

# Zechariah 9-14: In That Day

## Introduction

The first section of Zechariah is covered in chapters one through eight. It addresses the situation among the Jews at the time of the rebuilding of the temple between 520 and 518 B.C. Because Zechariah specifies the dates he received these visions we can date this part with little doubt. The second and final section of Zechariah is much more difficult to date. The authorship of these six chapters has also been questioned. The name Zechariah is mentioned three times in chapters one through eight, but nowhere in chapters nine through fourteen. Some scholars have maintained that these chapters were written by Jeremiah. Others believe that the author must have lived just before or during the Maccabean uprising. This would place the second half of the book as being written sometime between 218-134 B.C.<sup>1</sup> This author believes the best course is to appeal to Zechariah as having written the entire book. The language in the second section is highly apocalyptic. There is much here that looks forward to the time of Jesus. In fact, this part of the book is the most quoted of the Minor Prophets in the gospels. It is believed that Zechariah wrote chapters nine through fourteen several decades after the completion of the temple. Finally, this section is best understood to focus on the times between the life of Zechariah and Jesus Christ. Homer Hailey writes:

(Zechariah 9-14 is) interspersed with prophecies of the Messiah, which are quoted in the New Testament and applied to the Christ who came. In view of the admitted difficulty of these chapters, and in the light of Peter's claim that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation, 2 Peter 1:20, it seems wise to build one's interpretation of these chapters around the passages that are quoted by Jesus and the New Testament writers. In following this policy one will avoid the pitfalls of speculation and some of the quagmires of error into which many have fallen.<sup>2</sup>

## God's intervention among the nations

Zechariah 9-14 can best be divided into two sections. The first section covers chapters nine through eleven and is summarized by God's intervention among the nations. In chapter nine, we begin with judgments being enacted against nations north of Israel. Hadrach and Damascus are mentioned. (Hadrach was most likely in the area between Riblah and Hamath.) God's judgment would begin here and then move into Tyre and Sidon, 9:2. In times past, Tyre had held off the Babylonians and Assyrians for long periods of time, but this prophecy says that would not be the case this time. Tyre had a fortress on an island that was a source of protection during times of war. But Alexander the Great constructed a causeway from debris of the city which his army had destroyed. Tyre soon fell. Could this be what Zechariah is discussing in 9:3-4? Not only would Tyre be destroyed, but the cities in Philistia would be destroyed, 9:5-7. Alexander the Great did move into this area after defeating Tyre. And during the Hellenistic period, the Jews moved in and converted the Philistine people to the Lord. While the nations around the Jews were being subjected to domination by foreign powers, Jerusalem and Palestine remained unscathed by Alexander the Great.

Zechariah 9:9-11 speaks of a coming king. This king was *just* and *endowed with salvation*. He was *humble* and would be *mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey*, 9:9. This, of course, was fulfilled in Matthew 21:1-7 where Jesus enters Jerusalem in the triumphal entry. Jesus was to usher in a kingdom of peace, 9:10. His spiritual kingdom stretches *from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth*, 9:10. Those who had been outside of the covenant during the Old Testament time were now going to have hope of being delivered from spiritual bondage through Jesus. *I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit*, 9:11-12. These persons (Gentiles) were instructed to *return to the stronghold*. It is thought that God Himself is that stronghold, not the city of Jerusalem. For those who return, God promised to restore double, 9:12. James Smith believes the contents of 9:13-17 were fulfilled during the Maccabean period. He writes:

Zion (Judah + Ephraim) would be used as God's weapons in the battle against the invading armies of Greece. Yahweh would "stir up" the sons of Zion against the sons of Javan or Greece. In the second century before Christ the Seleucid kings sent huge armies again and again to put down the rebellions of the Jews in Palestine. The sons of Mattathias, known as the Maccabees, using guerrilla tactics inflicted enormous losses on those Greek armies.<sup>3</sup>

## God will bless His people

Chapter ten seems to expound on the contents of chapter nine. God would bless and protect His people during the intertestamental period. Prosperity would characterize the times. Grain would be harvested. There would be plenty of rain, *vegetation in the field to each man*, 10:1. This was a people who have *finally* learned to break away from idols, 10:2. *Teraphim* were thought to be smaller, pocket size idols, Genesis 31:19, 34. They could also be larger in size, 1 Samuel 19:13. Diviners were soothsayers who used certain items to forecast future events. In the past, their trust in these events had led them into captivity and destruction. It is thought that the *shepherds* and *male goats* are the Greek kings and leaders who sought to oppress the Jews during the period between the testaments. God would fight with the Jews and *the riders on horses will be put to shame*, 10:5-7.

Do these verses relate only to the intertestamental period? While much of it most likely does, there may be more applications to these verses than just this. Think of how 10:6-12 can be applied spiritually to the victory that is found in the kingdom of the Lord. Men from all nations would hear of the promise of God through Jesus Christ and seek to become part of His spiritual kingdom. Remember, many of the prophecies in the Old Testament use the language of the day to confer a spiritual application. This could be the case in these verses. Think of the spiritual applications we see in these verses:

God would gather His people together because He redeemed them, 10:8. God calls people into the kingdom today through the gospel, Romans 10:9-17. God promises His people spiritual life, 10:9. It is through Jesus that we can truly live life through the new birth. God seeks to enlarge His kingdom, 10:10. The gospel is for all and should be taken to the entire world, Matthew 28:18. God will bring his people out of the bondage of sin, 10:11. It is here that Assyria and Egypt might be understood as standing for captivity and bondage. People have been made spiritually captive through sin, and it is through Jesus that we may receive forgiveness. *God wants those in His kingdom to walk in His name*, 10:12. Compare to Colossians 3:17.

## The rejection of the Messiah

The first three verses of chapter eleven give us details of an extreme destruction. But to what occasion does it refer? It seems that these verses point to the destruction of the Jewish system of religion, economy, and way of life after their rejection of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Zechariah 11:4-14 symbolically describes the action of the shepherd (Jesus). Some believe Zechariah is relating a vision to his reading audience. If so, he was placed in the role of shepherd. He was to *Pasture the flock doomed to slaughter*, 11:4. By the days of Jesus, many of the Jewish leaders had become rich off of the backs of the poor. They attributed their success to God, 11:5. The *shepherds* in 11:5 might be applied to foreign rulers (the Romans) during the time of Jesus. They cared only about themselves and not the welfare of the Jewish people. There would be a time when God would no longer have compassion and *pity on the inhabitants of the land*, 11:6. When the shepherd was rejected, then the people were rejected by God. The symbolism which applies to Jesus and His day continues in 11:7 where we see the shepherd reaching out to the *afflicted of the flock*. Zechariah 11:8 has caused no shortage of difficulty. Three “shepherds” were cut off in one month. Smith believes these shepherds may refer to the scribes, Pharisees, and Herodians, Matthew 23:13-33.<sup>4</sup> These leaders despised Jesus. *Their soul also was weary of me*, 11:8. The next verse (11:9) might be applied to the decision of God to let those who rejected the Savior go to their own devices. Could the second half of 11:9 refer to the events at the destruction of Jerusalem in 68-70 A.D.? The covenant was broken. The wall of protection that had surrounded the Jews had been removed and *the afflicted of the flock who were watching me realized that it was the word of the Lord*, 11:11. Could this refer to the first-century Christians who were warned to flee Jerusalem prior to its destruction, Matthew 24:15-22?

Zechariah 11:12-13 is fulfilled in Matthew 26:15 as thirty shekels was the price paid to deliver Jesus into the hands of His enemies. These verses are also fulfilled in Matthew 27:7-9 where this amount was paid to purchase the field where Judas was buried. Who is the *worthless shepherd* mentioned in 11:15-17? Some say it refers to the Roman Pope and the rise of the Catholic Church. Others point to a more distant application and say this has yet to be fulfilled. James Burton Coffman writes, “It is not important to identify the person meant by this. It means any worthless leader that God’s people follow when they reject their true King. Significantly, Israel cried out upon the occasion of their formal rejection of Christ and said, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’ The wretched history of the reprobate emperors of Rome is comment enough upon how ‘foolish’ such ‘shepherds’ were. This passage ‘foreshadows the terrible afflictions of the Jews following their rejection of the Messiah.’”<sup>5</sup>

## Zechariah’s second burden

Chapters nine through eleven deal with God’s interaction among the nations in bringing about their destruction. Even the Jewish nation would be ended after the rejection of the Messiah. Chapters twelve through fourteen consist of the burden concerning Israel. To best understand “Israel” in these chapters is to remember that it is spiritual Israel that is in view. Homer Hailey writes, “Israel is the new people of God under the rule of the Messiah.”<sup>6</sup> Zechariah is using Old Testament language to explain events with a

spiritual meaning. In these chapters we see a siege against Jerusalem (12:1-9), a cleansing of the people (12:10-13:6), a great smiting of the enemy (13:7-9), and finally, the great day of the Lord, 14:1-21.

*The siege against Jerusalem* is discussed in the first part of Zechariah 12. Jerusalem was going to be strengthened by the Lord. Anyone who came against the city would be *severely injured*, 12:3. Jerusalem would be a place of safety and peace, surrounded by a world in chaos, 12:6. Those who come against Jerusalem will certainly be destroyed, 12:9. It is important to remember that these verses are speaking of a spiritual Jerusalem which would be protected against all its enemies. Those who live there can live with full assurance that God will protect them.

Next, the cleansing of the people is discussed. Those who participate in the blessings of the Lord do so because of the Spirit of grace and of supplication, 12:10. Those in Jerusalem would look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, 12:10. Could this not apply to the death of Jesus on the cross who was pierced for our transgressions? Recognition of this fact would move the people to repentance, 12:11-14. "Whenever believers pause to look upon the pierced one, they realize anew that their sin put Him on the tree."<sup>7</sup> Zechariah opens chapter thirteen by speaking of a fountain that will be opened for the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and for impurity, 13:1. Think of the spiritual application. In the New Testament we read of being washed and cleansed. See Acts 2:38; 22:16; Titus 3:5; Romans 6:3; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 1:7. In those days, the worship of idols would be cut off. False prophets and unclean spirits would be removed from the land, 13:2-6. We might apply these verses to the time after inspiration and prophecy passed. Anyone who claimed the power to prophesy would be proven as untrue. These false prophets would work to conceal their error.

Zechariah discusses a great smiting in verses seven through nine. Two thirds of the people would be *cut off* (13:8), and only one third would be left. This small remnant would be *refined* and *tested*, 13:9. Many believe the Shepherd in 13:7 is Jesus. Hailey writes, "this prophecy can look only to the Messiah for its fulfillment and can find it in none other. The turning of His 'hand upon the little ones' indicated His gathering the scattered ones together and His protecting the weak."<sup>8</sup> Could verses eight and nine have partially been fulfilled during the first few centuries after Christ when the Church underwent extreme persecution? Peter speaks often of the refinement and purification of one's faith through tests, 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12.

Deliverance comes from the Lord, 14:1-21. Much error is derived from these verses. Premillennialists can certainly have a field-day with this chapter. The church (spiritual Jerusalem) was going to be put through several tests. These tests would be in the form of persecution, mistreatment, and physical death. There were large numbers of Christians killed in the first and second centuries. Zechariah reassures his audience that the Lord would fight for His people, 14:3. We are told that God will deliver His people, 14:4-8. After this, God will reign as King over all. Those who have sought to destroy Jerusalem will be beset with a plague, 14:12-15. All who have stood against God will suffer defeat. This spiritual Jerusalem will become the center of worship and a holy city, 14:16-21.<sup>9</sup> Homer Hailey writes:

These wonderful and glorious promises are realized in the church of today. Every individual and every principle of worship and service has been cleaned and dedicated by the blood of Christ (Matthew 26:28). The church... is

going to be presented to Himself “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:26-27).<sup>10</sup>

## For Discussion

1. Who wrote Zechariah 9-14?
2. What is apocalyptic language?
3. Why is it important to remember that the prophets used Old Testament language to express spiritual meanings?
4. In what context is this section of Zechariah best understood?
5. Who was the great enemy judging the nations to the north of Israel?
6. Who is the coming King mentioned in Zechariah 9:9-11?
7. In what ways were God’s people blessed? See 9:17-10:2.
8. What are some spiritual applications of 10:6-12?

9. Find some links between things listed in Zechariah 11 and their fulfillment in the New Testament.
  
10. What can we learn from the contents of Zechariah 12-14?

## (Endnotes)

- 1 Baldwin, Joyce G. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. p. 64
- 2 Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 366-67
- 3 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 582
- 4 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 595
- 5 Coffman's Bible Commentary, Copyright © 1971-1993 by ACU Press, Abilene Christian University. All rights reserved
- 6 Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 386
- 7 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 604
- 8 Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 394
- 9 Robert Harkrider has some excellent comments on how to answer premillennial arguments that use Zechariah 14. See his workbook. *The Minor Prophets: Spokesmen of God*. Norris Book Company, 1985. p. 127
- 10 Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 400