



Zechariah - Chapter Twelve

II Zechariah 9:1-14:21 - The Return of the King (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twelve

This chapter sees the start of a new prophecy, in which God indicates that he will defend his people and their primary city against all the people that will come against them. However, the Jews will also undergo a time of great mourning when they realise that they have played a major role in crucifying their Messiah.

II.b Zechariah 12:1-14:21 - The Second Oracle: the People and their Leaders

In this last section of the book, hope for Judah is now tied explicitly to the 'house of David' as various scenarios relating to the future of Jerusalem unfold, signalled by the distinctive phrase 'on that day', used sixteen times in these chapters.

The assertion of divine deliverance (12:1-9) is followed by its impact on different constituents within the community (12:10-13:9). Chapter 14 develops these themes in connection with the 'day of the Lord,' so familiar throughout the Minor Prophets.

II.b.i Zechariah 12:1-13:6 - The Restoration and Renewal of God's People

Not only will God protect his people, he will lead them to true repentance and will cleanse them from their sin and idolatry.

II.b.i.1 Zechariah 12:1-9 - Jerusalem's Victory

In time God will punish the nations that seek to harm Judah, and will elevate the house of David.

¹ An Oracle.

The word of the Lord concerning Israel: Thus says the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the human spirit within:

Zechariah 12:1

The phrase: An Oracle. The word of the Lord concerning Israel marks this as beginning a new section in Zechariah's prophecy, refer also to Zechariah 9:1 and Malachi 1:1, describing the complete restoration and renewal of the Lord's people. Foundational to that transformation is the identity of the Lord as the creator of the universe and of humanity. As creator, the Lord is able to re-create a new society out of the existing chaos. Because God does all this, his promises of judgement and redemption are sure, and can be trusted.

Thus says the Lord, who stretched out the heavens. The section begins with praise for God's creative power, a reminder that he is in control and completely able to accomplish what he predicts.

² See, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the surrounding peoples; it will be against Judah also in the siege against Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12:2

I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the surrounding peoples. Jerusalem will be the instrument of God's judgement on the nations, a cup of reeling, i.e. a cup filled with intoxicating liquor whose consumption results in shame, disorientation, and destruction; refer to Jeremiah 25:15-29. God says that in a coming day Jerusalem will intoxicate and stupefy the surrounding peoples.

The Arab peoples surrounding Jerusalem have a passion for possessing the city that is not justified by history. Muslims claim Jerusalem as their third-holiest city, yet Jerusalem is not mentioned once in the Koran. Jerusalem's importance to Muslims comes from the belief that in the Dome of the Rock shrine there is a rock where two significant things happened: where Abraham was instructed to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, which is confirmed in Genesis 22:1-19; and where the Prophet Mohammed allegedly ascended into heaven. Although this tradition is firmly in the Muslim mind, it is of recent origin. It was invented by Yasser Arafat's uncle Haj Amin el-Husseini, who was the past Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. He promoted this myth in the 1920's and 1930's to arouse Arab passions against the growing Jewish presence in Jerusalem.

³ On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth shall come together against it.

Zechariah 12:3

The phrase on that day initiates a series of nine such statements, the last coming at 13:4. Although the phrase is common, such long sequences are rare, with the best parallel coming in Isaiah 19:16-25. The Hebrew prophets' future statements tend to have an imminent time frame, but these sequences look rather to a more distant temporal horizon, probably to be associated with 'the day of the Lord.'

The earliest known use of the prophets' expression the day of the Lord comes in Amos 5:18-20. It also occurs in Isaiah (Isaiah 13:6 and 13:9), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 46:10), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 13:5 and 30:3), Joel (Joel 1:15, 2:1, 2:11, 2:31 and 3:14), Obadiah (Obadiah 15), Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1:7 and 1:14), and Malachi (Malachi 4:5). Perhaps in Amos' day the term was in popular use for the time when the Lord would intervene and put Israel at the head of the nations, possibly based on Deuteronomy 32:35-37; but Amos, and all prophets after him, clarify what it would mean for the Lord to visit his people: it means judgement upon them if they are unfaithful. In Amos, the term points forward to the coming judgement on the Northern Kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians (Amos 5:27); in Zephaniah, it points to the coming judgement on Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. Other prophets use the term to signal God's forthcoming punishment of other nations for their brutalities, e.g. Babylon (Isaiah 13:6 and 13:9); Egypt (Jeremiah 46:10); Edom (Obadiah 15); and many nations (Joel 3:14 and Obadiah 15). In some cases the prophet uses the term to denote something farther off in the future (Malachi 4:5 and probably in Joel 2:31). All of this indicates that the 'day' is not unique, but may be repeated as circumstances call for it. The NT authors apply the term as well to the return of Christ, e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:8 and 2 Peter 3:10.

On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. If Jerusalem will be a cup of drunkenness to all her surrounding peoples, it will be a heavy stone, a burden, for all peoples, presenting a problem that cannot be solved: all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves.

⁴ On that day, says the Lord, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But on the house of Judah I will keep a watchful eye, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.

Zechariah 12:4

But on the house of Judah I will keep a watchful eye, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. When the nations of the earth gather against

Jerusalem, the Lord will strike their elite cavalry troops with blindness and panic, images drawn from the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:28.

Regarding the house of Judah, i.e. the Jewish people, the Lord says I will keep a watchful eye, meaning that he will watch out for them and protect them.

⁵ Then the clans of Judah shall say to themselves, ‘The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the Lord of hosts, their God.’ ⁶ On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12:5-6

I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves. The clans of Judah take the momentary focus: they recognise that the indestructible strength of Jerusalem comes not from themselves but from the Lord of hosts, God’s military title, while they themselves will be like a blazing fire under a cooking pot or a flaming torch among the intensely flammable sheaves of grain, refer to Judges 15:1-8, devouring the nations all around them as Jerusalem is restored.

⁷ And the Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not be exalted over that of Judah.

Zechariah 12:7

The Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David. King David was renowned for his fighting ability, courage, and success. God promises a day when the weakest in Jerusalem will be as mighty as David and the leaders can only be compared in might to God!

The promise of the Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled, refer to Genesis 12:1-3, with resulting glory for Jerusalem and the whole of Judah, and destruction for the nations that come against it.

Victory or salvation will come to the tents of Judah first, even before Jerusalem, meaning that either the soldiers in tents or the poorer people living in tents or in poor dwellings outside Jerusalem would first experience the Lord’s deliverance, so that the people in Jerusalem would not become proud over their privileged location.

⁸ On that day the Lord will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, at their head.

Zechariah 12:8

All of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be raised to the highest human glory, like David, the man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), while the line of David will attain an even greater, godlike glory. The text does not say that they will become God, or become equal to God, but become like God.

On that day the descendant of David will lead them into battle as the angel of the Lord did in days of old: <<*Once when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?' He replied, 'Neither; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.'* And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped, and he said to him, 'What do you command your servant, my lord?'>> (Joshua 5:13-14).

⁹ And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12:9

The Lord will bring judgement on all the nations that come against Jerusalem, and with this summary statement the sequence begun in v.3 reaches closure. The fate of all the nations, first introduced with 'all the peoples' in v.3, is settled.

II.b.i.2 Zechariah 12:10-13:1 - Mourning for the Pierced One

Interest in Judah recedes as these verses focus primarily on the house of David and Jerusalem. The 'pouring out' of the spirit elsewhere in the OT always indicates the pouring out of God's Spirit (v.10); refer also to Ezekiel 39:29 and Joel 2:28-29).

The Spirit will give grace and pleas for mercy, which implies both repentance on the part of the people and forgiveness from the Lord. They will mourn because of the one whom they have pierced, a word that usually connotes being stabbed to death by a sword or spear, as used in: <<*When Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he got up and left the congregation. Taking a spear in his hand, he went after the Israelite man into the tent, and pierced the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly. So the plague was stopped among the people of Israel*>> (Numbers 25:7-8). The mourning will be like that for a firstborn son, an only child on whom all hope for continuation of the family line rested, or like the mourning for or at Hadad-rimmon.

The identity of the one who is pierced and on whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem look is difficult to discern. Most interpreters see this as a reference is to God himself, perhaps in the person of the shepherd who will be struck in 13:7, a prophecy that John 19:37 sees fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

¹⁰ And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Zechariah 12:10

And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Part of this great outpouring of strength and might to defend Jerusalem will be an outpouring of the Spirit, but for grace and supplication. God will move among Israel and bring saving grace and repentant prayer.

When they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child. As Jerusalem is supernaturally defended and the Spirit is poured out on the nation, they will turn to Jesus, the pierced one. His head was pierced with thorns: *<<And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him>>* (Mark 15:17), his hands and feet were pierced with nails: *<<So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe'>>* (John 20:25), and a spear pierced his side: *<<But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out>>* (John 19:33-34).

When they look. They will turn away from their trust in the foolish, worthless shepherd and turn their focus on the Good Shepherd. When people see Jesus crucified, understanding why he went to the Cross and what he accomplished there, they are drawn to him in humble repentance, just as Jesus said they would: *<<And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself>>* (John 12:32).

When they look on the one whom they have pierced. They will realise that they did it, and that they bear responsibility, not sole responsibility, but responsibility nonetheless, for the crucifixion of their Saviour: *<<The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and*

Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses>> (Acts 3:13-15).

They shall mourn for him. The Jewish people will turn to Jesus in repentance, mourning their past rejection of him. The mourning will be deep, as if for an only son, the firstborn. Firstborn was synonymous with the most beloved and it was the firstborn son who would receive his father's inheritance.

This will fulfil the amazing promise that Paul writes of: <<And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, 'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob'>> (Romans 11:26), and many other passages that reveal that before the physical return of Jesus to this earth, the Jewish people as a whole, will welcome him as their Lord and Saviour. The whole context of Zechariah Chapter 12 puts this radical conversion in the setting of miraculous deliverance from an attack from the nations.

¹¹ On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ¹² The land shall mourn, each family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; ¹³ the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; ¹⁴ and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves. ^{13:1} On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

Zechariah 12:11-13:1

The mourning in Jerusalem. The repentance that comes to Israel in that day will be like a great mourning, the ultimate fulfilment of the Day of Atonement, the day of national mourning over their greatest sin, the rejection of Jesus.

As great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon. This refers to the mourning over King Josiah's death; refer to 2 Kings 23:29 and 2 Chronicles 35:20-25. He was such a godly king that the whole nation wept bitterly at his death.

The plain of Megiddo is the literal site for Armageddon where the armies will amass for the final battle when Christ returns (Revelation 16:16).

The land shall mourn. The mourning will affect the entire world as well as Judah's community, family by family, men and women alike: *<<Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" with power*

and great glory>> (Matthew 24:30), and: <<Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen>> (Revelation 1:7). Two particular lines are singled out: the royal line of David, by way of his son Nathan (1 Chronicles 14:4), and the priestly line of Levi, by way of his grandson Shimei (1 Chronicles 6:16-17).

A fountain shall be opened to cleanse them from sin and impurity. Water is symbolic for the washing away of sins and bringing great blessing: *<<On that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Wadi Shittim>> (Joel 3:18). Ultimately, Jesus is the source of living water to cleanse the sins of those who believe in him: <<On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water”’>> (John 7:37-38).*