

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 26, Chapter 12

Just as Bible scholars tend to divide the Book of Zechariah into two books... First Zechariah that is chapters 1 – 8, and Second Zechariah that is chapters 9 – 14... so, they further divide Second Zechariah into two sections, chapters 9 – 11, and 12 – 14. Different scholars have differing perspectives on the 2nd section: some thinking of it in terms of Israel's day (meaning moment or time) of atonement, others as it being all about Israel's conflicts, subsequent victory, conversion to being Believers in Yeshua, and ultimately their sanctification. And yet others see it as dealing with the various predicaments Israel has historically faced, both internal and external, especially as concerns Jerusalem. That is, Israel has always dealt with hostilities and differences within their own faith sphere, and also from the external pressures of foreign adversaries that on a couple occasions involved invasion and exile. But chapter 12 lays out how God is going to resolve this troubling historical pattern once and for all.

Zechariah chapter 12 speaks to a future age (what modern folks loosely call The End Times) when a great confederacy of enemy nations makes war against Israel. It deals with a number of events that are prior to the return of Messiah Yeshua to rule and reign, although some of the later events might be happening as part of the immediate results of His return. Tragically, Israel will suffer greatly and be decimated; yet in the end, miraculously come out the victor with a remnant surviving. Her enemies will be decisively dealt with, and what remains of Israel (meaning the people) will enjoy a permanent peace and sufficiency in all things. The Prophet makes it clear that all that is predicted will happen, because the Creator has ordained it and therefore nothing can change it.

I want to emphasize that final point: nothing can change what has been predicted. There are substantial Christian denominations, however, who believe humanity and our planet *can* avoid these outcomes if only we'll do the right things now. In fact, some go so far as to believe that Messiah only returns once these conflicts and evils have been resolved by Christian leaders. That is, He waits on a kind of worldwide human-devised utopia to be established, so that He can come back to a peaceful and Godly world

population to rule over. A goodly part of the reason they believe this is because they shun the Old Testament and the Prophets as no longer having relevance. In their doctrinal beliefs the birth of Yeshua inaugurated a new era with a different set of laws to follow, a different God, the gentile Church having replaced Israel, and so all the predictions of the OT Prophets have no meaning. I assure you they are far, far off the mark.

As I have mentioned a few times, as valuable is the Book of Revelation for us, the Minor Prophets and 3 or 4 of the Major Prophets are where we find the bulk of information about the End Times, and then thereafter. The fact that what is going to happen is unchangeable and irreversible means that the reason we need to know about what these Prophets say is so we can properly interpret history as it unfolds around us, and so that we know what to prepare for. It is very much parallel to Joseph in Egypt. When Joseph arrived, and was later made 2nd in command over all of Egypt, Egypt was thriving. It had such an abundance of food they were selling it to foreigners that needed it. There was nothing going on there that would say trouble is coming. Yet, Joseph convinced Pharaoh that Joseph's God had told him there would be 7 more years of agricultural abundance, but that this would be immediately be followed by 7 years of very low food production. Pharaoh believed Joseph; he believed that Joseph's God was so powerful that nothing they could do could avert the 7 years of famine, and so Egypt's leadership went on a long-term nationwide campaign to prepare for it by storing away vast food supplies. We are in the same position, today. God has told us in advance what is going to happen, and so we need to be wise and react properly to that knowledge. That doesn't mean that we won't face hard times no matter how prepared we might be. But it does give us an opportunity to do what we need to do to better survive it. Still, whether we do or not depends on if we take God's Word seriously. And, it also depends on our faith leaders pointing us to these prophecies, rather than the large majority of Church leaders we have now who dismiss them as no longer relevant, and thus a waste of time to study except, perhaps, as a historical curiosity.

Open your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 12.

READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 12 all

The first thing we see is that the words to come in this chapter are prefaced by calling them an "oracle". In other words, this is something God is pronouncing. It is not the Prophet deducing it, or using divining powers to look into the future, or even having inspired thoughts put into his mind. This a direct communication from God, which is something unique to true Prophets of God. Just who is this God that is giving Zechariah the oracle? Despite virtually all English Bibles obscuring it, we find that in the original Hebrew it says "Yehoveh". By saying this, the fullest weight of what Zechariah brings via this prophecy is brought to bear and no one can doubt which god is the one pronouncing it. And, don't get tunnel vision and think this is referring only to chapter 12. This opening oracle, who it is from and who it applies to, has to do with everything that follows all the way through the end of Zechariah... chapter 14.

The next issue is who exactly this prophecy concerns. Thus, immediately after establishing that this is coming from Yehoveh, we read that this concerns Israel. Sounds straightforward enough, but the reality is that the term "Israel" appears nowhere else in chapters 12 -14 than right here. Up to now, the concern in Second Zechariah has been for Judah and Jerusalem. So, is Israel a term the returned Judeans adopted and used for who they are? Or is this speaking about the Northern Kingdom that came to be called Ephraim? Or is this speaking about all of Israel...both houses... all 12 tribes? The verses do not make that entirely clear. I think this can be reduced to two possibilities. The first being that Israel became an alternative name the returning exiles from Babylon began to use for themselves. It remains a Jewish tradition to this day that the Jews (historically meaning descendants of Judah and Benjamin) consider themselves as representing the remainder of all 12 tribes (further meaning that the 10 Lost Tribes as a separate entity is a myth). The second more likely solution is that this is referring collectively to all 12 tribes (both houses of Israel... Judah and Ephraim). An interesting statistical fact is that of the over 1,000 times the term Israel appears in the Bible, only 17 times is it used to refer to the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Even more, when we read (like here) the words that the Hebrew most literally says is "burden of Yehoveh", we can contrast that strange phrase from one like it from earlier in Zechariah...chapter 9... when we read "Burden of Hadrach". Hadrach is

representative of the pagan world religions, while Israel is representative of God's religion. So, I lean towards this passage referring to the second of the two more likely choices. That is, in this case the use of the term "Israel" is meaning all of Israel and not just Judah.

The remainder of the first verse makes it clear that Yehoveh, Israel's God and the one pronouncing this oracle, is also the Creator of all things (He stretched out the expanse of the heavens...the Universe... laid the foundation of the earth, and created human life). This is one of the more clear passages in the Old Testament that speaks of Yehoveh as the only god in existence, and not just the one and only god that Israel is allowed to have. The monotheism that we think about today...meaning only one God in existence... is nowhere present in the Old Testament. This was an era when the Hebrews still believed there were many gods performing different functions and assigned to a variety of nations. It's just that their God, Yehoveh, allowed Israel to worship only Him.

Verse 2 opens with that special Hebrew word that amounts to "pay attention! Something amazing is going to happen!". That word is **hinneh** and it means behold or indeed. It is announcing something surprising or unlikely or even history changing. And, what is it that is going to be history changing? It is that that the relatively small, rather crudely built and out-of-the-way place... that city that has been captured, burned, rebuilt, only to be captured again...called Jerusalem is going to become a cup of trembling to the peoples that surround it. The Hebrew word **ra'al** is used to express what English often translates as trembling or reeling; it means to stagger around as a drunk person.

When a cup of something is used, it means that whatever is in the cup is a quantity of something that is set apart for a person or a group to experience. It is more usually a negative thing, but there are a couple of rare instances where it is used positively. Then we are told that these peoples (plural) round about Jerusalem are involved in some way and they are going to be badly affected. The Hebrew translated as peoples is **ammim**. Very often this is a term used for God's people. Here it seems to be broad and all inclusive. Yet, these peoples, who are probably foreigners, aren't far away; they are somewhat near to Jerusalem. One might expect to find the word **goyim**, here,

instead of **ammim**. **Goyim** is a term that means gentiles or just as often nations (with the understanding that since Judah or Israel is the only Hebrew nation all other nations are gentile nations). Considering the context, there can be little choice but to see these as gentile people groups and nations that are relatively nearby to Jerusalem. That said, because Jeremiah and Zechariah are so closely aligned in what they prophesy, it can be helpful to go to Jeremiah and see what this Prophet has to say about what is surely the same event. And, as is typical of Jeremiah, he goes into more detail than Zechariah. Since this *is* an End Times timeframe, then it seems to me we need to pay close attention because these events may be much closer to us in time... literally just around the corner... and the likelihood is greater than ever that we may be alive to experience it.

CJB **Jeremiah 25:15-31** ¹⁵ *"For here is what Yehoveh the God of Isra'el says to me: 'Take this cup of the wine of fury from my hand, and make all the nations where I am sending you drink it. ¹⁶ They will drink, stagger to and fro and behave like crazy people because of the sword that I will send among them.'"* ¹⁷ *Then I took the cup from ADONAI's hand and made all the nations drink, where Yehoveh had sent me- ¹⁸ Yerushalayim and the cities of Y'hudah, along with their kings and leaders, to make them a ruin and an object of horror, ridicule and cursing, as it is today; ¹⁹ Pharaoh king of Egypt, with his servants and leaders and all his people, both native ²⁰ and foreign; all the kings of the land of 'Utz; all the kings of the land of the P'lishtim, Ashkelon, 'Azah, 'Ekron and those remaining in Ashdod; ²¹ Edom, Mo'av, and the people of 'Amon; ²² all the kings of Tzor, of Tzidon and of the coastlands across the sea; ²³ D'dan, Teima, Buz and all who cut the corners of their beards; ²⁴ all the kings of Arabia and of the mixed peoples living in the desert; ²⁵ all the kings of Zimri, of 'Eilam and of the Medes; ²⁶ and all the kings of the north, far and near, one after another- indeed, all the kingdoms of the world that there are on the surface of the earth. And the king of Sheshakh will drink last of all. ²⁷ "You are to say to them, 'Here is what Yehoveh-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el, says: Drink until you're so drunk that you throw up, fall down, and never get up again, because of the sword I am sending among you!' ²⁸ If they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink it, then*

say to them, 'Here is what Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says: You must drink! ²⁹ For, look!- if I am bringing disaster on the city that bears my own name, do you expect to go unpunished? Yes, I will summon a sword for all the inhabitants of the earth,' says YehovehI. ³⁰ "As for you, [Yirmeyahu,] prophesy all these words against them; say to them, 'Yehoveh is roaring from on high, raising his voice from his holy dwelling, roaring with might against his own habitation, shouting out loud, like those who tread grapes, against everyone living on earth. ³¹ The sound resounds to the ends of the earth, for Yehoveh is indicting the nations, about to pass judgment on all humankind; the wicked he has handed over to the sword,' says Yehoveh."

Clearly, Jeremiah's prophecy lists a number of nations in the Middle East region that are nearby Jerusalem on a relative basis, if one takes into account the overall size of the entire globe. However, Jeremiah is essentially saying that all the nations both near and far to Jerusalem will be affected by this cup of staggering that is Jerusalem. So, despite the implication of Zechariah that it might be only nations nearby to Jerusalem, Jeremiah much more specifically calls out certain nations within the Middle Eastern geography, but then expands that to a global... a universal... scale. Inherent in this thought is that the nations involved are those that are threatening Jerusalem and Judah. Bringing that into modern times, it is speaking of Israel as it exists today (or as it might exist in the near future), and especially Jerusalem is Israel's capital. So, it is likely that there might be some few nations that are not a threat to Israel, and perhaps they will not be affected. That said, like in any broad-based war, even nations that aren't directly involved are affected in many ways. And, as connected as the world is today, it is hard to imagine any nation being an exception to the rule, no matter if they are a friend to Israel, because if you are friend to Israel then you, too, are going to be a target for the world's fury for supporting the enemy of the world (sorry to dash any hopes of finding a nation to escape to when all hell breaks loose).

The final part of the verse makes it clear that the city of Jerusalem is not the only target of the nations. It includes all of Judah (modern Israel). It speaks in terms of a siege against it. I think we need to take the word siege in a broader sense than what the word means technically or historically. Technically it

means that an army surrounds the city, lets no one in or out, and eventually food and water run out and the city has to surrender. Here, considering the modern age, it more likely means being under attack from all sides. Verse 3 continues with further describing the scenario.

That passage begins with: On that day. Some translate it as "in that day". Still others "when that day comes". It doesn't matter. These are all synonyms of the End Times Day of Judgement, also known as the Day of the Lord. Some Bible teachers and scholars try to find a way to differentiate one from the other, but such precision is unnecessary. Sometimes it is just a matter of using a phrase that works in the best meter or simply sounds best when spoken, depending on the circumstance. They all point to the same thing. These terms occur again and again in the Prophets, and they always wind up describing the future when God visits His wrath on the nations and He rescues Israel from them.

This verse continues that Jerusalem will become a burden-stone to these attacking nations. The term is most unusual (especially when it is used of Jerusalem), and in Hebrew is ***eben ma amasa***. Literally it means "stone of burden". It is common among Bible teachers to say that this is referring to the Greek sport of lifting weights (usually stones); that is very farfetched. If any guess at least stays within the realm of the Scriptures and Hebrew (not Greek) thought and culture, it probably has to do with a number of references in the Tanakh to Israel, to Jerusalem, and to the tribes, etc., as being or being represented by some type of stone (such as a precious stone). But, here, because these are heathen gentiles attacking Jerusalem, Jerusalem (for them) is a burden-stone. A negative thing. It is going to cause them exhaustion and harm. It will be like trying to unsuccessfully lift a hard, jagged and heavy rock that causes them nothing but bruises and cuts.

Now notice how at the end of verse 3, Zechariah also expands the scope of who will be attacking Jerusalem to more mirror Jeremiah. It says, "... and all the nations on earth will be amassed against her." So, I think we can remove any doubt that when this attack comes against Israel, the armies will represent nearly every nation on earth. All nations will be aligned against Israel and thereby opposed to God. No single nation... not even a

Superpower... could hope to win in such a situation. I want to offer what is admittedly speculation. Israel is simply too small for every nation on earth to send large mechanized armies. There wouldn't even be room for them to assemble. So, I suspect that what we'll see is that nearby nations will use their armies backed by the weaponry, intelligence, technology, and supplies of other and larger nations acting as allies. Perhaps nations with air superiority and aircraft carriers to launch planes from would participate in that way. That might explain the strange tension between Zechariah first talking about the nearby armies doing the attacking, and then a few words later the nations of the whole world involving themselves. As hard as it might be for us to accept, the world's nations will on this occasion, join forces to fight one enemy: Israel. What the final catalyst will be to set this off I don't know. But, as Zechariah 12 shows us, what *they* don't know is that their military superiority matters not at all. They are fighting God, and that fight is not winnable because God doesn't fight fair nor does He go by the Geneva Convention.

Verse 4 again begins with those words speaking of the End Times... "on that day". This term appears 7 times in chapter 12 to emphasize the future nature of it, so it is pointless for anyone to be looking to the past or to Zechariah's present to see if somehow this prophecy fits. Yehoveh says "I will smite". The key word is "I". Far from God only empowering the army of His people to fight (which He also does), He will directly intervene on Israel's behalf, just as He did when fighting for Israel when they were under such oppression in Egypt. The word that we translate as smite is in Hebrew ***nakah***. It is far more than striking or hitting. It inherently includes the idea of defeating whomever is being struck. One way to do that is for God to inflict diseases upon the enemy that weakens, incapacitates, even kills, them quickly and in vast numbers. This passage says that God will smite the enemies' horses with bewilderment or astonishment, and their riders with madness... insanity. Usually, such words are figurative in the Bible. For instance, when in 2Kings 6, Elisha prayed and God responded it says He smote the enemy with blindness. But, the blindness wasn't so much a loss of eyesight as it was a mental blindness that didn't allow them to properly assess the situation around them so they were confused and rather easily defeated.

Thus, here in verse 4, no doubt the uses of horses and riders that become panicked and befuddled is symbolic of whatever war equipment is used in the future when this prophecy comes about, and it also has to do with the people operating the machinery. I won't venture to guess about it, but you get the picture. The equipment becomes inoperative, and the equipment operators panic when they can't make it operate like it is supposed to. Clearly, because virtually all the equipment behaves in the same way, the soldiers will be terrified at what this might mean. They probably quit fighting and run for their lives.

However, says Yehoveh, as opposed to what He will do to the nations, He will keep watch over Judah (Israel). That means, He will safeguard them. The Hebrew more literally says; "I will open My eyes" over Judah. No doubt using this choice of words is meant to contrast with the blindness (a closing of eyes) that God inflicts upon the nations... the nations being God's enemies. So, God is acutely aware and closely guarding Israel at the same time He is in process of defeating the armies of the world. The Bible shows us that unless God decides to use a nation to punish His people (as He did with Assyria and Babylon), then the reality is that nations that try to harm Israel always wind up on the losing end of the deal, no matter how improbable. Why is that?

CJB Genesis 12:1-3 *Now ADONAI said to Avram, "Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

As much as it riles the bulk of the gentile Constantinian Church, the reality is that, yes, God does have a special love and concern reserved just for His covenant people above His love for others. I have had many mainstream Christians challenge me on that because they believe that they have replaced Israel as God's cherished people, and so now they are the most beloved of God. They are a New Testament Church, you see, because everything in the Old Testament is now outdated and superseded. Anywhere we find blessing

and protection and love for Judah and Israel, scratch it out and replace it with "Church". It seems to do little good to tell them that God will always show special allegiance and favor to Israel, even pointing it out in the Bible, because it just seems unfathomable to their closed and made-up minds. Recent history doesn't matter, either. The kind of blindness of the Church is similar to the kind of blindness and madness that is going to strike nations and their leaders. The Church's blindness affects them spiritually, the nations' blindness affects them militarily. It causes them to refuse to accept what is clearly before them, and so they decide and react irrationally, and this leads to their demise. So much like His dealing with Pharaoh, this is God using the darkest side of human nature against them. This isn't pleasant to speak about or think about. But it is true and we must not kick against the goad because we don't like it, or think it unfair in our eyes.

Verse 5 speaks not about the leaders, but rather the clans of Judah. This is meaning social units, as opposed to only those in leadership roles. So, it is those who form the various clans who come to fight for the sake of Jerusalem. And, they can feel most confident that despite the impossible odds, they will win because Yehoveh has empowered their military officers. And these clans will say to themselves... they will sincerely believe... that Jerusalem will not be taken.

The thing to understand is that even though archaic terms are being used, what this is saying is that the population of Israel will be united in their conviction. And, their conviction is based on their belief that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are mighty due to God having chosen Jerusalem as His holy city. So, at the same time the enemy will be stricken with panic as their war machinery fails them, so will the inhabitants of Jerusalem grow in confidence and recognition that their God is fighting for them. And, even this newfound strength is because Yehoveh of Hosts has put within them the faith to believe. Then, in verse 6, the results of this fierce faith are described.

Yet again, "on that day" or by using another of the several synonymous terms for it, which means this End Times battle for Jerusalem, the clans will be like basins of fire put under stacks of wood, or a torch put under a bundle of dry grain stalks. For some reason, a number of translators switch from saying

"clans" to saying "leaders", even though in both cases it uses the same Hebrew word, **alluph**. It is too ambiguous to say within certainty which is correct; but to me it reads better to stay with the word "clans" unless it is only the leaders of the clans who can be likened to a fire that destroys, and the enemy nations as that which gets burned up. Fire in the Bible is usually said to do one of two things: to destroy or to purify. So, a destructive fire consumes, while a purifying fire re-creates and elevates. Israel is also going to go through fire in this End Times war; however, God will not consume them, He will purify them.

I want to momentarily allude to the fact that the pile of wood and the stack of sheaves are meant symbolically to represent the political and military threat to Jerusalem and all of Israel, and by definition the wood and sheaves are all the enemies of God. We should not forget to factor in the End Times harvest metaphor that Christ was pleased to regularly use, that is but another means of explaining what we are reading here in Zechariah 5 and 6 about what happens to God's enemies at the end of the age.

CJB Matthew 13:34-40 ***³⁴ All these things Yeshua said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without using a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, "I will open my mouth in parables, I will say what has been hidden since the creation of the universe." ³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His talmidim approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world. As for the good seed, these are the people who belong to the Kingdom; and the weeds are the people who belong to the Evil One. ³⁹ The enemy who sows them is the Adversary, the harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age.***

The last half of verse 6 takes us back to the issue of at one time speaking of "the surrounding nations", and then another time speaking of "all the nations of the earth". Verse 6 says this complete destruction is about the surrounding nations. Again, are we to assume that there is a distinction being made

between the closer-by nations verses all the rest of the nations of the world? Or, should we see them both together as a unit, and what happens to some happens to all? I cannot accept that this is meant to be mysterious or misleading. Nor should we simplistically view the fate of both near and far away nations together. Especially when we read Jeremiah that speaks of the same thing, but in a much more expansive way, we find listed the surrounding Middle Eastern nations that had become perennial enemies of Israel, except for occasional historically brief bursts of friendship.

I feel pretty confident that the firm message here is that the surrounding nations geographically located nearer to Jerusalem, are going to be obliterated. Generally speaking, few to no survivors. These are those that have been enemies of Israel for millennia (as highlighted by Jeremiah), and today more than ever. If we go by the more historically recent reason for the acute animosity, which reason has only grown in our time, with the intractable hatred and never-ending hostilities, then the cause is clearly Islam. On the one hand, Islam is both a political and religious system and identity. Unlike the parts of the world that can be said to be Judeo-Christian, whereby the government is not ruled by the religion and vice versa, Islam is. This is especially so for the nations nearer to Jerusalem. Therefore, it might be that the immutable desire of Islam to erase Israel and all Jews from our planet, and their primary national locations that surround Jerusalem, is what is at play here. But, then again, something else could come along that isn't really apparent just yet.

At the same time, it means that all the other nations of the earth while being gravely damaged, will survive. In fact, we read in various Prophets about following the End Times war, and then Yeshua reigning from the new Temple in Jerusalem, that nations will send leaders and representatives to Jerusalem. So, obviously, the earth will continue throughout that 1000-year period of Messiah's earthly reign to be divided into nations. Good information for us to know.

The statement about these nearby nations more or less concludes with characterizing them as existing on the right and the left (of Jerusalem). This term is a merism. That means, it operates like book ends. It explains one end,

and the other, and everything in between... so it is expressing that there will not be any exceptions. It is inclusive of ALL the nearby nations. The verse ends by drawing a comparison to what will happen to Jerusalem. But, those last few words aren't as they might seem to us.

A much more literal rendering of the last phrase is:

YLT Zechariah 12:6 *...And Jerusalem hath inhabited again her place in Jerusalem.*

What is happening here is this: in the Hebrew mind, and from a biblical perspective, Jerusalem is here being personified as a female... a woman. Israel and Jerusalem are regularly personified in the Tanakh as a woman. It is a literary feature mostly employed by Hebrew Prophets and poets. One of the better examples (of several) that I can give to you comes from Lamentations.

CJB Lamentations 1:1-2 *How lonely lies the city that once thronged with people! Once great among the nations, now she is like a widow! Once princess among provinces, she has become a vassal. ² Bitterly she weeps at night, tears running down her cheeks. Not one of all her lovers is there to comfort her. Her friends have all betrayed her; they have become her enemies.*

To be clear, this passage from Lamentations is not the event Zechariah is depicting, but rather he is using a commonly employed word picture in the ancient Hebrew culture. I have to explain it to you, but the ancient Hebrews would have seen it right away. So, Jerusalem is a feminine figure here, and she has returned to her nest. The woman will be safe and secure in her home and with her family because all of her enemies have been permanently vanquished. In a way, the woman plays a central role in her own deliverance process even though it is Yehoveh that is divinely orchestrating it all.

The bottom line is that Jerusalem will become the Jerusalem God wanted, and the Hebrews always hoped for. But the path to get there will be terrible, bloody, devastating, and long. And, it will necessarily involve our entire planet. We'll pause here for today and begin at verse 7, next time.