

## **THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH**

### **Lesson 30, Chapters 13 and 14**

Whenever we get deep into studying a Bible book... especially so as concerns an Old Testament book... it is important that we occasionally back away from it, float up to the 30,000-foot altitude in our hot air balloon, and take a panoramic view so as not to lose our perspective as we were examining its many details.

I have spoken countless times over the decades of the problem a typical Bible student has when studying the Old Testament. This usually centers around what they might have been told about it at their Church, or perhaps from reading standard Christian commentaries. What they (and you) have heard or read ranges anywhere from explaining that these Old Testament books are actually mostly historical relics that have no effect on the lives of Believers (other than to learn about history for its own sake), all the way to taking a purely modern Western view of what those books teach that takes no account of the era or Hebrew culture of the times that those Bible authors lived.

Although I am often given credit for offering a new and alternative view, the fact is that I'm hardly the first or only. Some great scholars of past centuries have approached the Bible with a similar view that much pre-dates mine, however their works were mostly stifled by the guardians of the traditional Christian institutions because their scholarship did not agree with the rather standard Church view and mindset that had been that way for even more centuries. As with Judaism, Christian tradition and manmade doctrines eventually overtook and obscured God's actual Word, even substituting itself as God's Word... but the people who populate the pews were largely unaware of it. Therefore, since all theological knowledge used to be held tightly, and mostly out of sight, available only within the Theological schools and seminaries of the great religious institutions and only accessible by a privileged few, then that important information simply wasn't available to the common man or the unwashed Believers. Bottom line: the world and the Church congregations knew little of these enlightened scholars existence, nor did they even have access to their outstanding works of literature.

To our wonderful good fortune, some of these deep thinkers and amazing Bible scholars did have their works preserved such that now, in this digital and Internet age, they suddenly have become known and are accessible and available to one and all. Of course, only a precious few people today, at any academic level, even know these works exist. One such enlightened scholar of the not very distant past that was unjustly relegated to obscurity was Norman Snaith, who did some outstanding works about the Bible that were essentially read, acknowledged, but not acted upon. Snaith was a professor of Old Testament Studies at Wesley College in England.

I want to quote to you from the preface of his little-known book, first published in 1944 during the raging of WWII, entitled "Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament". I hope you will give what I am about to read to you the attention it deserves, because it will go a long way to help you to understand how to properly grasp the Old Testament, while at the same time explaining why the Old Testament (if not the entire Bible) has been so very sadly distorted and then presented to Bible students and ultimately to the everyday congregation members. Here is Norman Snaith:

***In this Fernley-Hartley lecture I have set forth what I believe to be the distinctive ideas of Old Testament religion. These are different from the ideas of any other religion whatsoever. In particular they are quite distinct from the ideas of Greek thinkers. The aim of the Hebrew religion was Da'ath Elohim (the Knowledge of God); the aim of Greek thought was Gnothi seauton (know thyself). Between these two there is a great gulf fixed. We do not see that either admits to any compromise. They are fundamentally different in a priori assumption, in method, approach, and in final conclusion.***

***Traditional Christianity has sought to find a middle way, combining Zion and Greece into what is held to be a harmonious synthesis. The New Testament has been interpreted according to Plato and Aristotle, and the distinctive Old Testament ideas have been left out of account. Here is the cause of the modern neglect of the Old Testament. The righteousness of Aristotle has been substituted for the righteousness of the Old Testament. The logos spermatikos of the Stoics (this means***

**the Stoic's popular philosophy of the divine cosmic principle of reason being present in all things) *has largely transplanted the Holy Spirit... Plato is indeed "divine" and Aristotle is 'the master of them that know'.***

***It may be that traditional Christianity has been divinely guided in thus transferring itself into a dominant Greek environment. In that case, then let us cease to talk of the Bible as the Word of God.***

I realize that this higher style of English language can be a bit hard to follow, but Professor Snaith's highpoints are that Christianity was created on the foundational basis of Greek thinking, the Bible interpreted through the lens of Greek philosophy and philosophers, and that this is entirely different than ancient Hebrew thinking, and therefore different from what the Old Testament teaches. It has brought the gentile assembly of Believers in Christ into the thought patterns and ideals of Plato and Aristotle, and especially it has been injected into the New Testament. This, of course, has greatly affected how we look at the Old Testament and what we take from it, and question if the oldest part of the Bible has any worth at all. I can tell you without hesitation that a Church basic principle of Bible study is, that the Old Testament must be looked at in the light of what the New Testament says, even though for any other literature ever created, this is, of course, backwards. His conclusion is that it is false on its face that the Church has the right to refer to the Bible, any longer, as the Word of God. And, interestingly, for at least 200 years, a few other noted Bible scholars have suggested that we also need to stop calling the principal Christian institution of the Church "the Church of Christ", but rather "the Church of Paul", due to the highest spiritual and doctrinal influences upon Christianity as coming from Paul's letters and not from the Gospel accounts full of Yeshua's teachings.

Naturally, in Snaith's (and several others) daring to challenge the Church leadership, and saying that it is has never been right for the Church leadership to call the Christian Bible "the Word of God", due to the way it has been interpreted and taught, and also the matter of later scholars claiming that it is Paul's teachings that dominate the Church and not Jesus's, these particular

scholars who were raising the red flag of concern were quietly marginalized and their voices muted.

I know this is hard-hitting, yet Snaith is right. Yeshua Himself was deeply upset with the Synagogue religious leaders of His day (the Pharisees, whom He also calls the Torah teachers), because they had created so many traditions, customs, and other manmade doctrines and rules by then, that it had reached the point of subverting, even substituting for, God's Holy Scripture. Snaith is accusing the traditional and original Church as founded by Constantine and his Bishops, of the doing same thing. And, by the way, the great Pilgrim leader William Bradford took the same view some 300 years earlier than Snaith, and he was driven out of the Church for his views, and hunted down to be jailed or even executed, thus his escape to a new continent.

In order to more easily and distinctively separate and contrast the faith of Yeshua and His Disciples apart from what has been called "The Church" and "Christianity" since the 4<sup>th</sup> century era of the Roman Emperor Constantine, I have coined the term Constantinian Church in order to give it a useable label. This effort is meant to establish a way to communicate that the Hebrew faith of Yeshua that we read about in the New Testament bears little resemblance to the new gentile-centered faith begun by Constantine and his Bishops that has grown today into the thousands of Christian denominations found around the world. Constantine's religion abolished the Hebrew-based Old Testament faith, which was the foundation of the faith of Yeshua, and made it into a new Greek faith for Greek thinkers and based on the teachings of venerated Greek philosophers that was aimed strictly at gentiles who lived a Greco-Roman lifestyle.

And, of course, Snaith's implication is that this urgently needs to be addressed so that our faith returns to being based on the actual Word of God and no longer on the worldview of Greek Philosophers as it has been for 16 centuries. None of this sheds any doubt on the true nature of Yeshua of Nazareth as our one and only Lord and Savior. In fact, towards the end of his preface, Snaith says:

***"I believe, partly from my own religious experience and partly what I trust is reasonable scholarly exegesis, that Luther was right in holding that the Word of God in the Bible, that strand by which the Bible itself is to be interpreted, is comprised of the great doctrine of Sola Fide... Salvation by faith alone".***

So, as we continue in our study of Zechariah, realize you are going to read it, hear it, and process it very differently from most Christian Pastors and our Believing friends who only know the Bible from a Greek mindset, and have no knowledge (and perhaps no interest) in understanding it from the Hebrew mindset and faith that the Bible actually represents. I have no trouble telling you that such a Greek mindset is well off the mark, has led millions of Believers astray, and it needs to be challenged. Recalibrating our minds to accomplish this mental and knowledge make-over takes quite some effort and time. But it begins with the simple realization that there is much more to our faith in the God of the Bible than only our salvation. And, that the best place to get that knowledge is the Bible itself. But, also, to obtain it we must necessarily begin at the beginning and to acknowledge that all of its contents is relevant to us, with no part overriding another. And, this includes the predictions of the Prophets, that if the fulfillments have not already happened, it is 100% assured to happen.

Let's return, now, to the Zechariah chapter 13.

We ended at verse 7 last time, so let's re-read from verse 7 to the end of the chapter.

### **RE-READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 13:7 – end**

Chapter 13 verse 7 shifted focus to speak more in depth on the coming divine judgments, which shall be suffered both by the nations and by Israel. The outcomes of these judgments will vary. The nations geographically nearest to Israel will suffer total annihilation. The nations further away from Israel will suffer much devastation, but will survive as nations. And Israel will suffer grave damage such that at one point in the War of Armageddon that the nations will assume that they have won. However, after none of the people of

Israel are left but a remnant, and after little of Jerusalem remains, God will miraculously intervene, fight for Israel, and the war will come to a quick conclusion with the nations the loser and Israel the victor.

We have spoken before about how the Prophets will regularly use Hebrew poetry to communicate their oracles from Yehoveh, because the words of poetry have the power to produce the greatest emotional impact, and because often the fulfillments of their predictions are far enough into the future that the words speaking of them must be necessarily hazy and not precise.

Zechariah 13 beginning at verse 7 switches into a more poetic mode.

Therefore, we find God with a sword in His hand, striking out at the shepherd (the religious and political leadership of Israel), and therefore the sheep (the Israelites) will be greatly impacted.

The verse says that the sheep will be scattered. In Hebrew the word is ***puwts***, and indeed it has the idea of being dispersed. Yet, here it is meant metaphorically, just as the terms shepherd and sheep are meant metaphorically. That is, when a flock of sheep are struck or startled, and the shepherd is not there to manage them, their instinct is to scatter. Yet, because the issue is communicated metaphorically and poetically, then we need to understand that here this has less of the intent to mean an exile, and more it means fleeing for their lives. That is, this by no means is saying that in the War of Armageddon, God is once again sending His people into exile in the lands of foreign enemies. Quite the opposite, Israel may be retreating or scattering to certain more defensible places or fleeing to hiding spots, but they are not leaving the Land. The mental picture that is being drawn is of Israel losing, badly, even in the place they will defend the most: Jerusalem. But, then the tide turns, and the Israeli survivors fight their way to victory with God leading the way.

In the remainder of verse 7 we read that God will turn His hand against His little ones. To turn His hand against is but another phrase that means to reign down judgment. Since neither exile nor total annihilation of the people is God's intent, then what this is about is severe disciplinary punishment. Justice. God has no choice but to punish Israel for their continuing idolatry, refusal to accept their Messiah, their intransigence about making religion and doctrine

their god instead of Yehoveh and His given Word as their guide, and overall rebellious unfaithfulness to Him. But, He still loves His chosen people, and has never given up on them as the many Prophets make clear.

Please notice something: this is not a battle of Christians against Jews. However, it is a battle of the entire gentile worlds' governments, including a huge portion (even perhaps a majority) of Christians that will be part of that military, going to war against Israel. Conversely, this is also not a religious battle of Christianity against Judaism. The Israelites fighting against the rest of the world will consist of both the secular and religious Jews. And, among the Israeli soldiers will be both the staunchly Orthodox as well as some number of Messianic Believers in Yeshua. And, there is nothing in the Bible (Old or New Testament) that says that Christ followers will survive but those who are not will be slain. The War of Armageddon will, on a physical level, affect all. On the spiritual level, this is a war of the evil spirit world against the righteous heavenly spirit world. Therefore, while the physical outcome will cut across all the groups of combatants as well as civilians, on the spiritual level many will come to trust in God and His Son Yeshua, while others will dig in their heels (even double-down) on being enemies of God. Upon this, their eternal fates will be sealed. Those who have come to a true and trusting faith having a joyous eternity ahead of them versus those who have chosen to remain steadfast in their unbelief having a sad and painful eternity ahead of them.

When the verse ends with speaking about "the little ones" being scattered, again we are to take "little ones" in relation to the corresponding metaphor of sheep. The little ones of the sheep are the most vulnerable. A good synonym to give us the best mental picture of the intent would be of helpless captives. Thus, from the greatest of Israel (the leaders) to the least (the little ones)... most everyone will be affected negatively. But, now comes the question that is a point of departure. Generally speaking, Christian scholars and teachers say that these shepherds and sheep, etc. point to evil political leaders of the nations and their citizenry. I cannot stand with that conclusion because of God's constant use of "My" when speaking about those He is going to strike and scatter, but not annihilate. The Church gets a little confused about this because most denominations (not all) identify themselves as the New Israel, and therefore, to their minds, whatever affect happens upon "Israel" is

actually speaking of The Church. Thus, since a remnant is to survive, then certainly this must be speaking of a Christian remnant and not Jews. Rather, the plain reading is that the shepherds, sheep, little ones and the general surviving remnant are **not** gentiles or gentile Christians, but rather they are Jews (or better, Hebrew Israelites). Nothing in here deals specifically with gentile Believers in Christ... whether negative or positive.

Verse 8 reads:

**CJB Zechariah 13:8 *In time, throughout that land," says Yehoveh, "two-thirds of those in it will be destroyed- they will die, but one-third will remain.***

Verse 8 drills down yet further into the depth of the damage Israel is going to suffer. However, here it is not speaking of buildings or infrastructure, but rather of the Jewish people who live there. To be clear: throughout the land means the land Israel will be currently possessing. So, this is more or less isolated to what will happen in Israel to Israelites. When we look ahead to verse 9, it helps us to understand that while verse 8 divides the fate of the Jewish people into two groups...those who survive and those who don't... in reality the surviving group is further sub-divided.

Although the words "in time" which we read in the CJB are not there, but rather it literally reads "and it will come to pass", the idea they are putting across is correct. That is, the intent of those words is to show that some amount of time passes between the fulfillments of verse 7 and then verse 8. How much time, exactly, I cannot discern. It could be days or weeks. Maybe a month or longer... I just don't know. But, it will not be immediate.

When the War begins in earnest, we are told that two-thirds of all the Israelites living in the Holy Land will perish. Such a thought is utterly impossible to imagine. There are close to 9 million Jews living in Israel today. That mean that only 3 million would survive. To make that a little more impactful, picture over 200 million Americans dying in a war... that would be an approximately equal proportion. Or imagine 45 million dead in the UK. Or 1 billion people killed in India. Staggering.



So now, there will be but one-third of the Jewish population of Israel left alive, in a war that will still be going on. Then in verse 9:

**CJB Zechariah 13:9** *That third part I will bring through the fire; I will refine them as silver is refined, I will test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is my people' and they will say, 'Yehoveh is my God.'"*

The poetic metaphors continue. Of the remaining third left alive, they will be refined in the same way precious metals are. This one-third will be a mix of people: Believers in God and Yeshua, Believers only in God, and the secular. It no doubt will include many from the worldwide Jewish Diaspora who come to fight alongside their Israeli brothers; likely some having been expelled from the nations in which they had lived because they are Jews or because they openly advocate for Israel.

Because metaphorical terms are used to describe what happens to this remaining one-third, then it is a given that we understand the purification process of metals. The byproducts are dross and pure metal. So, even though this verse doesn't mention the dross (that is, the metaphor for the still stubbornly rebellious Jews who deny God and/or Messiah Yeshua), it isn't necessary... obviously this is part of the refining process. After all, if all the remaining survivors were sincere Believers, why would they need to be further refined?

So, those who have gone through the refining process and are judged as sincere Believers, God will see as "This is My people", and they will acknowledge "Yehoveh is my God". This is the same formula as we find in the Torah, going back to Mt. Sinai when the Torah was first given to Moses. And, that was re-acknowledged by Israel on a few occasions. We come face to face, once again, with a truth that can be hard to digest. On one level, "My people" mean all the Hebrews. On another level, it means all people who have placed their trust in Yehoveh. Initially, when Israel was given the Torah out in the wilderness, it was given not merely as a set of civil laws, but also as part of the terms of a covenant; the Covenant of Moses. This covenant was placed

before the assembled people, and as one voice they said that they agree to it and will abide by its terms. Thus, all Israel was, on one level, God's people. Yet, there was also another sifting that occurred. While Moses was on the mountain, the Levites helped the people build a Golden Calf to worship as their god. Thousands of those people were put to the sword. That is, some of the dross was burned off.

But people being people, we are not static; we change as life goes along. And, we'll read of time after time that a portion of God's people fall away, or reject God's laws and replace them with new manmade doctrines and rules. Eventually, it can infect the entire population, upon which God exiles them all, and once again the people are sifted.

Upon the advent of Messiah Yeshua, the offer to become part of God's covenants with Israel was extended to the gentile world, for those who would forsake their own gods and worship only Yehoveh. But, as part of this, they also had to accept that part of God which represented and manifested His saving will... and that was Yeshua of Nazareth. Therefore, on the one hand, on the physical level, God's people were still the Hebrews (now more known as the Jews), but on the other hand, on the spiritual level, it was all who worshipped God the Father and also trusted in His Son, Yeshua... whether one was gentile or Jew... whom God considered as "My people".

This reality (and this *is* what the Bible tells us) can, indeed, make it a little harder to discern what to expect as we watch the prophetic fulfillments play out in the modern age. However, if we can grasp this two-level approach to identifying who God's people are, it becomes more transparent. It is not one or the other, it is both. And yet, each part's ultimate fates are different. The trick goes back to what I spoke about to open today's lesson: setting aside the Greek method of interpreting the Bible, which also usually leads to determining that only the New Testament is valid for us. If we don't read and acknowledge the Old Testament as relevant and valid, then we have no basis for understanding these fundamental God principles upon which the New Testament is constructed.

When we look more closely at verse 9, we notice that the refining process is directed only at silver. As concerns gold, we notice that it is not about refining, but rather says God is going to “test” it. Even in ancient times, gold has different degrees of purity, and that had everything to do with setting the assigned value. We, today, call it assaying and jewelers express the purity level in terms of carats. So, it is not that in God testing the gold that part of it might be rejected (as happens with the dross produced when silver is refined). Rather, it is that those who are judged as gold (meaning, they are already acceptable to God), will be further classified according to their level or degree of purity (a kind of scale of righteousness).

This testing of Believers and placing them into appropriate groups is a constant in the Bible, although typically we don’t hear it presented that way in the Christian community. Rather, it is usually said that all become equal in God’s sight, just as it is also taught that all sins are on the same level before God (neither of which is what the Bible tells us). Even Yeshua said in Matthew 5:

**CJB Matthew 5:19** ***So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

Here in Matthew this statement is based on the literary mechanism of merism. That is, we are not to think Believers will be divided into but two groups: the greatest and the least. After all, what amounts to how much of the law, and what degree of sincerity, that is considered as greatest and least? Rather it is that Hebrew merism means the same thing as when we say everything from A to Z. We don’t mean only A and Z; we mean those two letters as the most extreme extent (the 1<sup>st</sup> and last letters of the alphabet) *and* everything in between. Clearly there will be grades in between greatest and least assigned to Believers, but all will be Kingdom members (I assume because of a basic trust in Yeshua as Lord and Savior). What the precise criteria is for each level, I don’t know. And how many different levels there are that one could find oneself placed in, I also don’t know. But just as there are grades of gold, so

are there varying levels of righteousness and reward assigned to Believers. And, clearly, Yeshua is suggesting that the higher the better.

However, just as in our Zechariah passage, there must be criteria for determining where one will fall on the assay scale. I contend that Yeshua might be laying out exactly what that criterion is in Matthew chapter 5; and it amounts to one's level of obedience to, and one's dedication to teaching, the commands of God (the Torah and the Prophets) to others. Those surviving Israelites who have been judged as part of the Kingdom of God (whether through refining or having been graded) will be those who call on God's name. That is, they are calling out to Yehoveh, and doing more than acknowledging His existence; because many millions of people who had never before thought God exists (atheists) will certainly learn the hard way that Yehoveh *does* exist. Rather, it is that those who acknowledge His existence *and* sincerely dedicate themselves to Him alone, God will accept as members of His Kingdom (even if they may be on the lowest level of the scale). Let's move on to chapter 14.

### **READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 14 all**

Here we open the final chapter of Zechariah, which indeed *is* a dramatic finale. It returns us to the final siege of Jerusalem at the final moments of the War of Armageddon. The first 2 verses speak of Jerusalem's devastation, but then eases into God's deliverance of the city and its people.

Unlike the CJB translation, what the Hebrew says is: "Behold (that is, **hinneh!**) a day of Yehoveh (NOT the Lord) is coming". This is very regular Prophetic verbiage that announces an End of Days event, and we certainly all ought to be familiar with this, by now. "A day of Yehoveh" is usually found in English Bibles as The Day of the Lord, which is not a proper translation because it leaves just who this "Lord" is in doubt. Thus, because it is usual in Christianity to assign the name "The Lord" to Christ, then everywhere a Christian sees it in the Bible (OT or NT), it is assumed this is talking about Jesus. But, as we clearly read here, it is not. It is speaking of God the Father... and His name is Yehoveh. Especially here in Zechariah 14 this reality matters very much, as we'll soon see.

There are a number of terms used in the Bible for the Day of Yehoveh (the Day of the Lord) that includes the Day of Judgment, Judgment Day, or just The Day. Sometimes we'll find "in that Day" or "on that Day". Again, it is all referring to the same event. And, while some minor technical nuances might be attached to a few of these terms, they all ultimately mean a direct divine intervention in human history at a time in the future. This intervention doesn't happen in some spiritually fuzzy reality in Heaven, but literally it tears into the material fabric that makes up the dimensions of time and space in the human sphere.

The truth is that these Prophets of old would have had no idea that by the time we reach the 21<sup>st</sup> century A.D. that most of these "End Times" prophecies have yet to play out. They all saw them as fairly imminent, in the same way that Yeshua's first Disciples, and even the next generation of them including what we call the Apostles, also thought that the end was very near. As part of what happens in this Day of Yehoveh, whenever the ancients thought it would play out, the goal was the destruction of Israel's oppressors. Interestingly, what often gets overlooked by we modern Bible students and teachers, is that part of the reason the Jews fully expected the gentile world to be severely dealt with by Yehoveh was because He had already poured out His righteous justice upon Israel as a well-due punishment for their disobedience to the covenants He had made with Abraham and Moses, as well as because of their idolatry.

The book we are going to study next among the Minor Prophets, Malachi, continues with this same theme, adding its own perspectives and nuances to it. And, as Malachi often does, here in the first 2 verses of Zechariah 14, Zechariah reverts to speaking in the first person. That is, these words are Zechariah's as opposed to a direct oracle from God (which is mostly what we have been reading).

The next part of the first verse delves into the matter of spoils of war. In this case, however, Israel is envisioned FIRST as the loser, and so it is Jerusalem's spoils that is the subject. Very often when the Hebrew term **salal** is used as meaning spoils (as opposed to other times when it can mean prey or plunder) then it immediately follows with a short list of the types of goods and/or

people that were taken as booty. Here, however, the term ***sala*** stands by itself as non-specific and so is used as a general term meaning that all kinds of booty (spoils) are taken by the enemy. Thus, when this verse refers to dividing these spoils, it speaks of a protocol that was used by armies to divide up and assign portions of the spoils to certain people. Obviously, the higher ranking the leader the more and better one got. An army doesn't start dividing up spoils while the fighting is still going on. Therefore, as far as the enemy is concerned, they have conquered Jerusalem and vanquished its people, and now in a lull in the fighting they are divvying up all the material goods (and sometimes people) that were captured.

This is a good place to pause for today.