

“THE WORD OF THE LORD”

ZECHARIAH’S MESSAGES

BY

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1. GOD'S WORD COMES AND COMES TRUE

...the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah

(Zechariah 1:1).

Very little biographical material is given us concerning Zechariah. We know his father was Berekiah and his grandfather was Iddo, which doesn't mean much, if anything, to us. In the prophet's day, however, it distinguished him from other Zechariahs.

The identity of Zechariah does not establish his importance. What made him valuable to Israel was his message. The word of the Lord came to him, not to be privately treasured but to be publicly proclaimed. His ideas and opinions were not history-making but his relay of God's word to God's people made Zechariah a man-of-the-hour.

1. The word of the Lord comes.

The word of the Lord is dynamic. It has life and power that insures its relevance to every age and every need of mankind. God doesn't speak because he cannot abide silence. Silence often threatens people and causes them to babble. God speaks to achieve a purpose that is well-defined in his mind and definitely needed by those to whom he speaks.

The word of the Lord is historic. It addresses specific times and persons and situations. The prophet's first message was delivered "in the eighth month of the second year of Darius." It was datable, but not dated. It still comes, from the pages of Scripture to the ears of people who need to hear it as personal address to them.

The word of the Lord still comes. It comes to us bound in paper, cloth or leather, and unbound through the expositions and declarations of those who preach and teach the Bible.

2. The word of the Lord comes and comes true.

What was spoken as prophecy flowered into history. God fulfills both his promises and his threats. He acts in mercy and in judgment, but does neither without prefacing his actions with his announced intentions.

God's word transcends its deliverers. Sometimes the prophet is long gone before the events he proclaimed are experienced by those for whom the word was sent.

The word of the Lord is fulfilled in God's scheduled time. It does not originate with those who speak or those who hear. It is not human opinion or speculation. It is not offered for debate or negotiation. Our times are in God's hands, and he knows and sends the word we need to hear whether we want to hear it or not. And that word will come true whether we believe it or not. It is not subject to our cancellation.

"The word of the Lord" still comes and comes true. It lies in the past and intrudes into the present. It marks the present as probation, and we either learn from the past or we ruin our future.

2. GOD'S WORD FOR THE FUTURE

...the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah...

(Zechariah 1:7).

The word of the Lord makes a prophet. The prophets all differed from one another but had this in common--they were chosen by the Lord to deliver his word to their generation.

The word of the Lord makes or breaks the people to whom that word is proclaimed. Those who hear and believe are saved from their sins; those who hear and reject incur divine wrath.

1. The medium of the word that came.

"I had a vision" said Zechariah. God chooses the manner in which his word is conveyed to its messengers. In Zechariah's case it was often a vision. With others it was sometimes a voice or a dream. By whatever means it came from God, it became a compulsion for the prophet. He--or she--had to speak even when the assignment was costly.

The word that was seen marked the receiver as a "seer," one of the labels for a prophet in the Bible. What Zechariah saw he transmitted as a verbal message. From the eye of the prophet to the ears of the people was the route taken by the word of the Lord that gripped his soul.

God sovereignly chose both the messenger and medium.

2. The meaning of the word that came.

Sometimes the message accused and threatened as a sin-hating God condemned a sin-loving people. Sometimes the message comforted and encouraged as penitent people learned through judgment what they had refused to learn through mercy. The prophet then conveyed assurances of forgiveness and reconciliation. The Lord reminded Israel of the reason for its exile and promised, "Return to me and I will return to you."

Now the prophet can speak "kind and comforting words." The exiles will return; the rod of judgment is being lifted. Scouts have ridden "throughout the earth" and have reported prevailing conditions. The Lord decides that the time has come to pardon and restore the chosen nation.

Zechariah's visions were chiefly concerned with Israel's future after the exile ended and the people were restored to their homeland. God's last word is not judgment but grace.

3. A BRACING VISION

These are the horns that scattered Judah...the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns...

(Zechariah 1:29).

Zechariah “looked up” and saw four horns and four craftsmen. The horns were not brass instruments; they were animal horns. When used metaphorically horns are symbols of aggressive strength. The “craftsmen” were God's servants whose mission is to “throw down” the horns.

1. The puzzling identity of these powers.

The "horns" are unspecified "nations." They were nations who shared in the downfall and deportation of Israel. Unnamed in the text, they were doubtless readily known to the prophet and people.

The "craftsmen" are unidentified conquerors. When Zechariah asked what they were “coming to do,” the Lord replied, “to terrify...and throw down these horns.”

Throughout history evil forces have opposed God's people. There are always "horns" butting and shoving against the purpose of God. He raises up "craftsmen," who may or may not know they are serving him, to counteract and overcome the forces of evil.

2. The abiding message of this passage.

Choosing his own time and servants, God will defeat the "horns." Evil is powerful, but God is all-powerful. His purposes will stand when his enemies fall. As Jesus promised, "the gates of Hades will not overcome" the church. A John wrote, "The light shines in the darkness, but darkness has not overcome it."

We can endure the "horns" as we await the "craftsmen." We can trust, for God disciplines his people but he never abandons them. We can rejoice, for horns are never the final victors. History terminates in the utter conquest of the mightiest horn of all: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

4. THE SURVEYOR AND THE SOVEREIGN

"I will be its glory.... I am coming and I will live among you, declares the Lord" (Zechariah 2:8, 10).

The third of Zechariah's visions is once again a "kind and comforting" message. It held before Israel the bracing prospect of release from long exile, and the challenge of rebuilding a ruined city and restoring a national identity.

1. Zechariah beheld a surveyor.

This time he "looked up" and saw "a man with a measuring line." He was a surveyor whose task was to measure the length and breadth of Jerusalem. A pair of angels confronts the surveyor and tells him to hurry and tell the young prophet that the future city will exceed in size and population the city that had been reduced to

rubble. The number of persons and cattle who occupy the space will require “a city without walls.”

How like our gracious God is this good news. He always gives more in mercy than he has taken away in judgment. He is not content to duplicate what we once had but to increase it. After earth comes heaven!

2. Zechariah proclaimed a sovereign.

The Lord is coming to dwell as ruler of his people. He will be “a wall of fire around” the city.” His presence will be the security of his people. He will also be “its glory within.” The ultimate city will not flaunt walls or temples or palaces or buildings of any kind as its glory. The monarch who resides and reigns there will be its glory. For this reason, the “Daughter of Zion” is urged to “Shout and be glad.”

The Lord “has roused himself from his holy dwelling” to fulfill his promises. He is in action to realize his purpose. His reign will include all nations of the world--the first and last benevolent dictatorship. We know this king will be Jesus, the king of kings, the lord of lords. Ultimate fulfillment of Zechariah’s vision awaits the return of Christ. The Lord who will “inherit Judah” has “a glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18), the New Testament church.

The church of Christ is included in the future promised here in Zechariah’s prophetic word. That’s reason enough for us all to get busily involved in the work that Christ is presently doing in the world.

5. SAVED TO SERVE

Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?

(Zechariah 3:2).

The reference is to a specific man: "Joshua* the high priest." No two persons have identical experiences. God's grace is tailor-made.

The specific man is also a symbolic man. He is one of "men symbolic of things to come." There are common elements to everyone's experience of saving grace.

Three things are before us in this passage:

1. The rescue.

Joshua is called "a burning stick snatched from the fire." His rescue came when he was in danger of being consumed by flames of judgment.

The fire is a reference to the Babylonian Captivity. During this period of seventy years Israel survived as alien residents of a foreign power while their homeland and its storied capital lay in ruins, a haunt for jackals and owls.

The snatching refers to the divine rescue from that captivity. God allowed the captivity as a judgment upon his rebellious and ungrateful people. Now he says, "Enough," and begins their rescue from the fiery trial.

2. The robing.

The rescued priest was "dressed in filthy clothes." Bystanders were commanded to remove them, an action that symbolized the forgiveness of his sins. "The angel of the Lord" declared, "I will put rich garments on you." Then the re-clothed priest was promised a place of leadership in the Lord's house if he lived in obedience to the Lord's "ways" and "requirements."

The "rich garments" were the insignia of a high office. The Lord was re-investing the man and the nation as priests. They were to serve the Lord by representing him to other persons and other nations.

3. The redeemer.

The Lord then spoke of "my servant, the Branch." This servant was the promised messiah, through whom the Lord would remove "the sin of this land in a single day." The years of apostasy, filled with idolatry and immorality offensive to God, would be removed in a

single act of atonement and forgiveness. What a mighty force is God's grace!

In the light of the New Testament we know that the Branch is "Jesus of Nazareth," and that the vision of Zechariah has not been completely fulfilled.

The prophet's vision ends with a tremendous promise to those who had survived as captives and exiles: "In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree..." The promise reminds us that salvation brings peace and creates fellowship

6. SMALL THINGS, LARGE PROMISES

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: "Not might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty (Zechariah 4:1-14).

The angel who walked and talked with Zechariah "wakened" him "as a man is wakened from his sleep." God wakens his people by first wakening a prophet.

Revelation, explanation and transmission form the vision in chapter 4.

1. The prophet was awakened by an angel.

The prophet wasn't dreaming; he was wide awake. This does not mean that anyone else present could have seen the golden lampstand or the two olive trees. It does mean that revelation was given to the prophet; it did not arise from within his mind or imagination. It was a message to deliver, not a dream to laugh about over coffee cups.

People may awaken you unintentionally or for trivial reasons. God's messengers have a serious purpose when they awaken you.

2. The prophet was disturbed by the vision.

He knew God was speaking but he didn't know what God was saying. He knew the sight was symbolic but he could not identify the symbols.

Under these circumstances he did the wisest and best thing he could. He admitted his ignorance and asked for clarification. God's word profits those who are humble and teachable.

3. The prophet was cheered by the message.

The gist of the message: The temple would be completed by the hands that began its restoration, those of Zerubbabel aided by Joshua. What was a "small thing" to begin with would become a glorious reality.

The mission of Israel as a "light to the nations" would be empowered by the flow of oil to the lampstand. The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit by whose power the mission of the church is also advanced from "small things" to major victories.

We are the inheritors of the mission and the power. We can claim the promise of mission accomplished, divinely achieved through human dedication.

From foundation to capstone, the mission will be expensive but elative.

7. THE FLYING SCROLL

I looked again--and there before me was a flying scroll!

(Zechariah 5:1).

"Comforting words" formed the bulk of Zechariah's preaching. His primary mission was to encourage those who were rebuilding the city and temple.

Warning words were not omitted, however. He had the courage to oppose sin and demand repentance that marked every authentic prophet. Unlike many preachers today, he did not use psychological excuses for omitting unpleasant messages.

1. In this vision Zechariah saw something too big to miss.

He saw "a flying scroll." It was big in terms of measurement: "thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide." It was big enough to cover the floor of the temple's "holy place" plus the "holy of holies." However, this scroll was over the heads, not under the feet, of the Israelites.

It was also big in terms of menace, for it bore a threat of divine judgment against evildoers within the covenant nation.

With a parchment that size flying through the sky the prophet couldn't miss it. God makes his words of mercy and judgment clear enough to strip sinners of any excuse for opposing his will.

2. In this vision Zechariah heard something too bad to dismiss.

The interpreting angel described it as "the curse" that was "going out over the whole land." God's covenant with Israel contained "blessings" for those who were obedient and "curses" for those who were disobedient.

The "curse" would enter the houses of all guilty of thievery and perjury and the curse would destroy their timbers and stones. Why

are these two sins the only ones mentioned? We aren't told but we may safely assume that they represent all sins.

The guilty would be "banished." Another and worse exile awaits all who defy God's words and live as though they were autonomous persons.

We can ignore warnings but we can't escape judgment. We had best take seriously what God says clearly.

8. A WOMAN IN A BASKET

Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman (Zechariah 5:7).

In this vision the purging of the land continues. Thieves and perjurers have been “banished.” Now the “wickedness” of the land will be removed.

1. The look up.

The angel commands the prophet to "Look up and see what this is..."

"This" was a woman seated in a basket. The basket, like the flying scroll, was enlarged in the vision. It could contain a woman who bears the name of “Wickedness.” The wickedness represented by this woman was the idolatry that offended the Holy One who had made covenant with Israel. That idolatry had persisted among some who returned from the exile that idolatry had caused.

The woman struggled to escape the basket, but the angel was stronger than she and pushed her down. Evil never voluntarily leaves, but good is mightier than evil. Once she was thrust down the lead cover held her captive.

2. The lift off.

"This" was also two women flying with the basket. "They lifted up the basket..." They had unusual strength. These women had wings “like those of a stork,” i. e., large and strong wings. But their strength did not make possible the flight with the basket. They had “the wind in their wings,” and wind was used metaphorically for the power of God’s spirit.

In the Spirit's power "Wickedness" is removed to its place of origin--Babylon. There "a house" would be built for it, a temple of idolatry, and the basket of Wickedness would be "set there in its place," to receive the worship of misguided and rebellious devotees.

The vision assured the prophet and those to whom he preached that God's future for Israel is a holy land. In chapter two Israel was called "the holy land." Through the power of God's Spirit it will become that in fact.

The new Israel, the church, has the same future. God's "better country," with the "New Jerusalem" as its capital, is the promised future home of those who follow Jesus.

The power to achieve our mission and to reach our inheritance is the Spirit ("wind").

9. LORD OF ALL; JUDGE OF ALL

These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world
(Zechariah 6:5).

Zechariah's next vision is linked to the first one by the references to "the four horses" and their gallop throughout "the whole world." Once again the prophet sees more than he understands and his angelic interpreter makes the salient truths clear.

1. God is "the Lord of the whole world."

This was not true of heathen gods. Each of them had his own turf, usually restricted to a type of topography. There were gods for rivers, mountains, plains, oceans, etc. This meant that a coalition of gods ruled each nation and affected each person. Sometime, in pagan mythology, these gods fought turf wars with each other.

In contrast, the one true God who had chosen and covenanted with Israel was the ruler all nations. He brooked no rivals, he shared no pantheon, and he demanded the total allegiance of "the whole world."

2. God is "the Judge of all the earth."

In his work of judgment he employs both angelic and human instruments' here symbolized as four chariots drawn by horses of

different colors. They move in all directions, north, east, south and west because divine judgment embraces all nations of earth.

These instruments and agents of judgment cannot act upon their own impulses or authority. "The Lord of the whole world" is alone the judge of the entire population of earth.

From the New Testament we know that this judgment has been assigned to Jesus, the Son of God, and his appointment was powerfully attested by his resurrection from death.

Once more we are reminded that God works out his purposes within history. We can accept or reject Him; we cannot escape Him.

10. A CROWN FOR JOSHUA

It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne” (Zechariah 6:13).

“The word of the Lord” adds significant detail to Joshua, the high priest who was given priestly authority in an earlier vision. He stands crowned in this passage as a symbol of the coming messiah--“the Branch”--whom we know as Jesus Christ.

1. The unique crown.

Certain Jews had come from Babylon with a gift of gold and silver for the rebuilding of the temple. Zechariah is told that it will be used to fashion a crown to adorn the head of Joshua, the high priest.

The crown speaks of kingly power which is to be exercised along with priestly responsibilities. To this point in Israel’s history no priest had been king. The incident looks forward to the messiah who will unite both offices in his one person, exercising them harmoniously.

“Jesus” is a form of Joshua, and Jesus is the Branch who is also “the high priest whom we confess” as Lord. Melchizedek, the king-priest who received tithes from Abraham, serves also as a type of Jesus. Jesus, as king and priest, creates our peace by forgiving our sins.

2. The urgent condition.

The fulfillment of prophecies relating to the rebuilding of the temple and the creation of the church are conditioned upon the obedience of messiah’s people. “This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God.” The church is created by the obedience of Jesus to his heavenly Father. His gift of peace belongs to those who recognize his lordship over their lives. The offices of king and priest operate simultaneously and harmoniously. They do not conflict; they complement, but they are not at work in people who defy the Father’s will.

It is not our obedience that saves, but the king-priest does not save the unwilling and unyielded.

2. The universal cooperation.

Zechariah is told that “the Branch” will build the temple and that people “who are far away will come and help build the temple.” This is further testimony to the priest-king’s universal conquest and reign. Salvation is “from the Jews,” as Jesus told a Samaritan woman, but salvation is for all who follow him in every nation under heaven.

11. A ROUGH Q AND A SESSION

...was it really for me that you fasted?were you not just feasting for yourselves? (Zechariah 7:5).

“The people of Bethel” directed a question to the priests and prophets. “Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?” This fast was observed in Babylon during the exile. Did God want them to continue the fast? Zechariah’s answer was, in effect, “God wants you to repent.”

1. The people had been uncaring.

Fasting and feasting were both empty rituals observed for selfish reasons.

Those who fasted and feasted failed to administer justice. They did not “show mercy and compassion to one another,” and they “oppressed” widows, orphans, aliens and the poor.

Their injustice resulted from lack of compassion. As a consequence their outward religion was condemned by their inward rebellion. They thought evil of each other.

2. The people had been unhearing.

They rejected the word of God. “Earlier prophets,” sent by God’s Spirit, had reproved their sins and summoned them to repentance, but “they refused to pay attention,” stubbornly stopping up their ears and hardening their hearts. They would not listen to God when he spoke through the prophets, so God refused to listen to them when they called to him in prayer.

In refusing the word of God they provoked the wrath of God. He brought upon them the judgment of the seventy-year exile. He “scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations.” So dispersed, they lived as strangers in a foreign land while their homeland became so “desolate” that it discouraged any human traffic.

The lessons for us are too plain to miss. If we won’t hear the Lord he won’t hear us. When worship is a cover for sin it becomes an offense to God. God delights in mercy to the penitent but he dispenses judgment to the impenitent.

12. THE CITY OF TRUTH

I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth.... And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him (Zechariah 8:3, 22).

Zechariah has reminded Israel of past judgment. Now he now assures them of future blessings. He speaks of three things:

1. A jealous God.

The Lord Almighty says, "I am very jealous for Zion." He represents himself as burning with desire for his people. Because he does, he promises to "return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem." As his earthly dwelling place it will be called "the City of Truth," which means

it will be purged of idols and idolatry. The temple site will be called “the Holy Mountain.”

2. A restored city.

Jerusalem will be rebuilt as a city of truth and holiness. Men and women will reach “ripe old age.” They are depicted as sitting in the streets, leaning on their canes, and watching children at play.

Jerusalem will be a city of peace and security. The people will have steady employment and abundant crops. The fulfillment of these promises will be gifts of God to a faithful remnant in Israel as their inheritance. This does not mean they will become the idle rich. They are exhorted to use strong hands to finish the arduous task of rebuilding.

3. A happy religion.

Love will rule relationships. People will be true and fair to one another, just as the Lord has been “faithful and righteous toward them all.

Their times of fasting will become times of feasting--“joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals.”

Ten times in this chapter we read, “This is what the Lord Almighty says.” The word of God is the force by which the rebuilding and reformation is achieved.

The blessings bestowed upon Israel will prove magnetic, attracting people from “all languages and nations.” “Powerful nations” will visit Israel in order to worship the Lord, for they will hear that the Lord is with his people there.

We have only to read the chapter to realize that its complete fulfillment has not yet occurred. It will occur, however, for the guarantor of this vision is the Lord who speaks the promises.

13. JESUS FULFILLS ZECHARIAH

See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

The "oracle" in chapter 9 is totally significant. It was God's announced intention to bring judgment upon the enemies of Israel.

The part of the oracle fulfilled by Jesus has special interest for us. This includes:

1. The king who came (v. 9).

The N T identifies Jesus as this king. He staged his entry into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday as a fulfillment of this passage from Zechariah. Though he fulfilled the prophecy he did not fulfill the people's wishes. They wanted a king who would free them from Rome's domination and occupation. He came to set us free from sin, our worst enemy, and from death, our last enemy.

2. The peace he brings (v. 10).

The king of Zechariah's vision will extend his rule from "sea to sea" and "to the ends of the earth." As king he will "proclaim peace to the nations" and his reign will make armed conflicts unnecessary.

Jesus not only proclaimed peace, he provided peace with God and others by his atoning death and triumphant resurrection. He will extend peace through all the earth.

3. The freedom he procures (v. 11).

The king envisioned by the prophet will free "prisoners of hope" to return to their "fortress" and to enjoy unprecedented prosperity.

Jesus is the hope of all who are prisoners of sin. Jesus offers a blood-sealed covenant that makes him the defender and enricher of his "flock."

We know that Zechariah's prophecy has been partially fulfilled. We have the word of the Lord that the prophecy will be completely fulfilled. The Lord will finally and fully save his people "on that day," and they will "sparkle in his hand like jewels in a crown." Though despised and disdained in this age, they will at last be "attractive and beautiful."

A glorious future will be ours when the Lord returns!

14. GOD, THE SHEPHERD WARRIOR

I will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them
(Zechariah 10:6).

Israel's punishment was dispersion. The Lord said, "I scatter them among the people."

God's promise is reunion and regathering. He will “gather them” as a shepherd gathers a scattered flock.

1. An indictment.

"Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd" (v. 2). Why? Because the leaders misled the people. They worshiped idols and listened to false prophets.

The Lord declares that he will punish the leaders and shepherd the people himself.

2. An inducement.

"Because the Lord is with them, they will fight and overthrow the horsemen" (v. 5). God's presence becomes Israel's strength. In his strength they will triumph over their enemies and return to their own land. Led by rulers from the tribe of Judah they will prevail in battle “like mighty men.” Foot soldiers will defeat mounted foes.

3. An ingathering.

"I will signal for them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them" (v/ 8). Israel will remember him who never forgot them. They will cry for help and “the Lord their God...will answer them.”

The dispersed will be gathered from the nations and united once again in their own land.

Be reminded by this prophecy that God punishes sin. Be reminded also that God restores sinners.

15. THE TWO SHEPHERDS

The flock detested me and I grew weary of them...
(Zechariah 11:8).

Zechariah acted out the word of the Lord, a device practiced by several of the prophets. Specifically, he played two roles, that of a good and bad shepherd.

1. The good shepherd.

He was ordered to “pasture the flock marked for slaughter.” Wielding two staves, “Favor” and “Union,” he faithfully led and fed the flock. He also rid them of three false shepherds in a single month.

Despite his compassionate service, he was “detested” by the flock. Weary of their ingratitude, he abandoned them to their foolish and fatal choice. They chose judgment over favor. He responded by breaking the staff called ‘Favor,’ symbolizing Israel’s breach of covenant with the Lord.

The people further despised him by a paltry and unjust payment for his services, which he flung “into the house of the Lord to the potter.” He proceeded to break the staff called “Union,” which symbolized “breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.”

2. The evil shepherd.

The prophet was ordered by the Lord to assume the guise of “a foolish shepherd.”

In that role he exploited the flock. He did not “care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy.” Instead, he dined on “the choice sheep.”

In that role he abandoned the flock, proving himself to be a “worthless shepherd.” Instead of sacrificing himself for the people he sacrificed the people to himself.

In that role he received a terrible judgment. The sword of retributive justice wounded and shriveled his arm and totally blinded his right eye.

Jesus fulfilled the initial role as the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

Throughout the history of Israel and the church many have fulfilled the subsequent role.

16. ISRAEL'S FUTURE

This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel (Zechariah 12:1).

The recurring phrase, "On that day," points to the end-time, for the events described in this chapter have not yet occurred.

Two things stand out in the chapter.

1. Israel under siege.

The prophet speaks of a time coming "when all the nations of the earth are gathered against" Israel. The tiny nation will be outmanned and outgunned, yet it will prove unconquerable..

Israel will be an immovable rock. The Lord promises, "I will make Israel an immovable rock..." Those who strike her will only "injure themselves." Horses will be blinded and panic-stricken and riders will go mad.

The victory of Israel will be insured by an invincible Lord: "...the Lord Almighty is their God." He will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem and transform the feeble leaders into mighty warriors and consuming fires. Their triumph will be his gift. The leaders will confess, "The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God."

2. Israel in sorrow.

The Lord declares, "They will mourn...and grieve bitterly..."

Their mourning will result from a guilt-producing sight: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced..." As the final book of Scripture declares, "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him." The

nations will know that the once-crucified and now-risen Jesus is indeed the Son of God and savior of the world.

Happily, the guilt-producing sight will give place to a guilt-removing provision: "...a fountain will be opened...to cleanse them from sin..." The reference, as we know, pointed forward to the cross of Christ where he became an atoning sacrifice. Weeping turns to joy as God freely dispenses forgiveness for the sake of Christ.

God's people have been the world's prey throughout history, but whom God defends no one can destroy.

17. ISRAEL'S FUTURE (2)

On that day a fountain will be opened.... I will refine them like silver and test them like gold... (Zechariah 13:1).

This chapter continues the oracle of chapter 12.

1. Redemption will occur.

“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (v. 1).

The “new covenant” promised to post-exilic Israel includes a cleansing from sin. Their biggest problem was in their hearts; it was not imposed from the outside by pagan neighbors.

Historically, the death of Jesus was the opening of this fountain. As the Lamb of God he takes away the sin of the world.

2. Removal will occur.

“On that day I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more.” Two things God has promised to remember no more--the sins of forgiven penitents and the names of idols they once served.

Along with all idols, all false prophets will be removed. “I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land.” Those who misled Israel will be banished from Israel, not for seventy years but forever.

False shepherds, fearing death, will claim to be farmers. They will explain self-inflicted wounds used in their rituals as wounds inflicted by rough-housing friends.

2. Refining will occur.

The good shepherd will be smitten by deceived people and his flock will be scattered. This was fulfilled when Jesus was arrested, tried and executed, and his disciples “forsook him and fled” to escape death themselves.

The believing remnant will be refined by fire. They will confess, with courage and faith, that “the Lord is our God.” “Jesus is Lord” was the earliest Christian creed, boldly recited by those who refused emperor-worship at the risk and cost of their lives.

The future has invaded the past and present. The fountain for cleansing is flowing today. A remnant is being saved and purified. God declares them “my people,” and they call him “our God.”

18. ISRAEL'S FUTURE (3)

The Lord will be king over the whole earth (Zechariah 14:9).

Israel's final battle precipitates "the day of the Lord." That day will close human history with divine judgment.

1. The Lord comes.

In judgment, he gathers nations to fight against Jerusalem. "The city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped." Usual warfare, in all its brutality, will be waged.

Then the Lord will return to fight against those who fought against Israel. He will judge the instruments of judgment. No person or nation can escape the judgment of God.

"His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. The mountain will be "split in two," creating a deep valley. How literally this is to be understood has been a matter of scholarly debate for centuries. What is too clear to misunderstand is the decisive victory of the Lord. He routs an international army.

2. The Lord reigns.

"The Lord will be king over the whole earth," and his earthly headquarters will be

in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be secure and inhabited forever.
“Never again will it be destroyed.”

In that day the Lord’s character will be universalized. He is the Holy One, and holiness will be the glorious commonplace of the restored and refined city and land. “Every pot in Jerusalem will be holy to the Lord Almighty.” There will be no division between sacred and secular. The house of the Lord, the people of the Lord, will reflect his character

The N T identifies this "Lord" as Jesus. His O T people will unite with his N T people. “On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.” There will be one people; our vaunted racial and social and political differences will give place to what truly unites us, our mutual trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.