



Zechariah - Chapter Thirteen

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

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

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

II.b.i.2 Zechariah 12:10-13:1 - Mourning for the Pierced One (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

God promises, not only to eliminate idolatry from the land but also the false prophets who promote the idols that the people have worshipped. In addition, the Lord will allow his anointed Shepherd to be killed, resulting in the flock being scattered. This will be a period of severe testing for the people of God.

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 13:1

A fountain shall be opened. The repentant people need to be cleansed from their iniquity, so God will open up for them a fountain, or spring, from which will flow the running water necessary for ritual purification; refer to Leviticus 14:5, Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Revelation 22:1-2. The people's uncleanness comes from their devotion to idols; refer to Ezekiel 36:25. This is the sin that pierced the Lord in 12:10, metaphorically in its original context and really in the person of Jesus.

To cleanse them from sin and impurity. The only thing that can cleanse sin and uncleanness is God's fountain. It is his supply, and nothing else can cleanse. A

person's own works at reform or restitution cannot cleanse them; their past, present, or promised works cannot cleanse, only his fountain.

II.b.i.3 Zechariah 13:2-6 - Idolatry Cut Off

The Lord promises to excise the names of the idols from the land, terminating their influence and even their memory. The influence of the idols was exercised through false prophets, who told the people what they wanted to hear (10:1-3), so they too will be removed from the land, executed by their own parents in line with Deuteronomy 13:6-10.

The punishment of piercing fits the impact of their sin in piercing the Lord (12:10). This will make the false prophets eager to conceal their activities. They will no longer dress in a hairy cloak, as did Elijah. They will explicitly deny that they are prophets: instead, each one will claim to be a worker of the soil. Yet the true nature of the false prophet will be exposed by the wounds on his back, ritual scars related to pagan practices that he will confess to having received at the house of his friends, the idolaters with whom he practiced pagan worship.

² On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit.

³ And if any prophets appear again, their fathers and mothers who bore them will say to them, 'You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord'; and their fathers and their mothers who bore them shall pierce them through when they prophesy. ⁴ On that day the prophets will be ashamed, every one, of their visions when they prophesy; they will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive, ⁵ but each of them will say, 'I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth.' ⁶ And if anyone asks them, 'What are these wounds on your chest?' the answer will be 'The wounds I received in the house of my friends.'

Zechariah 13:2-6

On that day is a phrase used by Zechariah normally taken to refer to 'the day of the Lord' used by other prophets; refer to the comments made on 12:3.

I will cut off the names of the idols from the land; I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit. Idolatry and false prophecy were the two principle ways Israel was led astray from God. God not only provides a fountain to cleanse, but he also promises to cut off the source of uncleanness, in this case, idolatry and false prophecy. Jesus warned of false prophets yet to come during or after his time on earth: *<<Beware of false prophets, who come to you in*

sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves>> (Matthew 7:15). There remain the gaudy and ornate shrines that supposedly mark holy sites in Israel today, indicating that idolatry is still alive and well in the Holy Land. God promises to cleanse the land from such idolatry completely.

They shall be remembered no more. God promises ultimately to take away even the memory of sin.

Their fathers and mothers who bore them will say to them, 'You shall not live'. Zechariah prophesies a coming day when public opinion will not tolerate false prophets. There will be such a commitment to the Lord and his truth that even the family of a false prophet will condemn the false prophet.

The prophets will be ashamed, every one, of their visions when they prophesy. Those who posed as prophets will so fear exposure that they will deny ever having made such a claim. They will put away the 'uniform' of the prophets, i.e. a hairy mantle, and earn an honest living. The hairy mantle was one of the distinguishing features of Elijah: <<*They answered him, 'A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.'* He said, '*It is Elijah the Tishbite*'>> (2 Kings 1:8), and John the Baptist: <<*Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey*>> (Mark 1:6).

The wounds I received in the house of my friends. The man accused of being a false prophet insists the scars on his body are not the self-inflicted wounds often associated with false prophets, but merely the result of a brawl in his friend's house. This unlikely, ironic explanation shows just how desperately people will avoid being identified with false prophets in this coming day Zechariah speaks of. It was not unusual for false prophets to wound or mutilate themselves in the service of idols: <<*Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them*>> (1 Kings 18:28), and: <<*For every head is shaved and every beard cut off; on all the hands there are gashes, and on the loins sackcloth*>> (Jeremiah 48:37).

Some take this as another Messianic prophecy in Zechariah, because Jesus was clearly wounded by those who should have been his friends. Nevertheless the context and the original Hebrew argue against this referring to Jesus and his wounds. The translation from the King James Version makes it seem even more likely that this refers to Jesus: <<*What are these wounds in thine hands?*>>. However, the Hebrew is more literally between your hands, that is on the body, whether the chest or the back. Calvin disagrees with those who state this refers directly to Jesus: "Some apply this to Christ, because Zechariah has mentioned wounds on the hands; but this is very puerile; for it is quite evident that he speaks here of false teachers, who had for a time falsely pretended God's name." Clarke concurs with Calvin: "I do not think that these words are

spoken at all concerning Jesus Christ. I have heard them quoted this way; but I cannot hear such an application of them without horror.”

II.b.ii Zechariah 13:7-14:21 - Judgement and Transformation

Fearsome conflicts await the people of God, but God will intervene and usher in a day in which Jerusalem is supreme and all the world worships the true God.

II.b.ii.1 Zechariah 13:7-9 - The Shepherd Struck, the Flock Scattered

The sword of the Lord’s judgement goes out against a shepherd, as in 11:17, but this time against the good shepherd. His death will result in the scattering of the flock and a time of great trial and testing for God’s people, during which many will perish. Yet the result of that period of testing is the refining of the Lord’s people, culminating in the expression by the Lord and his people of their mutual commitment to one another.

⁷ ‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,
against the man who is my associate,’
says the Lord of hosts.
Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered;
I will turn my hand against the little ones.

Zechariah 13:7

Against my shepherd. In the context, and especially in light of the quotation of this passage in Matthew 26:31, it is generally understood that the Shepherd is Jesus the Messiah, and it is God the Father himself who calls for the Shepherd to be struck. Zechariah relates a thought also said in Isaiah: <<**Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain**>> (Isaiah 53:10a). The prophets Isaiah and Zechariah gloriously and emphatically, state that the suffering of the Servant of the Lord was ordained by the Father. This was God’s doing! He gave the command to strike the Shepherd. Jesus was no victim of circumstance or at the mercy of political or military power. It was the planned, ordained work of the Lord God, prophesied by Isaiah hundreds of years before it happened. This was God’s victory, not Satan’s or man’s triumph. As Paul writes: <<**in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself**>> (2 Corinthians 5:19a). The Father and the Son worked together at the Cross. Although Jesus was treated as if he were an enemy of God, he was not. Even as Jesus was punished as if he were a sinner, he was performing the most holy service unto God the Father ever offered.

The man who is my associate. The ancient Hebrew word for my associate or my companion is used in Leviticus 6:2 and 18:20 to mean a ‘near neighbour.’ This

describes someone who is more than a friend of the Lord; this Shepherd dwells side by side with the Lord, his equal.

Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered. Jesus quoted this phrase in Matthew 26:31 in reference to the scattering of his disciples during his arrest and suffering. There is also a sense in which the disciples were a type of Israel as a whole in being scattered. They would no doubt have felt abandoned by both their Lord and their God. Hence the phrase: **I will turn my hand against the little ones**.

- ⁸ In the whole land, says the Lord,
two-thirds shall be cut off and perish,
and one-third shall be left alive.
- ⁹ And I will put this third into the fire,
refine them as one refines silver,
and test them as gold is tested.
They will call on my name,
and I will answer them.
I will say, 'They are my people';
and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'

Zechariah 13:8-9

Two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one-third shall be left alive. God, of course, has always known that many of his people would reject the Cross and Jesus as their Saviour because: <<*not all Israelites truly belong to Israel*>> (Romans 9:6b). Paul also writes: <<*So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in*>> (Romans 11:25). Paul knew that there would be a refining by fire so that the dross could be removed, leaving only those whom God has called.

I will put this third into the fire. After the dispersion of Israel there will come a time of devastation and purification through fiery trials. Two-thirds will be destroyed and the remaining third will be put into the fire but preserved: <<*In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed*>> (1 Peter 1:6-7). This seems to suggest that only one-third of the Jewish people will survive the Great Tribulation. If this is the case, no wonder these years are called the time of

Jacob's distress or trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), and why Jesus said the Great Tribulation will be the most horrific time in human history (Matthew 24:21). Indeed, the Book of Revelation suggests that only one hundred and forty-four thousand, twelve thousand from each tribe, will be saved at that time.

Literal and symbolic approaches differ sharply in interpreting the vision of the <<the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel>> (Revelation 7:4), and its relation to the next vision of an innumerable multitude 'from every nation' (Revelation 7:9). Many understand this to be a reference to ethnic or biological Israel, and they would view the 144,000 as a symbolic or actual number of Jewish believers brought to faith immediately after Jesus returns and removes the church from the earth before or during a seven-year tribulation; this is a 'pretribulation rapture' view.

However, another common approach understands Israel as a reference to the church, the new covenant people of God, and in this view the visions of the 144,000 and of the international multitude are complementary perspectives on the church, believers from every nation including ethnic Israel. They are protected from the Lamb's wrath as his own flock (Revelation 7:17), but are exposed to persecution by evil enemies. The 144,000 reappear in Revelation 14:1-4, and their description there has a bearing on the interpretation here. Refer to the comments made on Revelation Chapters 7 and 14 on the website.

They will call on my name, and I will answer them. This prophetically refers to the Jewish people who survive the Great Tribulation, come to salvation in the second half of that final period and welcome Jesus in the name of the Lord. This group, which includes the 144,000 of Revelation Chapters 7 and 14, but is not limited to that number, will make up the core of a restored Israel as Jesus establishes his millennial rule over the earth.

I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.' God has never disowned his people but they have not always given him the glory or acknowledged his sovereignty over their lives. A time will come when this will all be changed: <<*Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, 'Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand'*>> (Romans 15:20-21), and: <<*Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is*>> (1 John 3:2).