

Israel's Final Deliverance

Scripture: Zechariah 12:1–14

Code: 2169

INTRODUCTION

The twelfth chapter of Zechariah presents the familiar theme of Israel's final deliverance and salvation. Zechariah has been predicting it throughout and now gives a description of its coming to pass.

Today it is relatively easy to imagine Israel as the focal point of the world. I imagine if we had been living a hundred years ago that would seem somewhat obscure. But since its reappearance as a nation in 1948, the eyes of the world have focused on that little plot of ground known as Israel. Seemingly indomitable, it exists as an island in a sea of nations endeavoring to drown it. God is not yet finished with Israel. The Bible teaches there is coming a great day for the nation of Israel-- a day of tremendous spiritual salvation and political victory. That has been prophesied repeatedly in the Old and New Testaments, and is detailed for us in Zechariah 12. The tragic history of Israel will be reversed to culminate in a future of unprecedented joy. This chapter is full of truths that are exciting not only for anyone who is Jewish, but also for anyone who knows that God is in control of history.

LESSON

I. THE SIEGE OF ISRAEL (vv. 1-3)

"The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, saith the Lord, who stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the peoples round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all peoples; all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the nations of the earth be gathered together against it."

A. The Burden for Israel (v. 1)

1. Its object

This prophecy is directed toward Israel. It begins by describing a siege against the nation. A siege is a military attack by an army, usually in the form of a blockade, against a city. There will be a great attack by the Gentile nations against Israel in the future. It will be another world war-- the battle of the centuries, the greatest war of history. It is commonly referred to as the Battle of Armageddon. All the nations of the world will converge on Israel in an effort to destroy it and prevent the Messiah's return to establish His Kingdom.

Verse 1 says this is "the burden of the word of the Lord for Israel." More specifically, verse 2 says this is directed toward Judah and Jerusalem. That is supported through such phrases as "the governors of Judah" (vv. 5-6), "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (vv. 5, 7-8, 10), "the tents of Judah" (v. 7), and "the house of David" (vv. 8, 10).

The Hebrew word translated "burden" comes from a term that is used frequently in prophetic literature. It's used in Zechariah 9:1 for a prophecy against the Gentiles. It signifies a prophecy of grief or anxiety that burdens the prophet who is obliged to proclaim it and the people who must receive it. There's going to be grief before there will be wholesale repentance and conversion in Israel.

2. Its source

Furthermore the burden is from God Himself. He is proclaiming in the first person through Zechariah what He will do. He says, "Behold, I will make" (v. 2), "In that day will I make" (v. 3), "I will smite ... and I will open mine eyes" (v. 4), and "In that day will I make" (v. 6). God sovereignly directs the course of events of history, whether through raising up a false shepherd or establishing His messianic Kingdom.

God is making a promise that in spite of a siege set against Israel, He will bring about the deliverance and salvation of His people. His active role is emphasized so that those who hear this prophecy will have the confidence to believe it will come to pass. It doesn't depend on men, but upon an unchanging God, who doesn't make plans and scuttle them, or who isn't thwarted by some other power. When God plans to do something, it will be done. To confirm that ultimate power rests with God, verse 1 reminds us that He is the One "who stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him." The point is beautifully made that the God who made history will be the One to bring it to a close. That truth is a solid basis for confidence in the ultimate destiny of history.

The divine element is expressed in three ways in verse 1. First, "burden of the word of the Lord" indicates a divine message involving judgment. Second, "saith the Lord" specifically indicates this is a message from God. Third, the description of God as the omnipotent Creator of the world emphasizes that He is in control of history.

B. The Battle in Israel (vv. 2-3)

1. The symbolism explained

Verses 2 and 3 are parallels. They begin with God making Jerusalem "a cup of trembling" and "a burdensome stone," respectively, and state that the future siege of Jerusalem will make an impact on "all the peoples."

a) Intoxication "Cup of trembling" refers to a large basin everyone can drink from (Heb., saph) rather than an individual cup (Heb., kos). This verse pictures the nations as a person who drinks too much wine and finds himself staggering. The trembling is not associated with nervousness, but with intoxication. When the nations converge on Israel and besiege Jerusalem, they will find themselves as ineffective as a drunkard trying to walk a straight line. By the time the nations make their way to Jerusalem, they will become figuratively drunk with their over inflated sense of power. Their overconfidence will so disorient them, they will be unable to claim their coveted prize, becoming easy prey for divine judgment. Revelation 17:6 is another example of a figurative use of drunkenness. It mentions that Satan's evil world system will become drunk "with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." b) Injury Verse 3 presents a second metaphor: that of "a burdensome stone" (lit., "a stone of burden"). That refers to a heavy stone that was used in weightlifting contests. The analogy is simple. Like a heavy weight, Jerusalem will give a hernia to any nation that tries to gain victory over it. The phrase "shall be cut in pieces" is best understood in context to mean they shall grievously injure themselves. It refers to a rupture or other internal injuries sustained from lifting something too heavy. The proud Gentile nations won't be able to subdue Israel.

2. The setting examined

The phrase "in that day" refers to the time during the Tribulation when the nations gather together to besiege Jerusalem. It's an eschatological term that is also referred to as "the day of the Lord." The attacking nations will find themselves reeling around in a drunken stupor of confusion and irreparably injured because they try to do something that's impossible--destroy the people of God.

Zechariah's prophecy is not a fairy tale. A day in history is coming when the entire world will attack the little nation of Israel and lose. Those are staggering odds, but realizing God is on their side means that if the same people could bring down the walls of Jericho by blowing horns and marching around the city, then we cannot discount what could happen in the future.

a) The attack described Other passages in the Bible also outline the battle of Armageddon for us. Joel 3:9-17 says, "Proclaim this among the nations, Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the

men of war draw near; let them come up; beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye nations, and gather yourselves together round about; there cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord. Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe; come, get down; for the press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision; for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shall shake; but the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the Lord, your God, dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain; then shall Jerusalem be holy." But before Jerusalem becomes holy, the nations will come against Israel in a great war instigated by Satan, yet in direct accord with the plan of God. While their armies are surrounding Jerusalem, Jesus Christ will return and defeat them, judging them for their evil.

b) The armies identified There are four armies represented at Armageddon. (1) The army from the west (Dan. 7:7-8, 24; Rev. 17:12-14) This army is known as the European Confederacy, the revived Roman empire, which is made up of ten nations whose boundaries were once contained within the ancient Roman empire. It will be led by the Antichrist, who will be the emperor of that particular dominion. (2) The army from the north (Ezek. 38:1-6, 14-16) This army is best identified as the Soviet Union (Magog) and her allies--Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Togarmah, which are ancient names of modern Arab states. (3) The army from the south (Dan. 11:40-44) This army will be Egypt and her Arab allies. (4) The army from the east (Rev. 9:13-16; 16:12-16) This army of 200 million soldiers will march toward Israel over the Euphrates River, which will be dried up at that time. Until this century, that was an inconceivable amount. However, Time magazine back in 1965 reported that Red China has a 200 million-man militia (21 May 1965, p. 35).

c) The aftermath depicted Revelation 14:20 says, "The winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs." Apparently the four armies are nearly slaughtered outside the city of Jerusalem as attempt to bring about a holocaust throughout the countryside. The unprecedented bloodshed will be so severe that it is symbolized as deep as a horse's bridle for two hundred miles. The whole land of Israel is going to be drowning in a blood bath as the battle rages.

d) The adversaries destroyed The armies will become drunk with their assumed success, but will be unable to claim their prize. Instead of victory, they will receive a political rupture in trying to lift a stone that's too heavy because God, so to speak, happens to be sitting on it. We see hope for the besieged city expressed in Psalm 118: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do unto me? The Lord taketh my part with those who help me; therefore shall I see my desire upon those who hate me.... All nations compassed me about, but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about, but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched like the fire of thorns, for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them" (vv. 6-7, 10-12). That psalm attests to the victory that God will bring to Israel over the armies of Armageddon.

II. THE SHIELDING OF ISRAEL (vv. 4-9)

A. The Panic of the Defiant (v. 4)

"In that day, saith the Lord, I will smite every horse with terror, and his rider with madness; and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the peoples with blindness." God is comforting His people, explaining how He will protect them in that day. Since horses were the symbol of strength in ancient times, verse 4 emphasizes God's superior power over Israel's enemies as He smites the horses with terror and confusion. Furthermore, He inflicts their riders with madness, putting them into a wild and helpless state of panic.

When the great armies of the world converge on Jerusalem, their weapons and soldiers will be rendered helpless. Although they will think victory is at hand as they attack the seemingly vanquished Jews, they will find themselves rushing to their own destruction. The phrase "I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah" assures Israel that He will be concerned and actively involved in what's happening to His people. God will open His eyes of love and forgiveness toward Israel as He brings about their deliverance.

B. The Preservation of the Defenseless (v. 5)

"The governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of hosts, their God."

The people in Israel who lived outside the city of Jerusalem were the most vulnerable in war in ancient times, being without the protection of fortified city walls. But knowing that God had chosen Jerusalem to be the city of His special affection will give confidence to future denizens of the surrounding countryside. They will recognize that they have been preserved because God has chosen Jerusalem. His promises to Jerusalem, which is the heart of the nation, will assure them of their divine invincibility. Perhaps they'll sing Psalm 46:5, which says of Jerusalem, "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved."

Zechariah 12:5 opens the door just a crack to allow the light of saving faith to shine through. Many times in the nation's past, the people of Israel have assumed their strength was in themselves. But during the Tribulation they will come to recognize that their strength is not in their military prowess, but in the Lord of hosts. They will turn from politics to God.

C. The Paradox of the Defeated (v. 6)

"In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fir among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the peoples round about, on the right hand and on the left; and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem."

Living in a day of thermostats and forced-air heating you may not know what a hearth or firepot was. It was a metal pot you put coals in to start a fire. If you put hot coals from a firepot on a pile of kindling, you would get a quick fire. Similarly, a flame set to a dry sheaf of grain would ignite quickly. The prophecy compares the Gentile armies to kindling or sheaves that the governors of Judah as firepots or torches that devour wood in flame. The relatively weak and outnumbered leaders of Israel are going to devour their enemies "round about on the right hand and on the left." That will allow Jerusalem to "be inhabited again in her own place." In the final battle nothing will be able to ultimately destroy the city of Jerusalem, which shall again be peacefully inhabited.

D. The Priority of Deliverance (v. 7)

"The Lord also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah."

God will first deliver the defenseless country folk. That will show those in the well-defended capital, which is delivered last, that the battle was not won by their military might or strategizing.

E. The Power of David (v. 8)

"In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be like David; and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord before them."

The greatest soldier in the history of Israel was David. In fact, after he had killed Goliath and defeated the Philistines, the Israelites compared him to their first king, saying, "Saul hath slain his thousands; David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). So if the weak will be like David, you can imagine what an incredible army Israel will have. The strong, represented by the house of David, shall be like God. More specifically they'll be like the angel of the Lord, who is Christ. They will be infused with the energy of the Messiah Himself, implying that He will be there leading His people to victory. The angel of the Lord in apposition to God identifies Him as God Himself, namely the Second Person of the Trinity.

This will be an exciting time that raptured believers will probably get to witness. We'll be coming out of heaven with Christ on white horses and we'll have a perfect view of the whole affair (Rev. 19:14). At the climax of the Battle of Armageddon, Jesus Christ and this heavenly army will strengthen the people of Israel to conquer their enemies.

E. The Promise of Destruction (v. 9)

"It shall come to pass, in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem."

God is going to wipe out those who seek to attack His people. The Hebrew term translated "will seek" speaks of the concentration of the marksman, who focuses on his target without being distracted. Revelation 16 and 19 chronicle the wrath of God and the judgment of Christ as He comes out of heaven in glory and power to conquer His foes.

Zechariah 12:1-9 prophetically describes Israel's great deliverance and the destruction of the armies of the world gathered against her. That's a political victory that will cause Israel and her enemies to recognize God at work. Verse 10 now makes a transition into the spiritual transformation of Israel.

III. THE SORROW OF ISRAEL (vv. 10b-14)

"They [Israel] shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon, in the Valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart."

A. Its Cause

While Israel's spiritual eyes are focused on God and His deliverance, they will see God incarnate, their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ coming as their victor--the very One they once rejected. That realization will cause national mourning among every family and individual. The Hebrew word translated "mourn" means "to strike the breast in deep grief." That men will mourn apart from their wives indicates individual acts of repentance that permeate the entire nation. How ironic that after winning their greatest victory they will mourn. But that's the anguish of true repentance.

The One Sin a Person Must Repent Of

Jesus said, "When [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin ... because they believe not on me" (John 16:8-9). Unbelief is the one sin the Spirit of God must convict a person of to bring him to salvation. That's the sin Israel will feel convicted of when they look on Christ, whom they once crucified. That's where salvation begins--in turning from rejecting Jesus Christ to believing in Him.

B. Its Comparison

The mourning and bitterness Israel will experience at that time is similar to that which took place when good king Josiah was mortally wounded at Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo. (Although not mentioned in 2 Chronicles 35:20-24, the scriptural account of Josiah's defeat, the name Hadadrimmon was apparently preserved by tradition and later recorded by Zechariah.) Pharaoh Neco of Egypt killed Josiah in battle, and the nation of Judah mourned its great loss. So Zechariah prophesies that the mourning of Jerusalem and Israel in the day that Christ returns will be reminiscent of the mourning over the death of King Josiah.

C. Its Contrast

Commentator David Baron explains the singling out of the families of David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei: "Through these ... aristocratic and privileged lines, the rulers and the priests, who, alas! in times past often set an evil example to the whole nation, will now be foremost in their self-contrition

and mourning over the great national sin, their example for good will now also be followed by all the rest of the people" (The Vision & Prophecies of Zechariah [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972], p. 453). Israel's deep mourning reminds me of Jesus' statement, "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). Israel's mourning of true repentance is coming, but she will be comforted.

IV. THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL (v. 10a)

"I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications."

A. Stated

God's pouring forth of His Spirit is the evidence of salvation because He never gives His Spirit to unbelievers (Rom. 8:9). The Holy Spirit is identified as the "Spirit of grace" (cf., Heb. 10:29) because was He given out of grace, and the Spirit "of supplication" because God's grace toward the remnant will result in repentant prayer. Zechariah is saying that just as God pours out refreshing showers on thirsty and parched ground, so will He pour out the Spirit of grace and supplication on repentant, needy Israel.

B. Supported

Joel prophesied essentially the same thing when he said, "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and, also, upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit" (Joel 2:28-29). That prophecy will be completely fulfilled at the Second Coming of Christ. Peter cited it at the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:15-21), but then the church was getting just a little taste of it. Joel's prophecy is similar to Ezekiel's saying that God would replace Israel's stony heart with a heart of flesh and would put His Spirit within them (Ezek. 36:26-27).

Israel's repentance happens only because "they shall look upon [Him] whom they have pierced." Because God is speaking in first person in verse 10 as the One who was pierced--whom we know to be Christ--we not only have an affirmation of the deity of Christ, but also an implication of the Trinity as the perspective shifts from the first person to the third person in the phrase "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him." There God sees Himself as well as the incarnate Son of God as the object of Israel's attention.

Don't let anyone tell you that Jesus is less than God or that the Jewish people weren't responsible at least in part for His death. God tells Israel that it was Him in the Person of His Son whom they pierced. They may have used a Roman spear and a cross (John 19:34), but it was their plotting of their religious leaders that put Him there. Yet God in His great mercy can forgive anything--even the murder of His Messiah.

CONCLUSION

Zechariah 13:1 reiterates the promise of salvation for Israel: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." God is going to wash away the sins of the nation. When they see Jesus and cry out, "My Lord and my God," they will realize it was the God of Israel whom they had pierced. And then God will turn on the fountain of spiritual cleansing and wash His people clean as He pours out His Spirit.

In any age, repentance like that--true, honest repentance--will lead to spiritual cleansing. The fountain is open today. The apostle Paul said, "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). While we as Christians look expectantly to the day of national mourning and blessing for Israel, meanwhile we can tell every Jew and Gentile that they don't need to wait until then, because the fountain of salvation is open right now.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is one reason that Israel has drawn the attention of the world?
2. What is a primary reason for Israel's reappearance as a nation?
3. What will happen to Israel's tragic history on the day of her future political and spiritual victory?
4. What is the future world war that will include a siege of Jerusalem commonly called?
5. What are two reasons the nations of the world will converge on Israel during the Tribulation?
6. Upon whom does the prophecy of Zechariah 12 focus?
7. What does God's use of the first person in Zechariah 12 signify? What confidence does it provide?
8. What will happen to the nations that lay siege against Jerusalem?
9. In prophetic literature, what does the phrase "in that day" usually refer to?
10. Although Satan will entice the nations to come against Israel, whose plan is that in accord with?
11. Identify the four armies present at the Battle of Armageddon.
12. How will God begin His shielding of Israel, according to verse 4?
13. What will the governors of Judah turn from and to as their resource during the invasion of Israel?
14. What will enable Jerusalem to "be inhabited again in her own place" (v. 6)?
15. Why will God first deliver the inhabitants outside of Jerusalem?
16. During the siege of Jerusalem, whom are its inhabitants compared to and why (v. 8)?
17. What will God do to the armies that attack Jerusalem at the end of the Tribulation (v. 9)?
18. Whom will Israel look upon as their victor? Why will that be a cause of mourning (vv. 10-14)?
19. What's the one sin a person must repent of to be saved?
20. What effect will the contrition of the aristocratic and privileged families of Israel have on the rest of the people?
21. What will God pour upon the faithful remnant of Israel? What does that indicate (v. 10)?
22. What doctrines concerning God and Christ are implied in verse 10?

Pondering the Principles

1. Before declaring how He would protect Israel, the Lord identified Himself as the One "who stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1). That is precisely the assurance Israel will need when faced with seemingly unbeatable odds. When you encounter trials, do you acknowledge God's power as the Creator of the universe and the One who gave us life? Memorize Jeremiah 32:17, which says, "Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee" (NASB). When you face obstacles that appear insurmountable, recall that verse as you look at things from the perspective of the Creator of the Universe.
2. Israel's recognition of Christ as her Messiah at the end of the Tribulation is one of the most dramatic examples of repentance in the Bible. Consequently Zechariah 12 is a wonderful chapter to share with your Jewish friends, relatives, neighbors, or co-workers. Rather than being someone they might assume to be indifferent or antagonistic toward the Jewish people, you have the opportunity to demonstrate that you believe the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will fulfill His promises to His people. Pray that you might lead them to mourn over their rejection of their Messiah, and be comforted by the One who has opened a fountain of salvation for anyone who will repent of the sin of unbelief and turn to Jesus Christ. Not only may your words provide a sense of hope for them, but they will also let them know that God has not forgotten Israel but plans to make that nation the victorious focal point of the world.

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