

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



"The Odds Have Never Been in Our Favor"

Rabbi Cosmo Panzetta

Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Zech. 12:1-9; Zech. 9:9; Ex. 14:10-14; Josh. 6:1-5; Judg. 7:2-7; Is. 40:22

We have a tendency to feel secure when the numbers are in our favor. Enough resources. Enough people. Enough strength. Enough options. We look at a situation and think, "Okay, this is manageable." But when the numbers turn against us—when we are outnumbered, outmatched, or staring at something we simply cannot overcome—we begin to panic. Yet when we look through Scripture, something becomes clear: **the odds have rarely, if ever, been in the favor of God's people.** God's greatest acts of deliverance happened precisely when His people had no reasonable way to deliver themselves.

Israel stood trapped between Pharaoh's army and the sea, and their deliverance depended entirely upon ADONAI. They stood outside the walls of Jericho with instructions that made little sense from a military perspective, and they had to trust Him. Gideon began with thousands of soldiers, and God intentionally whittled his army down to three hundred because He did not want Israel believing that their own strength had saved them. And now, as Zechariah looks toward *"that day,"* God's people are once again surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered. It is almost as though the LORD is asking the same question He has been asking throughout the story: **What's it going to take for you to trust Me?** His track record has already shown us who He is.

1. WHEN YOU ARE OUTNUMBERED, REMEMBER WHO IS SPEAKING

Zechariah 12 begins the final section of the book, and like chapter 9, it opens with "the burden of the Word of ADONAI." The previous chapters have brought us through the coming King, the restoration of God's people, the warning against false gods and false shepherds, and finally the rejection of the Good Shepherd. If Zechariah had ended with chapter 11, the future would look bleak. But chapters 12-14 turn our eyes toward what is still to come. And before ADONAI describes Jerusalem surrounded by the nations, He reminds His people WHO is speaking: *"...ADONAI, who stretched out the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth and formed the spirit of man within him"* (Zech. 12:1).

That introduction is intentional. God is about to describe circumstances in which His people will be absurdly outnumbered, so before they look at the size of what is against them, He tells them to look at the One who is for them. He stretched out the heavens. He laid the foundations of the earth. He formed the spirit of humanity within us. He is masterfully large and intimately personal. This is the same lesson Israel had to learn at the Red Sea when Moses said, *"ADONAI will fight for you, while you hold your peace"* (Ex. 14:14). **Being outnumbered has never been a problem for God.** The problem comes when we forget who He is because we are too busy counting what is against us.

2. THE ODDS HAVE NEVER DETERMINED GOD'S ABILITY TO DELIVER

ADONAI says, *"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the surrounding peoples"* (Zech. 12:2), and then, *"In that day I will make Jerusalem a massive stone for all the people. All who try to lift it will be cut to pieces"* (Zech. 12:3). The nations gather together against Jerusalem. On paper, that picture says Jerusalem *should* lose. She is surrounded. She is besieged. All the nations have gathered against her. Yet the very city they believe they can conquer becomes something they cannot handle. They come to control Jerusalem, but they discover that Jerusalem belongs to ADONAI and that **they cannot move what God has determined to establish.**

We have seen this pattern before. Pharaoh had the army; Israel had the LORD. Jericho had the walls; Israel had the LORD. The Midianites were *"as numerous as locusts,"* but Gideon had the LORD—and God actually reduced Gideon's army because He said, *"The people with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast about themselves against Me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me'"* (Judg. 7:2). That is the uncomfortable lesson behind so many biblical victories: sometimes God allows the odds to become worse so that we finally understand where deliverance comes from. In Zechariah 12, the horses of the nations are struck with confusion and blindness while ADONAI says, *"I will keep My eyes on the house of Judah"* (Zech. 12:4). The nations may have the numbers, but **Judah has the eyes of ADONAI opened toward them.**

3. OUR STRENGTH IS NOT IN THE NUMBERS—IT IS THROUGH ADONAI

Then something remarkable happens among the leaders of Judah. They say in their hearts, *"The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength through ADONAI-Tzva'ot their God"* (Zech. 12:5). Notice what they finally understand. Their strength is not merely in their people. It is not their warriors, their leadership, their strategy, or some alliance they have managed to form. Their people are their strength **through ADONAI-Tzva'ot their God.** That is a dramatic contrast with generations of leaders who continually looked to Egypt, Assyria, foreign alliances, horses, armies, and political strength whenever they were threatened. Here they finally recognize that their advantage is not numerical. Their advantage is ADONAI.

And once their confidence is properly placed, the entire picture changes. The leaders of Judah become *"like a firepot in a woodpile, like a burning torch among sheaves"* (Zech. 12:6). Suddenly the question is not how much wood surrounds the fire; the question is what happens when fire touches dry wood. ADONAI saves Judah, defends Jerusalem, and even *"the weakest among them that day will be like David"* (Zech. 12:8). The weak become mighty because God is defending them. This has always been His pattern. The sea did not part because Israel was strong. Jericho's walls did not fall because Israel had superior siege equipment. Gideon's three hundred did not win because three hundred was secretly enough. **God came through.** And Zechariah says that when history moves toward its climax and God's people appear surrounded once again, He will come through once again.

CONCLUSION

How Many Times Does He Have to Prove Himself before we trust Him? Perhaps that is one of the questions Zechariah 12 should cause us to ask: Again and again, the odds were not in the favor of God's people—and again and again, that was precisely the point. God was teaching His people that their security was never supposed to rest in favorable circumstances. Their security was supposed to rest in Him. And apparently that lesson will still matter at the end. Zechariah looks toward a day when Jerusalem will be surrounded and the nations will gather against her. Once again, God's people will look out and see overwhelming odds. Once again, human calculations will say there is no way through. And once again, ADONAI will show Himself faithful.

Maybe you are facing something right now where the numbers do not work in your favor. You feel outmatched, outnumbered, or simply inadequate for what is in front of you. The point is not to convince yourself that the odds are better than they appear. **The point is that we need to stop needing the odds to be in our favor before we trust God.** Bring Him the situation you cannot fix. Bring Him the battle you cannot win. Remember His track record and say, “ADONAI, You have come through before. I will trust You again.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does ADONAI remind Israel that He created the heavens, the earth, and the spirit within humanity before describing the nations surrounding Jerusalem?
2. What do the images of Jerusalem as a “cup of reeling” and a “massive stone” teach us about attempts to overturn or control what God has established?
3. How do the Red Sea, Jericho, Gideon's three hundred, and Zechariah 12 reveal a repeated pattern in the way God teaches His people to trust Him?
4. Where in your life are you currently looking at the “numbers”—resources, circumstances, strength, support, or probability—and allowing them to determine whether you believe God can come through?
5. Could God sometimes allow us to feel outnumbered or outmatched precisely because He wants our confidence transferred from ourselves to Him? What might trusting Him look like in your present situation?

CLOSING PRAYER

ADONAI, You have been faithful from generation to generation. And Your Word tells us that even in the days yet to come, when Your people are surrounded and outnumbered again, You will remain faithful. Forgive us for the times we have looked at the odds instead of looking at You. Forgive us for believing that favorable circumstances are necessary before we can have confidence. Teach us to trust Your character, Your Word, and Your track record. When we are weak, remind us that You are strong. When we are outnumbered, remind us that You are not. And when we cannot see how deliverance could possibly come, help us remember that You have never needed favorable odds to fulfill Your promises. May our hearts remember that the “One who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth” is with us!

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.