



Zechariah - Chapter Nine

Summary of Chapter Nine

The first half of the chapter is a prophecy against five of the major western coastal cities that had been powerful commercial centres and the major cities of the Philistines, one of Israel's main enemies for generations.

The focus then shifts to the coming of the Messiah who will arrive in Jerusalem in triumph and a rapturous welcome by its inhabitants. He will be the one to bring spiritual freedom with a prophecy of a future time when he will rule over all things, the Second Coming.

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

Reference to the surrounding nations in 8:20-23 and 9:1-8 links the book's main parts (Chapters 1-8 and Chapters 9-14). In the second half of the book, visions recede as does interest in Joshua and Zerubbabel as the named leaders of the community.

These latter chapters comprise two blocks of oracles, both introduced as 'an oracle' (9:1 and 12:1); as is also the case with Malachi 1:1. The twin themes of the purity of God's people and the fidelity of their leaders – often termed 'shepherds' – run throughout these oracles. The community and its leaders suffer turmoil: this turning back to the Lord faces opposition, tearing at the fabric of society and the natural world. Ultimately, the jubilant 'return of the king' (9:9) issues in the triumph of God's purposes and the restoration of God's people now joined by all nations (14:9 and 14:16; as was also seen in 8:20-23), for salvation belongs to the Lord (12:7).

II.a Zechariah 9:1-11:17 - The First Oracle: Leaders and their People

Judgment on Jerusalem's neighbours contributes to its security (9:1-8), but the arrival of a saving king completes it (9:9-17). While this remains the community's

only hope, it still must recover from destructive leaders (10:1-12) who themselves come under judgement (11:1-17).

II.a.i Zechariah 9:1-17 - The Return of the Ruler

Zechariah tells restored Judah that its current circumstances are only temporary: God will bring judgement on those who oppress his people, and will bring forth the promised king, who will rule Israel and the nations.

II.a.i.1 Zechariah 9:1-8 - Judgement on Israel's Enemies

The oracle starts with Hadrach, an area in northern Syria that encompassed Damascus and neighbouring Hamath, after which it moves south along the coast through Tyre and Sidon to four of the five cities of the Philistines: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod. In spite of all its natural resources, this whole region will experience the fiery judgement of God that will leave it desolate. Yet even from the destruction of those nations, a remnant will emerge who will attach themselves to the Lord and become part of his people; refer back to 8:22-23. In this way, the Lord will eliminate any future threats to the peace and safety of his house and his people. They will no longer have to fear that an oppressor would invade from the north, as they had so often in the past.

¹ An Oracle.

The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach
and will rest upon Damascus.

For to the Lord belongs the capital of Aram,
as do all the tribes of Israel;

² Hamath also, which borders on it,
Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.

³ Tyre has built itself a rampart,
and heaped up silver like dust,
and gold like the dirt of the streets.

⁴ But now, the Lord will strip it of its possessions
and hurl its wealth into the sea,
and it shall be devoured by fire.

Zechariah 9:1-4

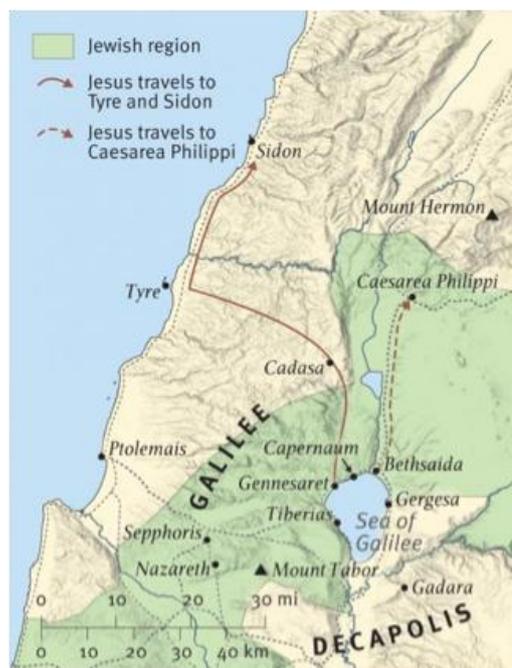
An Oracle. The prophet delivers the Lord's message to both Israel and her surrounding neighbours. As in 1:12, the issue is the nations that are wrongfully at rest, and that will now be subject to the Lord's judgement.

The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach. The two oracles that make up the remainder of Zechariah are undated, but many scholars believe they came in Zechariah's old age. Most see this burden against the land of Hadrach as fulfilled by the armies of Alexander the Great when he conquered this region. The cities mentioned in Zechariah vv.1-7 trace Alexander's march through the Promised Land in 332-331 BC.

The word of the Lord will rest upon Damascus. This Aramæan city had often been in opposition to the will and purpose of God, who prophesied its demise: <<*An oracle concerning Damascus. See, Damascus will cease to be a city, and will become a heap of ruins*>> (Isaiah 17:1), and: <<*I will break the gate-bars of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the sceptre from Beth-eden; and the people of Aram shall go into exile to Kir, says the Lord*>> (Amos 1:5).

For to the Lord belongs the capital of Aram, as do all the tribes of Israel. This is an unusual translation for the Hebrew translated capital here is usually translated 'eye' and the Hebrew 'adam' is translated as Aram rather than man or humankind. Therefore the NIV, and several other translations render it as: <<*for the eyes of all people and all the tribes of Israel are on the Lord*>> or similar. However, this translation fits with the theme of the prophecy against Damascus.

Tyre and Sidon were the two major cities north of Israel, in the land of Lebanon. Tyre was an important commercial city that was thought of as impossible to conquer. The Assyrians laid siege against Tyre for five years but never conquered the city. Nebuchadnezzar tried for 13 years to conquer Tyre, but Alexander did it in seven months. Tyre was originally an offshore island, later connected to the mainland during a siege in the days of Alexander the Great in the 4th Century BC. Alexander the Great conquered Tyre by laying siege for seven months, then using the rubble from the old city to make a causeway out to the island city. It was a spectacular achievement of both military and engineering strategy.



Regional Map: Tyre and Sidon

Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities in Phœnicia and they were often the object of condemnation by OT prophets for their Baal worship and arrogant materialism. However, Jesus stated that condemnation against them would be less than for the cities that had heard and rejected his teaching: <<*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes*>> (Luke 10:13).

Excavations have unearthed many remarkable finds at both Tyre and Sidon. Tyre evidences both Roman and Byzantine structures including, largely from after Jesus' time: a hippodrome, an immense bathhouse, a forum, a theatre, and tombs.

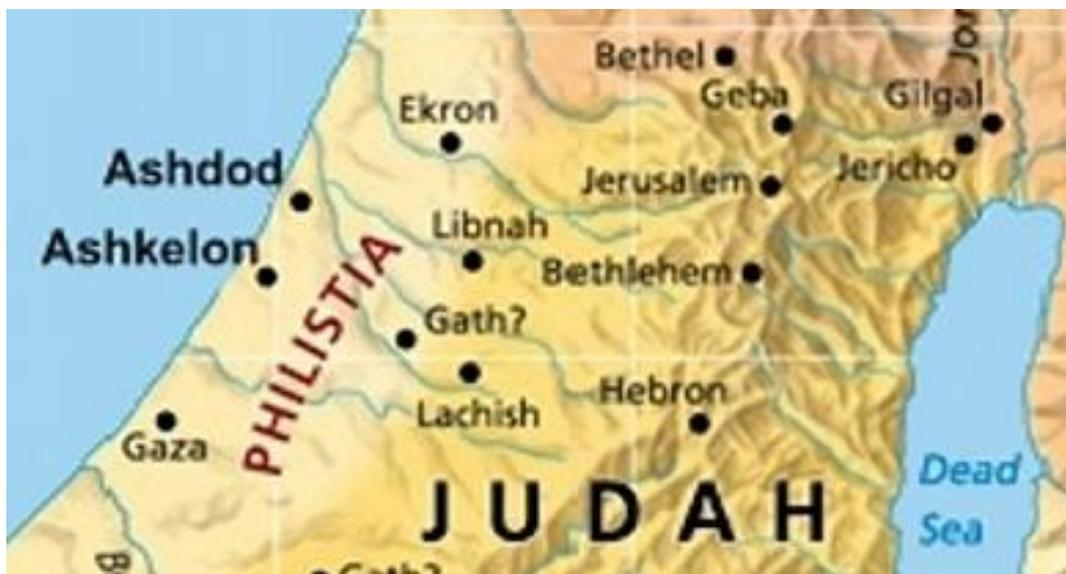
- ⁵ Ashkelon shall see it and be afraid;
Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish;
Ekron also, because its hopes are withered.
The king shall perish from Gaza;
Ashkelon shall be uninhabited;
- ⁶ a mongrel people shall settle in Ashdod,
and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia.
- ⁷ I will take away its blood from its mouth,
and its abominations from between its teeth;
it too shall be a remnant for our God;
it shall be like a clan in Judah,
and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites.
- ⁸ Then I will encamp at my house as a guard,
so that no one shall march to and fro;
no oppressor shall again overrun them,
for now I have seen with my own eyes.

Zechariah 9:5-8

It too shall be a remnant for our God; and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites. The Jebusites inhabited Jerusalem when David conquered the city; refer to both 2 Samuel 5:6-9 and 24:16-18. David did not wipe out the Jebusites, but merely incorporated them into Israel. The same would happen to the people of Ekron.

Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that no one shall march to and fro. When Alexander the Great marched through Lebanon and the Promised Land towards Egypt he did not conquer or attack Jerusalem. God promised to protect and spare his house during this time, and he did through a remarkable chain of events connected to Alexander the Great and the High Priest.

The Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod are south of Tyre and Sidon, and were also conquered by Alexander the Great in 332-331 BC. This passage accurately foretells the conquest of the eastern Mediterranean coastlands by Greek armies under the command of Alexander the Great. God had earlier prophesied their demise: <<*Baldness has come upon Gaza, Ashkelon is silenced. O remnant of their power! How long will you gash yourselves?*>> (Jeremiah 47:5).



Location of Philistia and the cities mentioned in the Oracle

Josephus' account of Alexander's meeting with the High Priest is fascinating:

Now Alexander, when he had taken Gaza, made haste to go up to Jerusalem; and Jaddua the high-priest, when he heard that, was in agony, and under terror, as not knowing how he should meet the Macedonians, since the king was displeased at his foregoing disobedience. He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifices to God, whom he besought to protect that nation, and to deliver them from the perils that were coming upon them; whereupon God warned him in a dream, which came upon him after he had offered sacrifice, that he should take courage, adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest appear in white garments, but that he and the priests should meet the king in habits proper to their order, without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent. Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly

rejoiced; and declared to all the warning he had received from God. According to the dream he acted entirely, and so waited for the coming of the king.

And when he understood that he was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests and the multitude of the citizens. The procession was venerable, and the manner of it different from that of other nations. It reached to a place called Sapha; which name, translated in Greek, signifies a prospect, for you have thence a prospect both of Jerusalem and of the temple; and when the Phœnicians and the Chaldeans that followed him, thought they should have liberty to plunder the city, and torment the high-priest to death, which the king's displeasure fairly promised them, the very reverse of it happened; for Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high-priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head having the golden plate on which the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high-priest. The Jews also did all together, with one voice, salute Alexander, and encompass him about: whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him to be disordered in his mind. However, Parmenio [Alexander's second-in-command] alone went up to him, and asked him how it came to pass, that when all others adored him, he should adore the high-priest of the Jews? To whom he replied, "I did not adore him, but that God who has honoured him with that high-priesthood; for I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios, in Macedonia, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea thither, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me dominion over the Persians; whence it is, that having seen no other in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering my vision and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind." And when he had said this to Parmenio, and had given the high-priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him, and he came into the city; and when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high-priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high-priest and the priests. And when the Book of Daniel was showed to him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended; and as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present, but the next day he called them to him, and bade them ask what favours they pleased of him: whereupon the high-priest desired that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers, and might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired: and when they entreated him that he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do

hereafter what they desired: and when he said to the multitude, that if any of them would enlist themselves in his army on this condition, that they should continue under the laws of their forefathers, and live according to them, he was willing to take them with him, many were ready to accompany him in his wars (Jewish Antiquities 11.8.4-5).

For now I have seen with my own eyes. The Lord has now observed the severe affliction of his people, and he will act to deliver them. The mention of eyes ties the end of this oracle to the beginning, where the Lord's eye was mentioned (v.1).

II.a.i.2 Zechariah 9:9-17 - The Coming Ruler of God's People

The rest of the chapter foresees the triumphant arrival of the Messiah riding into Jerusalem as the humble king. Yet his arrival marks the start of a great future for the people of God, those who would turn to him through his Christ, for their enemies will be defeated by the Cross.

II.a.i.2.A Zechariah 9:9-11 - The King enters Jerusalem

The coming king will bring peace for his people and for the nations.

- ⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zechariah 9:9

Daughter of Zion is frequently used in the OT as a personification of the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. Jerusalem is as defenceless as a virgin daughter, but because of the Lord's protection she will not be violated by mighty opponents.

This campaign over Israel's enemies would culminate in the triumphal entry of its king to Jerusalem. The people are summoned to acclaim their coming king: <<**Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in**>> (Psalm 24:7), <<**And you, O tower of the flock, hill of daughter Zion, to you it shall come, the former dominion shall come, the sovereignty of daughter Jerusalem**>> (Micah 4:8). He is described as triumphant, like the ideal ruler of Psalm 72. He will ensure God's blessing on his people, thereby bringing about their salvation.

He is also humble, as was required by God's decree in Deuteronomy 17:18-20, hinting that this king is still obedient to the King of kings, and he comes riding on

a donkey, the mount of one who comes to bring peace, not on the standard military mount, a horse. This Messiah-King is lowly, but this is not indicated by the animal he rides. He does not ride the triumphant stallion of a conquering general, but the customary mount for royalty, coming in peace. This was quite a contrast to the conqueror Alexander the Great. This prophecy famously finds its counterpart in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when Jesus clearly signals his messianic identity.

On a colt, the foal of a donkey. This seems to be a Hebrew expression of speech emphasising that the animal is purebred, a truly magnificent, royal mount. This verse is directly quoted at Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15, but both apostles abbreviate the quotation.

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you. This clearly prophesies what is known as the Triumphal Entry of Jesus when he presented himself as the Messiah to Jerusalem and the people of Israel (Mark 11:1-11). Although the Triumphal Entry was a joyful celebration, a Roman spectator would wonder what was so triumphal about this entry. It did not compare at all to the kind of parade Julius Cæsar had when he came back to Rome from Gaul. Then there was a parade that lasted three days as he displayed all the captives and the spoils of war that he had brought back with him. In contrast to this, the procession of Jesus must have seemed pretty humble, and this showed that Jesus was a different kind of King.

Triumphant and victorious is he. As Jesus enters Jerusalem, this work is still to be accomplished by dying on the Cross and then rising again from the dead.

¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the warhorse from Jerusalem;
and the battle-bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah 9:10

The Lord will bring to an end Israel's need for the traditional instruments of war: chariot, warhorse, and battle-bow. The coming ruler will rule the whole earth, from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth, just as Psalm 72:8 anticipated: <<*May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth*>>. The result of his rule will be universal peace.

The battle-bow shall be cut off. Verse 9 belongs to the First Coming of Jesus, but v.10 belongs to his Second Coming, when he comes in power and glory to reign over this earth for 1,000 years. In that day there will be an enforced righteousness, and he will no longer allow war: <<*He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*>> (Isaiah 2:4), <<*I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety*>> (Hosea 2:18), and: <<*He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*>> (Micah 4:3).

His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. When Jesus rules over this earth, his reign will be universal; the entire earth will be under his authority. This speaks of the time many refer to as the millennium, the thousand-year reign of Jesus on this earth, as indicated by Psalm 72, Isaiah 2:2-4, Isaiah 11:4-9, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Matthew 5:18, Luke 1:32-33 and 19:12-27, and Revelation 20:1-6.

¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Zechariah 9:11

The prisoners, those of God's people remaining in exile, would be set free from the waterless pit, a dry well that could be used as a temporary prison, such as the one where Joseph was placed before being sold into Egyptian slavery (Genesis 37:24), or the one in which the prophet was placed (Jeremiah 38:6). This salvation would come because of the blood of my covenant, that is, the blood of the sacrifices offered to ratify the covenant (Exodus 24:8). This blood testified to the seriousness of the covenant bond between God and his people. As a result of this hope, they should return to Jerusalem, their 'stronghold' (2:6-7 and 9:12), for the Lord had committed himself to 'double' his people's former prosperity; as confirmed by Isaiah 40:2. Ultimately, the blood of my covenant would be the sacrificial death of the Son of God: <<*And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*>> (Luke 22:20).

II.a.i.2.B Zechariah 9:12-17 - The King's Enemies Destroyed and his People Redeemed

The prisoners of war are not the only ones who need to hear the news of the coming king. The day of those who are oppressing God's people will soon be over. Instead of the breaking of threatening bows and removal of chariots, God will make his people themselves into a bow against their oppressors (v.13). He will make Zion's sons into a warrior's sword (v.13). The Lord will appear as the Divine Warrior, sounding the trumpet to advance, shooting his deadly arrow (v.14), destroying and pouring out blood, just as it is poured out in the sacrificial ritual in which it drenches the altar. By destroying their enemies, he will rescue his people and shepherd his flock (v.16). They will be **<<like the jewels of a crown>>** (v.16), his treasured possession. They will never again go hungry and thirsty, but will receive the covenantal blessings of grain and new wine (v.17).

¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

¹³ For I have bent Judah as my bow;
I have made Ephraim its arrow.
I will arouse your sons, O Zion,
against your sons, O Greece,
and wield you like a warrior's sword.

Zechariah 9:12-13

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope. Because of his faithful promise, even the prisoners are prisoners of hope. They should receive encouragement from his promise and return to the stronghold, both in the sense of a military fortress and a spiritual fortress in the Lord himself: **<<The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel>>** (Joel 3:16).

Today I declare that I will restore to you double. This blessing is not a reward for the people's faithfulness to God for they could never earn his blessing. Under God's law, the eldest son was due a double portion of the father's estate showing that he had been given the right of inheritance. God gives his children that same right of inheritance if they remain faithful to him: **<<He must acknowledge as firstborn the son of the one who is disliked, giving him a double portion of all that he has; since he is the first issue of his virility, the right of the firstborn is his>>** (Deuteronomy 21:17), and: **<<Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to**

her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins>> (Isaiah 40:2).

For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. This was partially fulfilled in the days of the Maccabees, when God raised up Jews to fight against the successors of Alexander's Empire. Nevertheless, it seems that the ultimate fulfilment of this promise is yet to come.

Following the death of King Solomon the kingdom of Israel split into two with ten tribes making up the Northern Kingdom and collectively called Ephraim. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin, along with the majority of the Levites, remained in the southern lands around Jerusalem. They were mainly faithful to God, whereas Ephraim strayed. The Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by the Assyrians and dispersed over a wide area, never to return home as a people during Biblical history. The Southern Kingdom was taken into Babylonian captivity but, after seventy years, a remnant of them returned. However, God here speaks of a time when the Jewish nation and, indeed, all the people of God will once again be united in the common fight against evil.

The oppressors of the sons of Zion (or Israel) are identified as the sons of Greece. God promises to make Zion like a warrior's sword, defeating the Greeks. This is best understood as a predictive prophecy regarding future events, much like the mention of 'the king of Greece' in Daniel 8:21. Zechariah was writing between 520 and perhaps 480 BC, but the Greek ruler Alexander the Great did not conquer Palestine until 333 BC. Then the Jewish people did not successfully rebel against domination by the Seleucids, the Greek-speaking successors to Alexander's rule, until the Maccabean period, the revolt was 166-160 BC; they gained full independence in 142 BC. Some interpreters, not allowing the possibility of such predictive prophecy, see this as a later insertion added into the text, but there is no manuscript support for this idea, and it is not necessary. The name 'Greece', Hebrew *Yawan*, was known at the time of Zechariah, for the Greeks had defeated the invading Persian armies of King Darius at the battle of Marathon in 490 BC, but Greece was never an enemy of Israel or a conquering world power until Alexander the Great.

14 Then the Lord will appear over them,
and his arrow go forth like lightning;
the Lord God will sound the trumpet
and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.

15 The Lord of hosts will protect them,
and they shall devour and tread down the slingers;
they shall drink their blood like wine,

and be full like a bowl,
drenched like the corners of the altar.

¹⁶ On that day the Lord their God will save them,
for they are the flock of his people;
for like the jewels of a crown
they shall shine on his land.

¹⁷ For what goodness and beauty are his!
Grain shall make the young men flourish,
and new wine the young women.

Zechariah 9:14-17

Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning. The Lord has not left his people defenceless but will provide a protective shield over this remnant to protect them from their enemies, just as he had done in the past: <<*And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them*>> (Psalm 18:14), and: <<*The mountains saw you, and writhed; a torrent of water swept by; the deep gave forth its voice. The sun raised high its hands; the moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear*>> (Habakkuk 3:10-11).

The Lord God will sound the trumpet. The idea is that the Lord himself leads the battle. Both the Bible and the Koran have the idea of the holy war, which Islam calls Jihad, but there is a huge difference between the idea of the holy war in the Bible and in Islam. Jesus alone carries out the Biblical holy war, never his people. In Islam, the Jihad is the responsibility of every good Muslim. Here, God makes it clear who does the fighting: On that day the Lord their God will save them, for they are the flock of his people. This is God's battle, not the battle of men: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Tread down the slingers is a reference to the stones hurled by slings in battle, but these stones are also a poetic representation of the enemies themselves. The army of Israel will simply trample on them and continue moving forward to conquer. By contrast, God's people are immensely valuable, like the jewels of a crown.

Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women. As in other passages that speak of the millennium: <<*On that day I will answer, says*

the Lord, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel>> (Hosea 2:21-22), and: <<In response to his people the Lord said: I am sending you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a mockery among the nations>> (Joel 2:19). here grain and new wine are pictures of prosperity and blessing.