain. This parallels with Ezekiel 5 which says that one third of modern Israel will die by the sword, one third by famine and pestilence and one third will go into captivity.

In the imagery of refining silver and gold through the smelting process, we see again the theme of God purging His people of iniquity—purifying them. And this process is not for the physical, national Israelites alone.

Those of God's church who don't go to the place of safety will have to endure the suffering of the Great Tribulation. God tells them, "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be [truly] rich" (Revelation 3:18). Those of both national Israel and the Church who are purified during the Tribulation will in the end be part of the true people of God.

Zechariah 14 starts off with events that will occur at the time referred to as the Day of the Lord (14:1). The Day of the Lord refers to the time of God's intervention in human affairs to bring judgment on the nations and assume rule over the entire earth.

The gathering of all nations to battle against Jerusalem (14:2) ties directly back to the prophecy of 12:2-3. This concerns the final siege of Jerusalem, evidently coinciding with the time of the Christ's second coming. Initially the nations gather together at Megiddo (Armageddon) in northern Israel (Revelation 16:12-16) and then proceed south to Jerusalem (Joel 3:2) after they conclude Jesus Christ is the coming enemy. The rest of Zechariah 14:2 seems to refer back to the beginning of the Great Tribulation of 13:8-9—perhaps to review the horrible events that have led up to this final siege.

During the Tribulation, the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into captivity, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city (14:2). That half of the city goes into captivity is quite interesting.

Currently the old city is fully controlled by Israel yet Zechariah says only half of the city will be taken captive. Europe and the Vatican are much more sympathetic to the cause of the Palestinians who want complete control of part of Palestine than they are to Israel's cause. Europe is mainly interested in the Christian and Armenian quarters of the old walled city and may give control of the Arab and Jewish quarters of the old city over to the Palestinians if they don't win it through negotiation before the Great Tribulation.

Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olivets (Acts 1:11-12) on the east side of Jerusalem—and that He would return in like manner to the same place. This is a reference to the prophecy in Zechariah 14:4 that “His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives”.

They would have been aware of the Shekinah glory of God departing from the Temple to the Mount of Olives and then back to heaven (Ezekiel 11:23). They are encouraged with the news that the divine presence would return to them by the same route. Olives produce olive oil which was used for anointing. The Jews also referred to the Mount of Olives as the Mount of Anointing which is fitting since Christ means the Anointed One.

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

Verse 5 speaks of them fleeing “as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah”. The prophet Amos dated his book with reference to that former earthquake (see Amos 1:1) which occurred about 747 BC.

Josephus tells us the following about the earthquake of Uzziah’s day: “before the city, at a place called Eroge, half the mountain broke off from the rest on the west, and rolled itself [toward the west] four furlongs [880 yards or half a mile], and stood still at the east mountain, till the roads, as well as the king’s gardens, were spoiled by the obstruction” (Josephus, Book IX, Chapter X).

Revelation 16:18 says: “And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth.” Interestingly, the Jordan River Valley, a few miles east of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, lies along a major fault line, so the whole area has long been a significant earthquake zone.

At the end of Zechariah 14:5, we are told that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, will come with “all the saints.” Jude wrote that Enoch prophesied “Behold the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints (Jude 14). The saints are those of His church in this age resurrected to divine glory at Christ’s coming.

Verses 6-7 describe a period of persistent darkness across many days, signifying the time of judgment. This parallels Joel 2:1-2: “For the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness”. But then the darkness will be broken and light will shine even at night.

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

It speaks of it being light at evening time (14:7). This may be due to Christ’s brightness filling the sky, making it like day or we may see some sort of repeat of Joshua’s long day where the daylight was extended to allow Israel more time to defeat an army it was fighting at the time.

Perhaps this might be a correction of the sudden rotation of the earth that is one possible interpretation of the fourth trumpet plague (Revelation 8:12). Amos 8:9 says that God will make the sun go down at noon, possibly referring to the fourth trumpet plague. The fourth trumpet plague could be similar to what happened in Hezekiah’s day (2 Kings 20:8-11) with the earth suddenly being rotated by a number of

degrees forward possibly due to the gravitational pull and/or the magnetic attraction of a celestial object as it passes the earth. If so, Zechariah 14:7 might be a correction of that sudden rotation of the earth extending the daylight of that day to allow more time to defeat the armies coming against Jerusalem.

Zechariah 14:8 describes living waters flowing from Jerusalem toward the eastern sea (the Dead Sea) and the western sea (the Mediterranean). “In contrast with the seasonal streams that flow only during the rainy season, these streams will irrigate the land in both summer and winter” (*Nelson*, note on verse 8). This parallels the description of the river of healing waters flowing from Jerusalem in Ezekiel 47 and Joel 3:18.

While literal, the reference is also figurative of the Holy Spirit and salvation flowing from the divine Messiah (John 7:37-39). It’s also interesting that the city of Jerusalem was founded on a hill atop the Gihon Spring, a freshwater source that has provided the city with water for many centuries. The limestone hills around Jerusalem are clearly underlain by underground water sources, so little stretch of the imagination is required to see God bringing these prophecies to pass. Verse 9 speaks of the realisation of the hope of all God’s people who pray, “Your Kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10)—the time when Jesus Christ will at last become King over the entire earth.

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

Verse 11 gives the comforting message that Jerusalem will be reinhabited with its citizens secure, the great destruction of the last days having come to an end. Verse 12 returns to the theme of the final battle over Jerusalem at Christ’s return. God will send a “plague” to strike the enemy forces.

The description of people’s flesh dissolving while they stand on their feet in Zechariah 14:12 seems similar to that of the effect of a nuclear- or neutron-bomb explosion. The main point is who causes the effect—“the LORD will strike all the people.” The plague of verse 12 is referred to again in verse 15 as consuming enemy transport animals and livestock.

Zechariah 14:13 describes a great panic among the enemy forces that will lead to them attacking each other. Zechariah 14:14 states that Judah will fight and seize the spoil of the defeated enemies. This could be the time of the final “Armageddon” battle in Jerusalem at the time Christ comes to the Mount of Olives. Alternatively it could be the time of a later invasion against Israel a little while into the millennium described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 when God and Magog and other Asian nations will come against Jerusalem. Enemy forces attacking each other is spoken of in Ezekiel 38:21.

All nations will then be required to observe the annual Feast of Tabernacles (14:16). This clearly proves that this festival, along with God’s other feasts listed in Leviticus 23, are not just for the Israelites but are, rather, for all humanity.

Indeed, the Feast of Tabernacles pictures this wonderful future period pictured in Zechariah 14—the time when all nations will be brought under the reign of Christ to experience joy and peace for 1,000 years. The Feast will be observed globally, with each nation sending a representation to Jerusalem. The point of verse 16 is to draw a contrast. Those of the nations who came *against* Jerusalem will now come to worship there.

Those who still refuse to obey God and keep the Feast will be withheld blessings such as rain. Such measures will be for the ultimate good of those afflicted. It will wake them up to understand who Christ really is. Also, even though they may go to learn from Him unwillingly at first, they will

nevertheless be afforded an opportunity to learn that they would have unwisely denied themselves. Eventually, most will be grateful for this discipline and will freely and enthusiastically join in the worship of God (Zechariah 8:23).

As *Expositor's* notes on verses 20-21, they "may be summed up like this: There will be holiness in public life ('the bells of the horses,' v. 20), in religious life ('the cooking pots in the LORD's house,' v. 20), and in private life ('every pot in Jerusalem and Judah,' v. 21). Even common things become holy when they are used for God's service...So God's original purpose for Israel (Exod 19:6) will be fulfilled...'Canaanite' would then represent anyone who is morally or spiritually unclean—anyone who is not included among the chosen people of God."

Indeed, God appears to be drawing a parallel between the establishment of His Kingdom in Zechariah 14 with ancient Israel's conquest of the Promised Land of Canaan. When the ultimate Joshua (Jesus) leads spiritual Israel to victory over the nations of spiritual Canaan (this evil world)—to dispossess them from the Promised Land of this whole earth—there will be no more spiritual Canaanites (rebellious, idolatrous nations) left to defile the house of the Lord. Instead, all will be holy.

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